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Bridging the Transition to Adulthood:

First review of the Implementation of
Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 of the
Committee of Ministers to Member States on
supporting young refugees in transition to
adulthood



**Bridging the Transition to Adulthood: Reviewing the Implementation of CM/Rec(2019)4 on
Young Refugees Turning 18**

Strasbourg, October 2025

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reflect the opinions of the Council of Europe.

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While surveys captured structured feedback within institutional boundaries, the Reference Group input provided a platform for cross-sector dialogue, yielding deeper and more context-sensitive reflections.

Participants included:

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Executive Summary

Purpose and Structure of the Review

This review presents a structured analysis of the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood, drawing upon a mixed-methods approach designed to capture diverse stakeholder experiences and institutional practices across the Council of Europe's Member States. The assessment responds to growing interest among national governments, local authorities, and youth- and/or refugee-led organisations to strengthen implementation of the Recommendation and address persistent gaps in service continuity, legal protection, and youth participation.

The report is organised in a way that clearly distinguishes between stakeholder contributions and the report's own policy conclusions. Thematic chapters present stakeholder *Proposals*, reflecting the perspectives of civil society organisations, government representatives, and a mixed group of participants. While not formal recommendations of the report, these proposals provide essential context and were instrumental in shaping the final consolidated Recommendations. The *Recommendations*, presented in the concluding chapter, constitute the core policy guidance derived from the findings. This structure ensures both transparency and clarity, allowing readers to trace how stakeholder voices have informed the overarching policy directions advanced in the final chapter.

Methodology

The review is based on research combining quantitative and qualitative methods, with a strong emphasis on triangulation of data sources to ensure reliability and contextual depth. It includes:

- A survey of government representatives (n=26), conducted by the Council of Europe Secretariat, assessing levels of awareness, implementation practices, and perceived challenges.
- A parallel survey with civil society organisations (CSOs), including youth-led and refugee-led groups, focusing on community-level implementation of the Recommendation, resource needs, and opportunities for strengthening support mechanisms.
- A series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders in countries not covered by the surveys, used to address geographic gaps and validate emerging themes.
- Desk research and secondary analysis of relevant Council of Europe frameworks, action plans, and sectoral recommendations.

Main Findings

The findings demonstrate a landscape of broad engagement and strong normative alignment with the principles of CM/Rec(2019)4, but also highlight structural challenges that constrain effective and equitable implementation.

Key insights include:

- **High Engagement with Implementation:** 88% of respondent Member States reported actions aligned with the Recommendation, suggesting a strong foundational commitment. Local authorities and public institutions are increasingly active but require clearer strategic coordination and support.
- **Persistent Systemic Barriers:** Across both government and civil society inputs, recurring implementation challenges include legal uncertainty post-18, fragmentation of support services, inadequate inter-agency coordination, and limited funding mechanisms, especially for organisations working directly with young refugees.
- **Valuable Role of Civil Society:** CSOs, especially youth- and/or refugee-led organisations, demonstrate innovative and often under-recognised leadership in filling critical service and advocacy gaps. These actors require better access to Council of Europe tools, funding, and platforms for meaningful participation in implementation efforts.
- **Cross-Cutting Strategic Priorities:** Education, housing, healthcare, and legal protection emerged as the most consistently cited areas requiring urgent policy attention. These themes represent actionable entry points for Council programme development and resource mobilisation.
- **Geographic Disparities and Knowledge Gaps:** Variation in awareness and implementation across regions indicates the need for targeted dissemination strategies and structured peer learning. Countries with strong practices are well-positioned to serve as reference points for others.
- **Call for Strengthened Council of Europe Leadership:** Stakeholders consistently highlighted the Organisation's unique capacity to coordinate, advise, and mobilise collective action. There is clear demand for expanded Council engagement in the form of technical guidance, monitoring frameworks, and convening power. At the same time, stakeholders acknowledged the important steps already taken by the Council of Europe's Youth Department, notably through the *Youth for Democracy* programme, including study sessions, seminars, and training activities aimed at building capacity and awareness around Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4. These efforts provide a valuable foundation which stakeholders suggested could be further scaled up and more systematically linked to national-level implementation.

Conclusions

The findings indicate the Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 is widely recognised as a highly relevant and timely instrument. However, its full potential has yet to be realised. While the Council of Europe's Youth Department has already laid important groundwork, for example, through the *Youth for Democracy* programme, including study sessions, seminars, and other capacity-building initiatives, the diverse institutional, legal, and social landscapes across Member States necessitate a more strategic, differentiated, and inclusive approach to implementation support.

The review highlights the indispensable role of youth work in supporting young refugees, underscoring the need for sustained investment, structured training, and formal recognition of youth workers as key actors in the Recommendation's implementation. With targeted investment in coordination, capacity building, and resource development, especially for civil society actors, the Council of Europe is well positioned to lead a renewed effort in realising the Recommendation's objectives. Crucially, the young refugees at the heart of CM/Rec(2019)4 are not only beneficiaries of transitional support but also contributors to Europe's democratic, social, and economic future. Their inclusion represents both a shared obligation and a strategic opportunity.

Finally, this review sets out specific proposals for action directed at, Member States, civil society and the Council of Europe respectively. Taken together, these proposals provide clear direction for scaling impact, transforming fragmented efforts into a coherent European approach that upholds rights, reinforces inclusion, and strengthens shared democratic values.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name	Explanation
CM/Rec(2019)4	Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2019)4	A recommendation adopted by the Council of Europe on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood.
CoE	Council of Europe	A regional intergovernmental organisation promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe.
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations	Non-governmental organisations and community-based groups involved in advocacy, service provision, and policy work.
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care	Educational and care services for young children, supporting child development and enabling parents' participation in work or training.
EU	European Union	A political and economic union of 27 Member States located mainly in Europe, sharing common institutions and policies.
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum	The EU agency that supports Member States in the implementation of asylum legislation and policies (formerly EASO).
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees	A non-binding international framework adopted by the UN in 2018 to improve the global response to refugee movements.
IAB	Institute for Employment Research	A German research institute specialising in labour market and social policy studies.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	An intergovernmental organisation that provides policy advice and comparative data to promote economic and social well-being.
SOEP	Socio-Economic Panel	A large-scale longitudinal study of private households in Germany used for economic and social research.
UN	United Nations	An international organisation founded in 1945, aiming to maintain peace, security, and cooperation among countries.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	The UN agency mandated to protect and support refugees and displaced populations worldwide.

Terms and Definitions

Refugee

Article 1 of [1951 Refugee Convention \(UNHCR\)](#) (see *references*, Geneva Convention) defines as "refugee" someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Refugee rights

As per the principle of 'non-refoulement' of Article 33 of the Geneva Convention, a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. Other rights outlined in the 1951 Convention include:

- *The right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions (Article 32)*
- *The right not to be punished for irregular entry into the territory of a contracting State (Article 31)*
- *The right to non-discrimination (Articles 3 and 5)*
- *The right to decent work (Articles 17 to 19 and 24)*
- *The right to housing, land and property, including intellectual property (Articles 13, 14 and 21)*
- *The right to education (Article 22)*
- *The right to freedom of religion (Article 4)*
- *The right to access to justice (Article 16)*
- *The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26 and Article 31 (2))*
- *The right to be issued civil, identity and travel documents (Articles 12, 27 and 28)*
- *The right to social protection (Articles 23 and 24 (2-4)).*

Asylum seeker

According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), an asylum-seeker is "someone who is seeking international protection. Their request for refugee status, or complementary protection status, has yet to be processed, or they may not yet have requested asylum, but they intend to do so". It should be emphasised that "not all asylum-seekers will be found to be refugees, but all refugees were once asylum-seekers". Governments are usually the ones to assess asylum applications to

determine whether an individual's circumstances make them a refugee or not. While awaiting the outcome of their application to be granted international protection, asylum-seekers "have the right to and should be protected".

International protection

In the *global context*, the UNHCR (see references, *UNHCR Glossary*) envisions international protection as a set of "actions by the international community on the basis of international law, aimed at protecting the [fundamental rights](#) of a specific category of persons outside their [countries of origin](#), who lack the national protection of their own countries".

In the *European Union (EU) context*, [the European Commission](#) (see references, EC Directive 2011) foresees protection "that encompasses [refugee status](#) and [subsidiary protection status](#)". The first refers to the "recognition by an EU Member State of a [third-country national](#) or [stateless person](#) as a [refugee](#)".

While the legal definition of a refugee under European Union (EU) law, based on the 1951 Geneva Convention and reaffirmed in Directive 2011/95/EU, remains unchanged, the EU [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) adopted in 2024 has significantly altered the way this definition is applied in practice. The Pact introduces stricter and faster border procedures, expanded use of the "safe country" concepts, as well as a stronger focus on returns, which can affect the accessibility and fairness of asylum processes. These procedural shifts may limit some applicants' ability to fully present their claims, potentially undermining consistent recognition of refugee status across the EU despite the unchanged legal framework.

Dislocated or displaced person

In the *global context*, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) [defines](#) as dislocated or displaced (terms used interchangeably throughout the study to refer to the same people) persons or groups of persons 'who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a State, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of **human rights** or natural or human-made disasters' (IOM 2019).

In the *EU context*, the following definition is provided in the framework of the [Directive - 2001/55](#) (EUR-lex 2011) :

'A third-country national or stateless person who has had to leave their country or region of origin, or has been evacuated, particularly in response to an appeal by international organisations, and is unable to return in safe and durable conditions because of the situation prevailing in that country, who may fall within the scope of Art. 1A of the Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol or other international or national instruments giving international protection, in particular:

- (i) Persons who have fled areas of armed conflict or endemic violence;
- (ii) persons at serious risk of, or who have been the victim of, systematic or generalised violations of their human rights'.

Chapter 1- Introduction: Council of Europe Engagement on Refugee and Youth Rights

1.1. Background

The transition to adulthood represents a critical juncture in the life course of all young people. For young refugees and migrants, this period is often compounded by uncertainty, systemic gaps in care, and a sudden withdrawal of support structures at the age of 18. Recognising this, the Council of Europe adopted [*Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood*](#) on 24 April 2019, to provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring that young refugees are supported in this transition as rights-holders and members of society.

The adoption of CM/Rec(2019)4 builds on the Council of Europe's longstanding commitment to both youth rights and the protection of refugees and migrants, rooted in its human rights mandate, as articulated in the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) and other legal instruments.

Building on these foundations, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in April 2019. It calls on Member States to provide transitional support to young refugees turning 18, covering key domains such as housing, education, healthcare, legal assistance, employment, and community participation.

Prior to 2019, several key initiatives laid the groundwork for the Recommendation:

The Youth Sector's Advocacy on Transition Gaps

Throughout the 2010s, youth organisations and refugee-led initiatives, particularly through the [Advisory Council on Youth](#) (CCJ) and the [Joint Council on Youth](#) (CMJ), highlighted the abrupt termination of support at age 18 and called for a structured policy response. This advocacy, grounded in lived experience and field realities, highlighted the need for a structured policy response to prevent exclusion and harm.

Concurrently, the CoE's youth sector advanced rights-based, intersectional approaches through initiatives such as the [Enter! Project](#) on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights. The [Enter! Recommendation](#) (Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 "Access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights"), developed through bottom-up, participatory methodologies, provided precedents in supporting marginalised youth using rights-based, intersectional approaches; it also underscored the necessity of tailored support measures for young people facing multiple forms of marginalisation, including those with refugee and migration backgrounds.

Intergovernmental Cooperation on Migration and Asylum

In parallel, within the framework of [the Special Representative on Migration and Refugees - Division on Migration and Refugees \(SRSG\)](#) and the Council of Europe [Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe \(2017-2019\)](#),

member States acknowledged the unique vulnerabilities of children and youth on the move, including during the transition to adulthood. Intergovernmental cooperation helped create consensus around the need for a dedicated instrument; one that would ensure continuity of care and rights protections as children reached the legal age of adulthood. These developments, combined with sustained input from the Advisory Council on Youth and youth-led networks, culminated in a consensus that a standalone instrument was needed to ensure continuity of care, inclusion, and protection for refugee youth as they turned 18.

Building on these foundations, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in April 2019. It calls on Member States to provide transitional support to young refugees turning 18, covering key domains such as housing, education, healthcare, legal assistance, employment, and community participation.

1.2 Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Supporting Implementation

In recent years, the Council of Europe has taken further steps to strengthen its institutional capacity in the migration field. In 2025, a dedicated [Division on Migration and Refugees](#) was formally established within the [Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law](#). This division builds on the work initiated under the SRSg and is now tasked with overseeing migration-related cooperation, including the implementation of the [Action plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#). The Action Plan reflects the Organisation's renewed focus on identifying vulnerability, improving access to justice and rights, and reinforcing cooperation between migration, child protection, and youth services.

1.2.1 Flexible Youth Funding in Times of Crisis: The European Youth Foundation response

A concrete example of the Council of Europe's capacity to support young people in contexts of displacement and crisis is the [European Youth Foundation's](#) (EYF) special funding call launched in response to the full-scale war in Ukraine. Introduced in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, this initiative channelled flexible resources to youth-led organisations both within Ukraine and across neighbouring countries. By enabling grassroots actors to provide youth work interventions, psychosocial support, accurate information, and opportunities for civic engagement, the EYF has demonstrated how targeted youth policy instruments can address complex crises in real time.

This timely intervention illustrates the Foundation's unique capacity to sustain democratic resilience through agile and needs-based funding. Projects supported under the call, such as safe educational spaces for displaced youth, resilience training for young refugees or youth-led youth work coordination, underscore the importance of empowering civil society even in the most adverse circumstances. As such, the EYF's response offers a valuable model for future youth policy in crisis settings, combining urgency with long-term vision in line with the Council of Europe's core values.

It should be emphasised that the European Youth Foundation (EYF) has a solid record of supporting projects that focus on young refugees and displaced youth, well before

the special Ukraine call. For instance, the EYF has been supporting refugee youth inclusion through its [pilot activity grants](#) focused on human rights education and meaningful youth participation.

The [Youth Sector Priorities](#) for the period 2024–2027 reflect a strong emphasis on inclusion, rights-based approaches and democratic resilience. The four thematic priorities—"revitalising pluralistic democracy, ensuring young people's access to rights, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, and strengthening youth work"—underscore the importance of reaching marginalised groups, including young refugees and those in transition to adulthood.

In this context, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 serves as a key reference document, offering a normative and practical framework that supports the EYF's mandate: It informs both funding decisions and programme orientation by reinforcing the need to protect the rights and agency of displaced youth through youth work, participation, and targeted civil society support. Importantly, these priorities are also operationalised through the [Youth for democracy programme](#), which has hosted study sessions, seminars, and capacity-building activities with young refugees and youth organisations. These initiatives not only translate the Recommendation's principles into practice but also demonstrate the Council of Europe's commitment to fostering meaningful participation and inclusion of displaced young people.

Special call Ukraine

This special funding call had stood as a good practice in flexible, responsive youth policy. It illustrated how tailored instruments can quickly mobilise resources to address emerging crises while staying true to the Council of Europe's core values. Such approaches not only meet immediate needs but also contribute to longer-term democratic resilience. For these reasons, it is essential to consider expanding and building on this model.

Strengthening the capacity of youth organisations in crisis settings ensures that young people remain active stakeholders in shaping inclusive and democratic societies, even in the most difficult circumstances. The experience of the EYF special call demonstrates that timely, targeted support can have a profound impact, an approach that should inspire future policy responses at both European and national levels.

1.2.2. Youth for Democracy Programme: Advancing Participation, Learning and Youth work support

The [Youth for Democracy Programme](#), implemented under the Council of Europe's [Youth sector strategy 2030](#) (adopted in January 2020), constitutes a central pillar of the Organisation's efforts to promote meaningful youth participation, strengthen democratic resilience, and safeguard young people's rights. The programme is

anchored in the unique [Co-management](#) system of the Council of Europe's youth sector, where representatives of governments and youth organisations share equal responsibility for decision-making. This governance model is both practical and symbolic: it demonstrates that young people are not only beneficiaries of youth policy but equal partners in shaping it.

In this context, the programme makes a direct contribution to the aims of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood. Through study sessions, seminars and targeted capacity-building initiatives, it reinforces the role of youth work, fosters inclusive participation mechanisms, and develops practical tools that enable young people, including those with refugee or migration backgrounds, to act as active contributors to democratic life.

Illustrative Practices from the Youth for Democracy Programme

❖ Capacity building and knowledge transfer

Several recent initiatives demonstrate the programme's contribution to building capacity and creating enabling environments for young people:

- [Integration of Young Migrants and Refugees](#) (Budapest, 2025): A study session in cooperation with the Youth Social Rights Network which aimed to empower participants to create positive environment, narratives and communication that makes young refugees and migrants feel valued and accepted.
- [Youth For Democracy in Ukraine](#) (Phase III, 2023–2026): A multifaceted project supporting young people and youth organisations during wartime through trauma-informed youth work, participatory youth policy and the recognition of youth centres as platforms for democratic engagement.
- **Practical Tools and Resources:** The programme has produced accessible learning materials such as the "Guide on [Trauma-informed youth work](#)"; an [educational and practical course "Participatory Youth Policy"](#), as well as innovative methods like the board game ["Solution Exists!"](#) and multimedia resources showcasing youth participation practices.

These practices highlight the programme's tangible contribution to advancing youth work and supporting inclusive, participatory approaches across Europe. They also illustrate how the Council of Europe is equipping practitioners and young people with tools that directly complement the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4.

1.2.3 Turning Policy into Practice: Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence”

The Council of Europe’s [*Guide Turning 18 with Confidence*](#) translates Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 into concrete application by empowering youth workers, public authorities, refugee-led organisations and civil society to collaboratively implement tailored pathways for young refugees as they age out of childhood protections. It simplifies the recommendation’s nine thematic areas, such as legal frameworks, education, housing, health, employment, family reunification and life-project planning, into accessible tools and inspiring case studies, ensuring that stakeholders across sectors coordinate effectively to provide continuity of support beyond the age of 18, uphold non-discrimination, enable access to rights and foster active social participation.

This practice illustrates how the Council of Europe’s approach moves beyond policy into implementation, by facilitating dialogue among young refugees, policymakers, youth workers, educators and civil society, and by equipping them with simplified guidance and real-world examples to turn the recommendation into action on the ground.

The *Turning 18 with Confidence* is a practical and innovative tool that brings the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 to life by offering clear guidance, concrete examples, and actionable steps for supporting young refugees in their transition to adulthood. Importantly, it includes a self-evaluation kit that allows organisations to assess and strengthen their alignment with the Recommendation’s principles, making it especially valuable for civil society actors engaged in youth and refugee work.

Illustrative Practice from the guide “Turning 18 with Confidence”

❖ Self-assessment tools for different stakeholders

A key practical feature of the Guide is the self-assessment checklists, which help stakeholders—including public authorities, local services, and civil society—to evaluate the extent to which their policies and programmes align with the Recommendation across domains such as legal protection, education, housing, and youth participation. The checklists facilitate structured reflection, evidence-based planning, and cross-sector coordination, transforming normative principles into actionable steps that strengthen rights-based, inclusive, and sustainable support for young refugees.

- ✓ **Gap Analysis:** Local authorities and NGOs use the checklists to identify gaps in services bridging the 18-year transition, such as continuity of housing or access to vocational training.
- ✓ **Coordinated Planning:** Stakeholders apply the tool to align interventions across sectors, ensuring youth receive coherent support between child and adult services.
- ✓ **Monitoring Progress:** The guide enables periodic review and documentation of progress, fostering accountability and structured improvement over time.

1.2.4 Spaces to discuss and understand refugee-related trauma

Forced displacement often results in profound and multilayered trauma for refugees, particularly young people, who may have experienced war, persecution, separation from family, exploitation, and protracted uncertainty. These traumatic experiences frequently have long-term psychological effects, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Özerim et al. 2020: 3-4; Fazel et al., 2012; Lustig et al., 2004). The transition to adulthood can exacerbate this vulnerability, especially when protective structures fall away at age 18.

In parallel, growing evidence highlights the secondary traumatic stress experienced by the practitioners, youth workers, and social service providers who support these individuals (Baird & Kracen 2006; Bride 2007). Chronic exposure to the suffering of others can lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and impaired professional functioning (Figley 1995).

In this context, organisations such as the Council of Europe have a critical role to play, not only in advancing rights-based policy frameworks, but also in providing structured spaces for reflection, peer exchange, and trauma-informed learning (Drosopoulos 2024). By addressing both primary and secondary trauma within its programming and consultations, the Council of Europe helps promote resilience, sustainability, and ethical care standards in refugee support systems. In the last years, the Council of Europe, especially through its Youth Department, has implemented several initiatives addressing trauma affecting refugees, displaced youth, and dislocated people, particularly in the context of war, conflict, and forced migration. Evidence shows that there is great value in investing even further in understanding mental health and well-being in the wider migration context and building capacities for people primarily and secondarily involved in related trauma. Such initiatives contribute to a more holistic understanding of well-being that includes both those who seek protection and those who serve them.

Illustrative Practices

❖ Co-designing with refugee-led organisations

In November 2022, the Council of Europe Youth Department hosted a study session in Strasbourg titled "[Managing mental health as a refugee, asylum seeker and migrant](#)" co-organised with Voices of Young Refugees in Europe (VYRE) and Euro Youth Mental Health (EYMH). This initiative brought together 33 young refugees, migrants, and youth practitioners to strengthen understanding of mental health challenges and promote peer-led strategies across Europe.

Key strengths of this initiative included:

- A rights-based and peer-inclusive learning environment, where participants explored legal frameworks, cultural sensitivity, and access barriers to mental health support.
- A focus on culturally sensitive psychosocial support, empowering refugee youth and practitioners to exchange good practices and co-create mental health awareness campaigns.

-Facilitation of networking and future cooperation, helping to build programmes and campaigns on refugee mental health rooted in lived experience and cross-border solidarity.

Such study sessions exemplify how institutional platforms like the Council of Europe can effectively create spaces for peer learning, advocacy, and mental health literacy. By centring young refugees and integrating legal awareness with psychosocial dialogue, the session offers a scalable template for youth-centred mental health interventions across Europe.

1.3 Objectives of the Recommendation

Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 aims to guide Member States in the development and implementation of policies that:

- Ensure continuity of support and protection for young refugees during and after the age of majority;
- Promote access to education, training, employment, housing, healthcare, legal assistance, and other essential services;
- Facilitate the participation of young refugees in democratic life and decisions that affect them;
- Strengthen cooperation between youth services and migration/asylum authorities;
- Promote an individualised, holistic and rights-based approach, acknowledging the specific needs and aspirations of young refugees.

The Recommendation also encourages Member States to work closely with civil society, youth organisations, and refugee-led initiatives, and to invest in training, coordination, and cross-sectoral collaboration as tools for effective implementation.

1.4 Strategic Importance of the Recommendation

The Recommendation reflects a paradigm shift from viewing young refugees solely through a protection lens to understanding them as active contributors to society whose agency, participation, and inclusion are central to sustainable integration. Its adoption aligns with broader European and international commitments, including the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

The Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 exists within a broader and evolving policy environment, including the European Union's (EU) [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) and the United Nations' [Global Compact on Refugees](#). While these frameworks share overarching goals of protection and inclusion for refugees, their specific approaches and priorities may differ.

The Council of Europe Recommendation urges Member States to adopt a rights-based, youth-centred approach to the treatment of young refugees and migrants transitioning to adulthood. It emphasises that turning 18 should not lead to a sudden loss of care and protection. Instead, it frames this stage as a gradual transition requiring sustained support across legal, social, educational, and psychological dimensions (Council of

Europe 2019, paras. 4–8). The Recommendation calls for continued access to youth welfare services, non-discriminatory treatment regardless of legal status, and the recognition of young people aged 18–25 as rights-holders whose needs must be met within broader youth policy frameworks.

1.5 Rationale for the Review of the Recommendation

Since its adoption in 2019, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 has served as a key reference point for Council of Europe Member States in shaping rights-based, youth-centred responses for young refugees in transition to adulthood. However, five years on, there is a growing recognition that systemic, structural, and political challenges continue to affect the consistency and effectiveness of its implementation across Member States.

This review has been undertaken to evaluate the extent to which the Recommendation has translated into concrete policy and practice, to identify persistent barriers and enabling factors, and to provide evidence-based guidance for strengthening future action.

Why a review is timely and necessary

- *Emerging Challenges: New Barriers in a Changing Context*

Since the adoption of the Recommendation in 2019, the landscape confronting young refugees has become increasingly complex. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, disrupting access to education, employment, and essential services. Moreover, shifting geopolitical dynamics, ranging from regional conflicts to fluctuating asylum policies, have introduced new obstacles.

Ongoing displacement, secondary movements, and new transit routes have placed renewed pressure on national protection systems. Many young refugees and asylum seekers continue to encounter uncertainty, gaps in services, and a lack of tailored support once they reach adulthood. These trends require updated insights into how Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 is being used as a guiding framework.

- *Evolving Demographics: A Changing Young Refugee Profile*

Since the adoption of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 in 2019, the demographic profile of refugees arriving in Europe has shifted significantly. Earlier refugee inflows, particularly between 2014 and 2017, were largely composed of young, single men with relatively low levels of formal education and limited integration prospects (van Tubergen et al.: 2024). In contrast, more recent displacement, most notably following the outbreak of [Russia's war against Ukraine](#) in 2022, has brought a greater share of women, including young adults in transition to adulthood, many of whom are mothers with dependent children (OECD & EUAA 2023; Chatham House 2025). These newer arrivals often possess higher educational attainment and stronger social networks in host countries (OECD 2022; IAB et al. 2024). As a result, their integration needs differ from earlier cohorts, with particular emphasis on access to childcare, education, psychosocial support, and tailored labour market pathways (Eurofound 2024). This changing refugee landscape underscores the importance of age- and gender-sensitive policies that reflect the complex realities of young refugees transitioning into adulthood (Drosopoulos 2024:23).

- *Uneven uptake and limited visibility*

Initial observations from Council of Europe networks and youth stakeholders suggest that awareness and application of the Recommendation vary significantly across Member States and among different types of organisations. There is limited consolidated information on how the Recommendation is used in national policymaking, service design, or youth support systems.

- *Absence of formal monitoring mechanisms*

Unlike binding instruments, CM/Rec(2019)4 has no obligatory reporting or follow-up structures. As a result, there has been little systematic tracking of its dissemination, use, or impact. This review aims to address that gap by offering a structured snapshot of stakeholder engagement with the Recommendation across multiple countries.

- *Need to support cross-sectoral implementation*

The Recommendation calls for coordinated action across sectors, including youth, education, migration, child protection, and justice. However, fragmentation between child and adult services and limited cooperation among institutional actors are commonly cited obstacles in youth transition support. This review provides a timely opportunity to explore where such gaps persist and how they might be addressed.

- *Alignment with Council of Europe strategic goals*

This initiative contributes to broader priorities within the Council of Europe, including the [Youth sector strategy 2030](#), the [Action plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#), and the Organisation's continued support for Member States in upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law for all—including displaced and marginalised youth.

1.6 Scope, approach and methodology

1.6.1 Scope of the Review

This review assesses the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 across a diverse range of institutional and geographic contexts. It draws on contributions from two primary stakeholder groups: civil society organisations and government representatives, including officials from youth, migration, and social protection sectors.

The geographic scope covers 24 Council of Europe Member States, with representation from Western, Southern, Northern, and Eastern Europe. Care has been taken to ensure a balanced understanding of regional trends while recognising the unique national contexts in which the Recommendation is being interpreted and applied.

Thematically, the review focuses on four interrelated areas:

- Awareness and use of the Recommendation among stakeholders;
- Perceived relevance and effectiveness of the guidance it provides;
- Structural and institutional barriers that affect implementation;

- Enabling conditions and policy opportunities for strengthening support systems for young refugees transitioning to adulthood.

The review gives particular attention to the "18-year transition point", a period often marked by discontinuities in support, and explores the Recommendation's potential to promote more coherent, rights-based approaches across sectors.

1.6.2 Methodological approach

The review employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to capture the complexity of stakeholder engagement with Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 and the varied contexts in which it is being implemented.

In designing the survey, the criteria set out in the [Council of Europe's Evaluation Policy](#) were used as primary guiding lenses. In particular, measures of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and added value shaped question development. This ensured that stakeholders were asked not only about whether actions aligned with Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 but also whether those actions were practical, enduring, well-resourced and delivering meaningful benefits. By aligning survey items with CoE's evaluation norms, the findings are more directly interpretable in CoE decision-making frameworks and better positioned to inform actionable recommendations.

Quantitative component

Two structured online surveys were conducted between June and July 2025:

- One targeted civil society organisation (CSOs) working with young refugees, including youth-led, migration-focused, legal aid, and general service providers.
- The second targeted public entities from national, regional, and local administrations, primarily in the fields of youth, migration, asylum, and social services. The survey was disseminated through two institutional channels: the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the network of National Focal Points on Migration.

The surveys collected both descriptive data and open-ended responses, enabling identification of statistical trends as well as illustrative insights.

Quantitative data was analysed using basic descriptive statistics to understand patterns of awareness, use, and perceived effectiveness of the Recommendation. The focus was not on country-by-country comparison, but on identifying recurring themes, regional patterns, and sectoral differences.



Qualitative component

Alongside desk research undertaken between April and June 2025 with the aim of identifying existing practices, resources and trends, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted between May and July 2025 with selected stakeholders from civil society, youth structures, and public administrations. Interviewees were chosen to reflect geographic and thematic diversity and to provide deeper insights into implementation challenges and enabling practices.

In addition, the Council of Europe seminar [Supporting Young Refugees: The Next Chapter](#), held at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg (EYCS) in June 2025, constituted an integral component of the data collection process. The seminar featured plenary exchanges, working groups, and thematic discussions that directly informed this report. Dedicated focus group sessions were also organised during the event, engaging youth workers, policymakers, and representatives of international organisations in structured dialogue on the transition to adulthood.



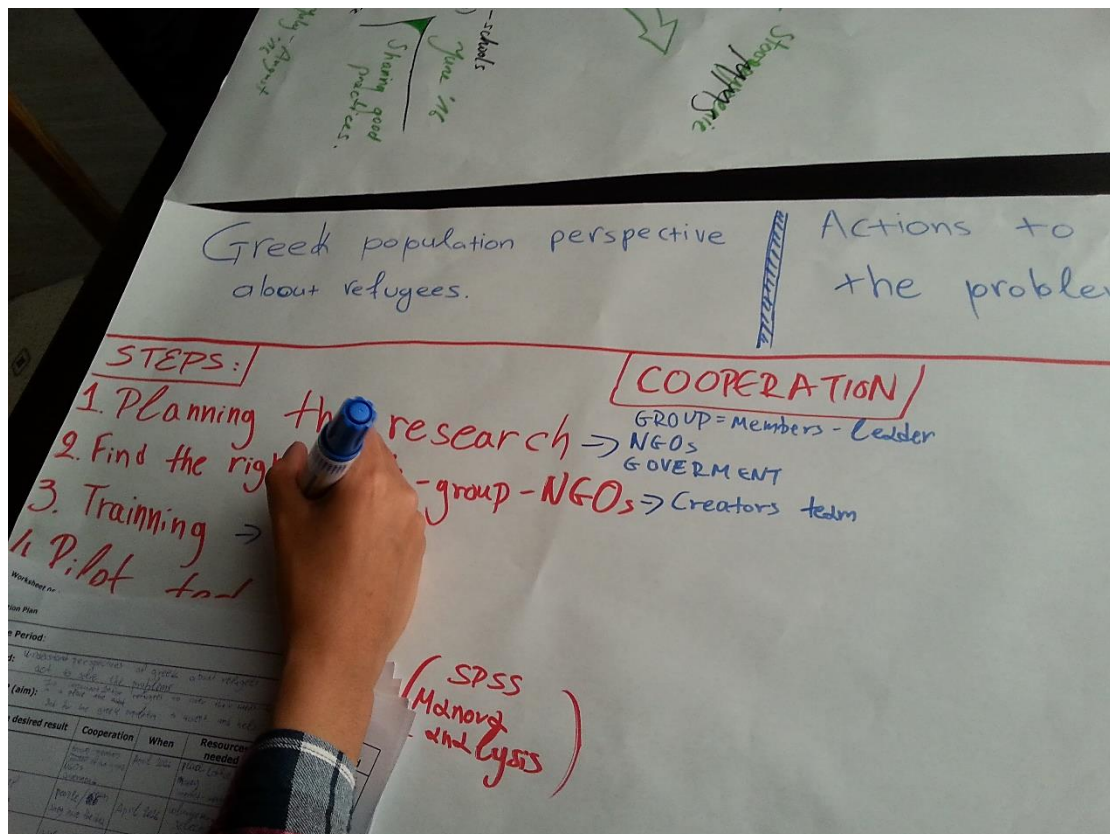
All qualitative data was analysed using a grounded theory approach,¹ allowing key themes and categories to emerge inductively from participant perspectives. This method was selected for its suitability in capturing the emerging, diverse, and context-sensitive nature of how Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 is understood and applied across countries and sectors; also, for its appropriateness for exploring complex policy environments involving multiple stakeholders, where formal processes often interact with informal practices and evolving needs. Rather than seeking uniform metrics of success, the grounded theory approach allowed the review to identify patterns, tensions, and innovations arising from real-world implementation. Grounded theory supported a bottom-up understanding of how the Recommendation is perceived, adapted, and applied in practice.

This methodological design allowed for a nuanced, evidence-informed review that reflects both institutional perspectives and the lived realities of those working most closely with young refugees. It also ensured the inclusion of youth-led and community-based voices, in line with the Council of Europe's commitment to participatory and inclusive policymaking.

¹ This review adopted a grounded theory approach for the analysis of qualitative data, particularly interviews, open survey responses, and focus group discussions. Grounded theory is a method of qualitative inquiry that focuses on developing concepts and categories inductively from the data itself, rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. The approach was inspired by the constructivist tradition of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), which emphasises the co-construction of meaning between researchers and participants, and values the subjective experiences and interpretations of those directly involved in a given context.

Chapter 2-Findings from Government Stakeholders

Translating figures into policy insights



At a Glance: Survey Highlights

Geographic Distribution of Online Survey respondents

- Greece: 15 responses (58%) - predominantly local authorities and municipalities
- Portugal: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Czech Republic: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Luxembourg: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Switzerland: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Albania: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Latvia: 1 response (4%) - national government
- North Macedonia: 1 response (4%) - national government
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1 response (4%) - national government

Combined, mixed-method research respondents represent stakeholders from:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Portugal, Switzerland, Türkiye

Organisational Type

- ✓ National Ministries: Education, Interior, Social Welfare, Migration
- ✓ Municipal/Local Authorities: Social Services, Integration Centers
- ✓ Regional Governments
- ✓ Council of Europe Committees and Networks: European Steering Committee for Youth, Focal Points on Migration (multiple)

Statistical Highlights:

- 88% implementation rate (some level of implementation)
- 81% unfamiliar with Council of Europe resources designed to support implementation
- 58% cite insufficient funding as the top barrier

Major Themes:

- Visibility Crisis: Despite high implementation rates, awareness of Council of Europe support resources is significantly low
- Relevance Gap: Education and healthcare support are priorities, but there is misalignment between recommendation scope and ground realities
- Systemic Barriers: Funding, coordination, and legal framework gaps are the primary obstacles
- Data gaps: different approaches in tracking (or not) outcomes for young refugees transitioning to adulthood

Most Striking Finding:

The paradox that while countries are implementing measures, they are largely unaware of the Council of Europe's own support tools. This suggests that implementation is happening in isolation rather than as part of a coordinated European approach.

3.1 Analysis

3.1.1 Geopolitical scope and limitations

This analysis examines primarily 26 online survey responses from stakeholders across nine countries regarding the implementation of Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on young refugees in transition to adulthood. Despite diligent efforts to distribute the online survey across all Council of Europe Member States, the response rate varied significantly, leading to limitations in the representativeness and comparability of the data collected. While Greece accounted for 15 responses (58%), these were predominantly from local authorities and municipalities, whereas most other countries, such as Portugal, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Albania, Latvia, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided only a single response each, typically from national government bodies.

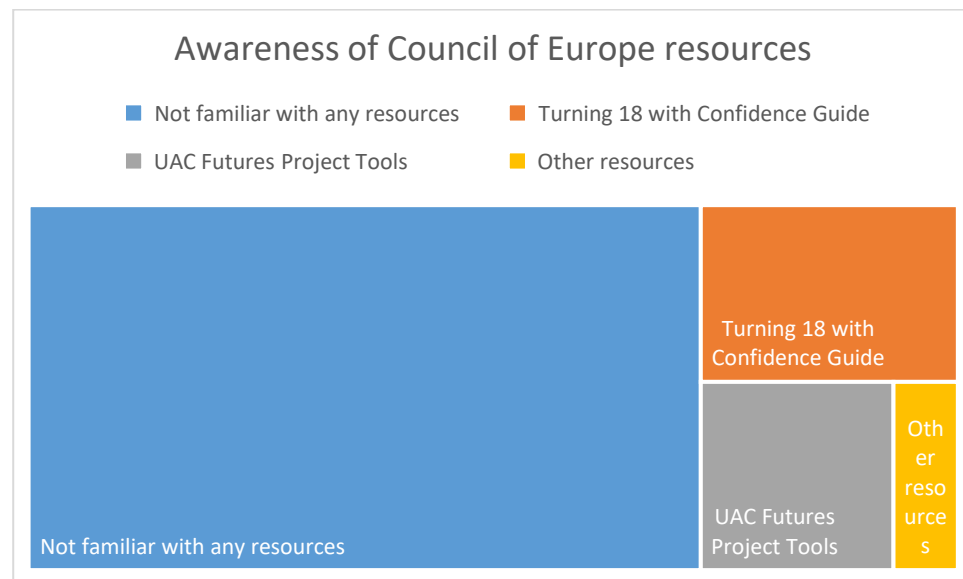
To complement and deepen the findings, both in terms of diversity and geography, additional qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected government stakeholders. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of national and local dynamics in different corners of Europe and offered contextual depth that enhances the overall analysis. By integrating both data sources, the report aims to capture a representative and multifaceted picture of how the Recommendation is being implemented across Member States.

Overall, respondents highlighted persistent challenges, including gaps in continuity of care after age 18, limited inter-agency coordination, and restricted access to housing, education, and psychosocial support. Notably, while some governments reported efforts to extend child protection measures beyond the age of majority, these practices remain discretionary and uneven.

These findings underscore the need for more coherent national strategies and greater investment in youth-specific integration pathways, particularly for vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors turning 18 and young mothers. This landscape presents significant opportunities for the Council of Europe to enhance its leadership role by expanding awareness-raising efforts, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and developing targeted support programmes that build upon existing national initiatives.

3.2 Analysis per indicators

3.2.1. Institutional visibility and resource utilisation



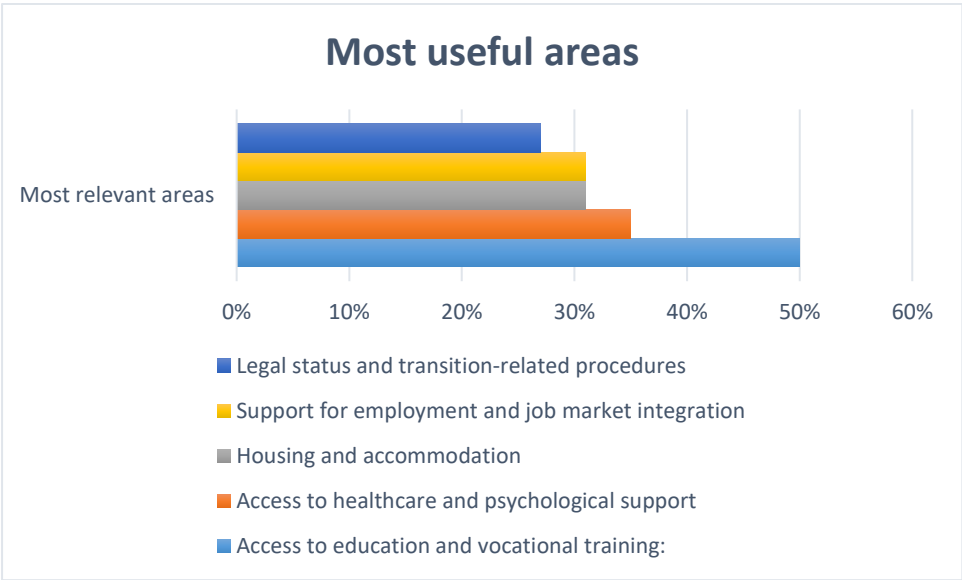
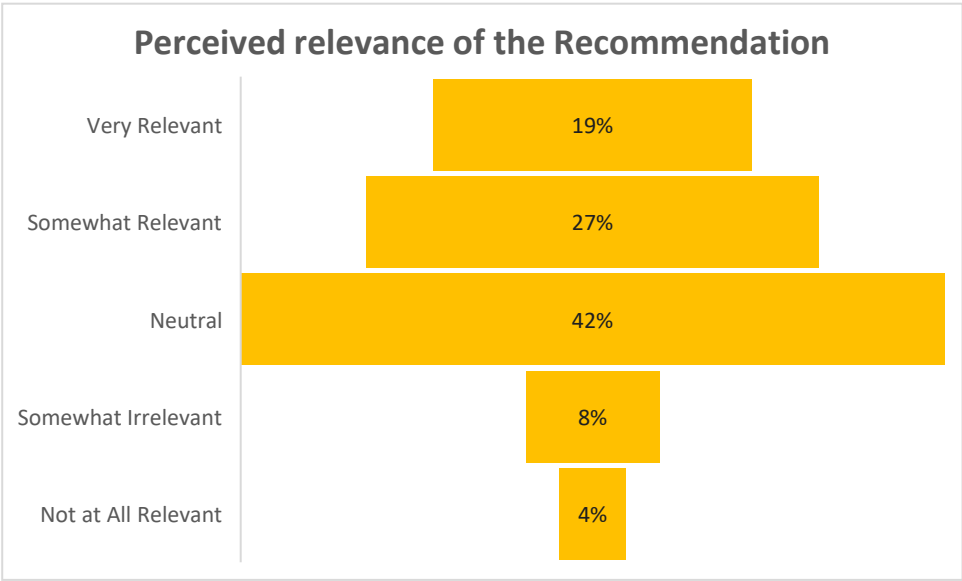
Main reasons for limited awareness:

- Lack of dissemination to local level practitioners
- Limited promotion of existing resources
- Language barriers (untranslated materials)
- Insufficient training for frontline workers

Analysis: The finding that 81% of active implementers remain unaware of dedicated CoE support resources represents a significant leverage point for enhanced institutional impact. Key resources including the [Turning 18 with Confidence](#) practical guide and the [UACFutures project](#) have achieved limited visibility, indicating substantial potential for strengthened dissemination strategies and targeted outreach.

The limited translation of the Recommendation into national languages presents another constructive avenue for Council action. Given that frontline practitioners consistently emphasise the importance of accessible, culturally adapted materials, expanded translation efforts could significantly amplify implementation effectiveness.

3.2.2. Usefulness and Relevance



Relevance Assessment: Mixed Engagement with Strategic Implications

The relevance ratings reveal a nuanced stakeholder perspective that requires careful interpretation. While 46% of respondents consider the Recommendation either "very relevant" or "somewhat relevant," the substantial 42% neutral response warrants closer examination. This neutrality may reflect several factors: limited familiarity with the Recommendation's specific provisions (consistent with the 81% unfamiliarity with Council of Europe resources), uncertainty about how the Recommendation translates into practical implementation, or satisfaction with existing national frameworks that makes additional guidance appear less essential.

Importantly, only 12% of respondents view the Recommendation as irrelevant, suggesting that scepticism about its utility is minimal. The challenge appears to be

activation rather than resistance; such an approach could transform neutral stakeholders into engaged implementers through enhanced awareness and practical guidance.

Strategically identifying priorities

The prioritisation data regarding usefulness reveals strong consensus around core integration domains, providing clear strategic direction for Council of Europe efforts:

Education as integration foundation (50%) The primacy of education and vocational training reflects both evidence-based understanding of integration pathways and alignment with the Recommendation's empowerment framework. This finding validates the Council of Europe's emphasis on educational continuity and skills development as fundamental to successful transitions. The strong stakeholder consensus creates opportunities for targeted resource development, including practical implementation guides, peer learning networks among educational practitioners, and advocacy tools that demonstrate educational investment returns.

Healthcare and psychological support (35%) The second-tier priority on healthcare access, particularly psychological support, acknowledges the complex trauma and mental health needs characteristic of young refugee populations. This finding suggests opportunities for the Council of Europe investing further in developing specialised guidance on trauma-informed approaches, facilitating knowledge exchange on innovative mental health integration models, and advocating for policy frameworks that recognise the intersection between psychological wellbeing and successful integration outcomes.

Multidimensional integration approach (Housing 31%, Employment 31%) The equivalent prioritisation of housing and employment integration demonstrates sophisticated stakeholder understanding of integration as an interconnected system rather than discrete services. This creates strategic opportunities for the Council to develop holistic implementation frameworks that address the reinforcing relationships between stable accommodation, employment readiness, and long-term integration success.

Legal framework integration (27%) While receiving lower priority ranking, the attention to legal status and transition procedures reflects the fundamental importance of administrative clarity in enabling other integration efforts. This finding suggests Council opportunities to strengthen guidance on administrative procedures, age assessment protocols, and legal status transition mechanisms.

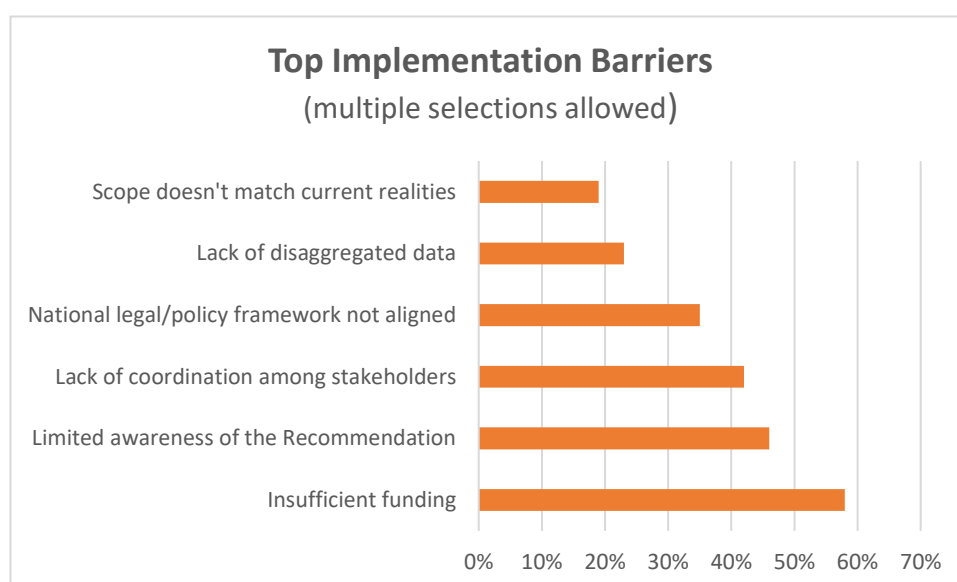
Strategic implications for Council of Europe action

These findings support a tiered approach to Council of Europe resource allocation and programme development:

- Primary focus: Educational integration tools and networks
- Secondary emphasis: Comprehensive approaches linking healthcare, housing, and employment
- Foundation building: Legal procedure guidance and administrative capacity building

Overall, the data suggests that enhanced Council of Europe’s visibility and practical resource development could significantly shift the relevance perception, transforming neutral stakeholders into active implementation partners through targeted, sector-specific support mechanisms.

3.2.3 Implementation Barriers and Enablers



Proposed enablers and solutions:

- Enhanced funding mechanisms: Direct funding for transition programs and pilot projects
- Capacity building: Training for government officials and local practitioners
- Coordination platforms: Better networking between national and local levels
- Legal framework alignment: Model legislation and policy guidance
- Peer learning: Exchange of good practices between Member States

Implementation momentum and adaptability

The analysis of survey responses, supplemented by targeted interviews, reveals strong foundational engagement with the Recommendation's objectives while identifying strategic opportunities to enhance institutional impact and implementation effectiveness. Findings demonstrate substantial uptake across diverse national contexts, from Greece's extensive local-level programming to systematic policy alignment in Portugal, Czech Republic, and Switzerland. This geographic span, which encompasses both established immigration countries and so-called “transit” routes, validates the Recommendation's broad relevance. Notably, implementation approaches reflect constructive adaptation to varying legal frameworks and administrative structures, creating a rich knowledge base for peer learning mechanisms.

Implementation pathways and impact enhancement

The 35% reporting misalignment or inconsistencies between the recommendation's goals and existing legal frameworks implies a need for better policy coherence guidance. Understanding the non-binding nature of the recommendation, this finding serves as evidence that respondents could benefit from further guidance on how to translate the recommendation's principles into domestic legal contexts. This is a topic which has been more explicitly elaborated in both focus groups and personal interviews, where respondents have expressed their expectation for more prescriptive legal guidance (including model legislation examples), as well as for clearer and more detailed communication on implementation pathways, showcasing how soft law instruments like recommendations are meant to function in practice.

Coordination challenges: Fragmentation and Integration Gaps

The finding that 42% of respondents identify coordination challenges reveals significant implementation fragmentation that undermines the Recommendation's effectiveness. This substantial proportion indicates that while individual stakeholders are actively engaged, the lack of systematic coordination mechanisms creates inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and missed opportunities for synergistic impact.

The diversity of stakeholder types reporting coordination difficulties, spanning national ministries, regional authorities and local municipalities, among others, illustrates the multi-level governance complexity inherent in young refugee integration. These coordination gaps manifest in several ways:

- Vertical disconnects between national policy frameworks and local implementation realities
- Horizontal fragmentation among sectors (education, healthcare, employment, housing)
- Limited information sharing between practitioners facing similar challenges
- Inconsistent approaches to similar situations across jurisdictions.

This coordination deficit, seen in juxtaposition with other implementation-related challenges examined above, represents a significant opportunity aligned with the Council's institutional strengths and mandate. The finding validates the Council of Europe's unique positioning to:

- Facilitate horizontal peer learning through structured knowledge exchange platforms connecting practitioners across Member States
- Strengthen vertical policy coherence by providing implementation guidance that bridges national policy and local practice
- Create systematic coordination mechanisms that leverage existing networks while reducing duplication
- Develop shared standards and tools that enable more consistent, effective approaches across diverse contexts

Funding challenges: Systemic barriers to implementation

The finding that 58% of respondents identify insufficient funding as a primary implementation barrier reveals a critical gap between policy commitment and resource allocation. This substantial majority indicates that while stakeholders demonstrate strong engagement with the Recommendation's objectives, implementation capacity remains constrained by financial limitations.

This funding gap represents a structural challenge that limits the Recommendation's potential impact, despite evident stakeholder commitment and programmatic innovation at local and national levels. The prevalence of this concern across diverse national contexts suggests that resource constraints are not isolated incidents but rather systematic barriers affecting implementation quality and sustainability.

Illustrative insights

On how the Council of Europe can support national governments:

It is worth highlighting that respondents consistently frame their suggestions in terms of enhanced Council of Europe leadership rather than criticism of current approaches. A Portuguese respondent's comprehensive vision exemplifies this constructive approach:

The Council of Europe could play a key role by offering practical support, such as tailored technical assistance, training for frontline workers, and clear, accessible toolkits with good practices from across Europe. Support for small-scale pilot projects, funding opportunities, and spaces for peer learning between countries would also help.

Government stakeholder

Similarly, a Greek respondent articulates the integration imperative with clarity:

One impactful step would be the creation of a national mentorship and transition program specifically for young refugees turning 18. These young people often face sudden gaps in support just as they need it most. A program that guarantees access to safe housing, legal guidance, education, and job pathways would help them move forward with dignity and security

Government stakeholder

Quotes showcasing interesting national practices

An example of youth-centred policy development:

We developed and adopted a new National Youth Strategy 2025-2030 which reflects the needs and personal development of young refugees. A young Ukrainian refugee was selected into the Youth Panel, which is a youth advisory body in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

Government stakeholder

Choices Programme (Portugal)

The Choices Programme (Programa Escolhas), a national initiative integrated within the Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (IPDJ), has been promoting social inclusion across Portugal since 2001. Co-funded by the European Union and local partners, the programme targets children, young people, and families from socioeconomically vulnerable backgrounds, with a special focus on individuals at high risk of social exclusion, particularly refugees.

Through a combination of education, vocational training, civic engagement, arts, and sports, the programme fosters equal opportunities and community integration. Its governance model blends centralized strategy with local autonomy, enabling tailored, locally relevant interventions. Each project cycle spans two to three years, operating through diverse regional partnerships that include schools, municipalities, NGOs, and other civil society actors.

Refugees benefit from dedicated support plans that include life-history assessments, psychological screening, educational integration, and personalised life-project planning. Initiatives such as multilingual welcome kits, cultural celebrations, cooperative games, and inclusive sports and nutrition programmes have proven essential in fostering belonging, linguistic acquisition, and intercultural dialogue.

The Choices Programme stands as a model of inclusive practice, addressing complex needs with a structured, sustainable, and human-centred approach to integration, aligning with the Recommendation.

Representative of the Portuguese Sports and Youth Institute

3.3 Conclusion

The analysis reveals substantial opportunity for enhanced Council leadership in supporting young refugee integration across Member States. The 88% implementation engagement rate demonstrates strong foundational commitment; stakeholder identification of resource, coordination, and awareness enhancement needs provides clear direction for expanded Council action.

The convergent emphasis on education, healthcare, and housing integration offers strategic focus for Council of Europe programme development. The diversity of national implementation approaches creates rich opportunities for systematic peer learning and evidence-based good practice exchange. Significantly, the constructive stakeholder feedback reflects recognition of the Council's distinctive capacity to provide coordination, advocacy, and technical leadership that transcends individual member state capabilities.

Rather than viewing current implementation landscapes as constrained, the evidence indicates significant momentum for expanded Council of Europe engagement. Member States demonstrate active implementation, local authorities show strong participation, and practitioners actively seek enhanced Council of Europe guidance and coordination. The strategic question centres on optimising the Council of Europe response to meet demonstrated demand for capacity building, technical support, and systematic coordination.

The young refugees central to this Recommendation represent both immediate integration priorities and Europe's demographic and economic future. Their successful transitions depend not only on national implementation efforts, but on the coordinated, values-driven leadership that positions the Council of Europe as Europe's primary human rights institution. The stakeholder findings provide strategic direction for that leadership, building systematically on existing strengths while addressing identified opportunities for enhanced impact. The analysis demonstrates that a more effective implementation of the Recommendation through strategically targeted efforts can transform individual national endeavours into coordinated European action, maximising both integration outcomes and institutional impact across the member state community.

On the whole, while valuable contributions were received from a number of national authorities, the overall response rate from governments remained limited, particularly at the central level. This asymmetry in participation highlights the importance of continued efforts to encourage and facilitate state-level engagement in the review and implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4. As States play a key role in shaping legal frameworks and service provision for young refugees, their active involvement is essential to ensuring that transitions to adulthood are supported in a coherent, rights-based, and sustainable manner. Looking ahead, reinforcing structured dialogue between governments and other stakeholders, including civil society and youth actors, particularly ones that can affect and shape policy, will be critical to strengthening ownership of the Recommendation's principles and enabling more consistent implementation across Member States.

3.4 Proposals from National Governments

Funding & Resources

- Governments proposed the development of innovative financing mechanisms, including public-private partnerships and impact investment models, to support young refugee integration.
- Governments emphasised that strategic advocacy demonstrating the socio-economic benefits of investing in young refugee support can strengthen resource mobilisation and political commitment.

Coordination & Integration

- Governments suggested strengthening stakeholder integration by systematically engaging local authorities and frontline practitioners in policy design and implementation.
- Governments highlighted the value of structured networks connecting national and local stakeholders through peer learning exchanges and the dissemination of good practices.
- Governments proposed establishing digital coordination platforms to enable real-time knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving across jurisdictions.

Youth Participation & Leadership

- Governments highlighted the importance of including young refugees and youth-led organisations in programme design and evaluation, ensuring policies reflect their needs and capacities.
- Governments proposed the creation of consultation mechanisms that systematically incorporate local-level expertise and innovation into policy development processes.

Awareness & Dissemination

- Governments emphasised the need for comprehensive outreach strategies for Council of Europe resources, targeting both practitioners and policymakers.
- Governments suggested the creation of integrated digital platforms to facilitate resource sharing and systematic stakeholder networking across Member States.
- Governments highlighted the need for enhanced visibility and accessibility of existing Council of Europe resources, including multilingual formats and direct engagement with practitioners.

Capacity-Building & Training

- Governments proposed targeted professional development programmes for officials, local practitioners, and civil society partners, including evidence-based approaches, trauma-informed practice, legal framework navigation, and integrated service delivery.

- Governments highlighted the importance of building institutional capacity for coordinated sustainable service provision.

Policy & Evidence Infrastructure

- Governments proposed developing adaptable model frameworks and implementation guidance that can be customised to national legal and administrative contexts.
- Governments highlighted the need for standardised outcome monitoring systems and comprehensive evaluation methodologies to support evidence-based policy development.
- Governments suggested creating permanent institutional mechanisms for sharing innovation, coordinating responses to emerging challenges, and sustaining political commitment to young refugee integration.

Knowing Shapes Doing



At a Glance: Civil Society Survey Highlights

Geographic Distribution in the Survey (mixed-method)

Category	Countries	Key Findings
Survey Respondents	Austria, Germany, Belgium, France	High awareness (75%) but mixed implementation success
	Poland, Serbia, Ukraine	Moderate awareness (60%) with strong advocacy focus
	Greece, Italy, Spain	Variable implementation with funding challenges
	Norway, Sweden	Limited representation but positive feedback
Personal Interviews	Cyprus, Greece, Türkiye, Italy, Germany, Finland, Bulgaria	In-depth insights through qualitative personal interviews

Quantitative Response Overview (online survey only):

Total responses: 47 organisations across 24 countries

- **Top countries by responses:**
 - Austria: 6 organisations; Germany: 4 organisations; Belgium: 4 organisations; France: 4 organisations; Poland: 3 organisations

Organisation Categories

Youth Organisations 12 organisations (25.5%); Refugee/Migration-focused Organisations 8 organisations (17.0%); Religious/Faith-based Organisations 7 organisations (14.9%); Legal Aid Organisations 4 organisations (8.5%); General NGOs/Social Services 16 organisations (34.0%)

Key Insights

Strong Foundation: Nearly 86% of organisations report effective programs, with 78.7% finding the recommendation useful, indicating a solid base for implementation enhancement.

Critical Support Needs: Legal uncertainty (53.2%) and housing transitions (42.6%) emerge as the most pressing challenges faced by young refugees on transition, highlighting the need for coordinated policy responses.

Resource Constraints: Over half of organisations (55.3%) cite insufficient funding as their primary barrier, while 38.3% lack stakeholder support, indicating significant capacity gaps.

Cooperation Potential: Organisations prioritise flexible funding (63.8%) and recognition (51.1%) as key factors for enhanced public authority collaboration, suggesting clear pathways for partnership development.

Implementation Gap: While 57.4% are aware of the recommendation, only 38.3% are familiar with implementation resources, indicating opportunities for enhanced resource dissemination.

2.1 Analysis: Understanding local realities and emerging dynamics

A total of 47 civil society organisations (CSOs) from 24 Council of Europe Member States contributed to the survey. These organisations represent a diverse range of actors, including youth-led networks, refugee support services, legal aid providers, faith-based organisations, and broader social service NGOs. Moreover, findings have been enriched, both geographically and thematically, with targeted semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of i) frontline workers in humanitarian aid organisations, ii) youth researchers/members of the academia who are experts in the field, iii) youth workers active in refugee-established and refugee-led organisations, some of whom are either asylum seekers or have received international protection.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) demonstrated a strong and proactive commitment to the review process of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4. The survey received a satisfactory number of responses from CSOs, many of whom also expressed willingness to contribute through in-depth personal interviews. This high level of participation reflects the central role CSOs play in supporting young refugees, particularly during the complex transition to adulthood. Their responsiveness illustrates a deep awareness of emerging challenges on the ground, the need for tailored support mechanisms, and a genuine interest in shaping policy outcomes. It also confirms that CSOs remain critical in both monitoring implementation gaps and developing good practices that uphold the rights and wellbeing of young refugees and migrants.

The survey results reveal key insights into how Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 is perceived and applied in practice. Using a grounded theory lens, several interconnected themes emerge: the relationship between organisational capacity and awareness, the integration of holistic support practices, systemic implementation gaps, and the structural vulnerabilities faced by young refugees post-18.

2.1.1. Institutional Visibility, Awareness and Resource Utilisation

Awareness of CM/Rec(2019)4

- Aware of the recommendation: 57.4% (27 organisations)
- Not aware of the recommendation: 42.6% (20 organisations)

Familiarity with Implementation Resources

Among all organisations surveyed:

- Familiar with *Turning 18 with Confidence* Implementation Guide: 38.3% (18 organisations)
- Familiar with "UAC Futures Project" tools: 12.8% (6 organisations)
- Not familiar with any resources: 48.9% (23 organisations)

Key Patterns

- Larger, established organisations show higher awareness levels
- Youth-led and refugee-led organisations often lack access to formal resources
- Geographic disparities exist, with some countries showing limited institutional knowledge

Main Reasons for Limited Awareness

- Insufficient dissemination of resources
- Language barriers for non-English/French materials
- Lack of targeted outreach to grassroots organisations
- Limited integration into national policy frameworks

Strong baseline awareness as a solid foundation

The analysis of responses related to the visibility and awareness of CM/Rec(2019)4 reveals a promising implementation landscape with substantial opportunities for strategic enhancement. In particular, the findings show that a substantial majority of organisations (68%) demonstrate awareness of CM/Rec(2019)4, providing a strong foundation for implementation efforts. While 38% of surveyed organisations report familiarity with specific implementation tools such as the guide *Turning 18 with Confidence*, this indicates significant potential for expanding practical implementation support.

This gap between general awareness and familiarity with implementation tools represents an opportunity to strengthen the connection between policy knowledge and practical application. Building upon the existing awareness base offers a pathway to enhance the recommendation's implementation effectiveness at the organisational level.

Overall, the analysis of responses identifies several strategic opportunities to build upon the existing awareness foundation and strengthen implementation capacity. Current resource dissemination approaches have achieved substantial reach, creating a platform for scalable, more targeted and comprehensive support strategies.

Language accessibility presents an opportunity to expand the recommendation's reach by developing resources in additional European languages. This multilingual approach would enable organisations across diverse linguistic communities to engage more effectively with implementation guidance and tools.

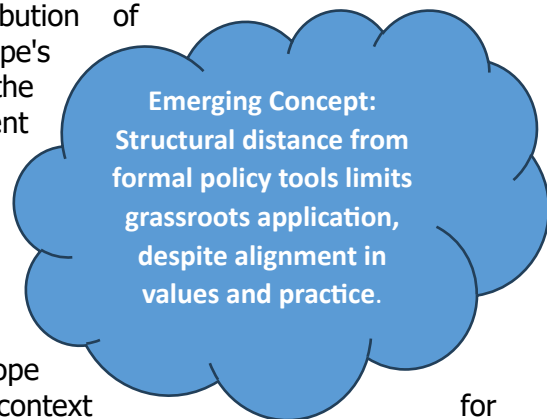
Enhanced integration of CM/Rec(2019)4 into national policy frameworks represents an opportunity to strengthen implementation support through domestic policy alignment. This integration can provide clearer pathways for organisations to understand how the recommendation connects with their national operational contexts.

Organisational and Geographic Disparities

The interpretation of findings identifies clear patterns in awareness distribution that correlate with organisational characteristics and geographic location. Larger, well-established organisations consistently demonstrate higher levels of awareness and resource familiarity compared to their smaller counterparts. This pattern suggests that institutional capacity and resource availability significantly influence an organisation's ability to engage with Council of Europe recommendations.

Youth-led and refugee-led organisations face particular challenges in accessing formal resources and implementation guidance. These organisations, despite their critical role in serving vulnerable populations directly addressed by CM/Rec(2019)4, often operate outside traditional institutional networks that facilitate information dissemination. Their limited access to formal resources creates a paradoxical situation where organisations most likely to work with the recommendation's target beneficiaries are least equipped with official implementation tools.

Geographic disparities further compound these challenges, with certain Member States demonstrating limited institutional knowledge of the recommendation and its associated resources. This uneven distribution of awareness across the Council of Europe's geographic scope undermines the recommendation's potential for consistent implementation; nevertheless, it presents an opportunity for the Council of Europe to update and enhance its current dissemination strategies. The diverse organisational landscape involved in implementation offers opportunities for peer learning and collaborative approaches. The Council of Europe can play a pivotal role in creating the space and context for established organisations with higher awareness levels to serve as resources and partners for capacity building initiatives targeting emerging and community-based organisations.



2.1.2. Usefulness and Relevance

Methodological Clarification: Usefulness versus Relevance

It is essential to distinguish between the concepts of "usefulness" and "relevance" as applied in this assessment.

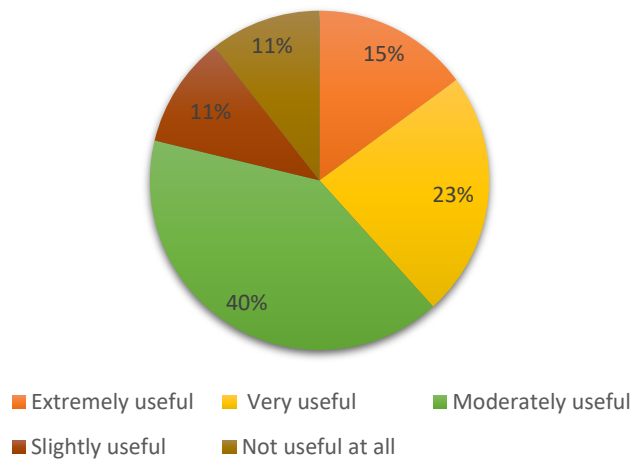
Usefulness, as measured throughout this review process, refers to the practical applicability and resonance of CM/Rec(2019)4 within the immediate operational context of organisations and practitioners. This encompasses how well the recommendation aligns with the daily realities, scope of work, and programmatic needs of youth workers and organisations working with and for young refugees.

Relevance, by contrast, encompasses the broader sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts that influence how the recommendation resonates within different national and regional environments. While an organisation may find the recommendation highly useful for their direct work with young people, broader relevance may be constrained by national policy frameworks, political climates regarding migration, or varying legal contexts across Member States.

This distinction helps explain why high organisational usefulness ratings may coexist with implementation challenges that stem from broader contextual factors beyond individual organisational control. Understanding this differentiation is crucial for interpreting survey findings and developing targeted strategies that address both practical implementation support and broader systemic enablers for the recommendation's effectiveness.

Survey results: Usefulness of CM/Rec(2019)4 Recommendation

Organisations rating usefulness



Key Insights

40.4% of organisations find the recommendation moderately useful

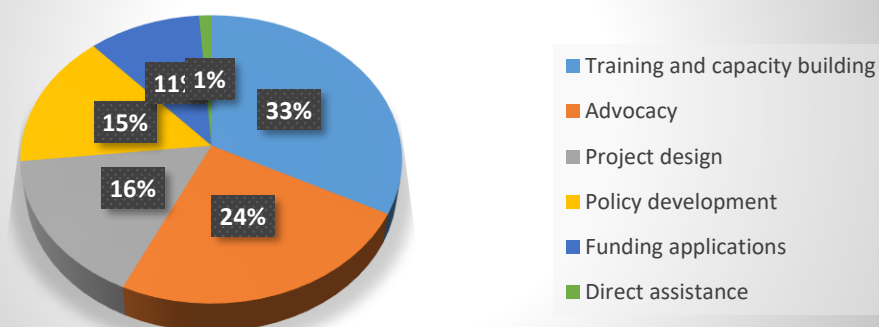
38.3% rate the recommendation as very or extremely useful

The majority (78.8%) see at least moderate value

The findings demonstrate solid organisational appreciation for the Recommendation's utility, with diverse successful application models emerging across different operational contexts. Civil society actors particularly value the document's rights-based framing and the recognition of young refugees as active rights-holders, not only service recipients or 'beneficiaries'.

Alignment with organisations' activities

Primary organisational activities related to the Recommendation



The Recommendation shows particularly strong resonance with training and capacity building initiatives, where 70% of implementing organisations report successful integration. This alignment demonstrates the recommendation's relevance and effectiveness as a framework for professional development and organisational strengthening within the youth care transition sector.

Organisations also find substantial value in applying the Recommendation to advocacy and policy development work, with 60% reporting successful integration in these areas. This dual utility as both practical guidance and policy framework enhances the recommendation's versatility and institutional value.

Relevance for Practitioners and Youth Workers in a Shifting Political Landscape

The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on young refugees remains highly relevant in today's complex and polarised sociopolitical environment. Across Europe, rising nationalist rhetoric and public fatigue with migration have altered the conditions in which youth work takes place (Eminoğlu et. al 2020; Annaoglou 2022). Youth practitioners working with displaced young people increasingly operate in settings shaped by restrictive migration policies, public scepticism, and politicised discourse (Amnesty International 2020).

The in-depth personal interviews with targeted practitioners were an opportunity to explore how, in many contexts, the reception and use of the Recommendation is interconnected with the wider sociopolitical context over migration that youth workers and CSOs operate in. Dominant national and European narratives often influence how refugee-related work is perceived and supported. In some contexts, migration is framed primarily as a security or demographic challenge, leading to shrinking civic space, particularly for organisations offering support, advocacy, or rights-based youth work with displaced populations. This can result in increased scrutiny, reduced funding, or even legal and reputational risks for those engaging directly with young refugees.

At the same time, there is growing evidence of "refugee fatigue" in several Member States, where public and political will to support inclusive refugee integration is diminishing (Drosopoulos 2024). This fatigue can manifest in delayed asylum processes, limitations on services, or even, the withdrawal of essential support mechanisms, making the work of youth practitioners even more challenging.

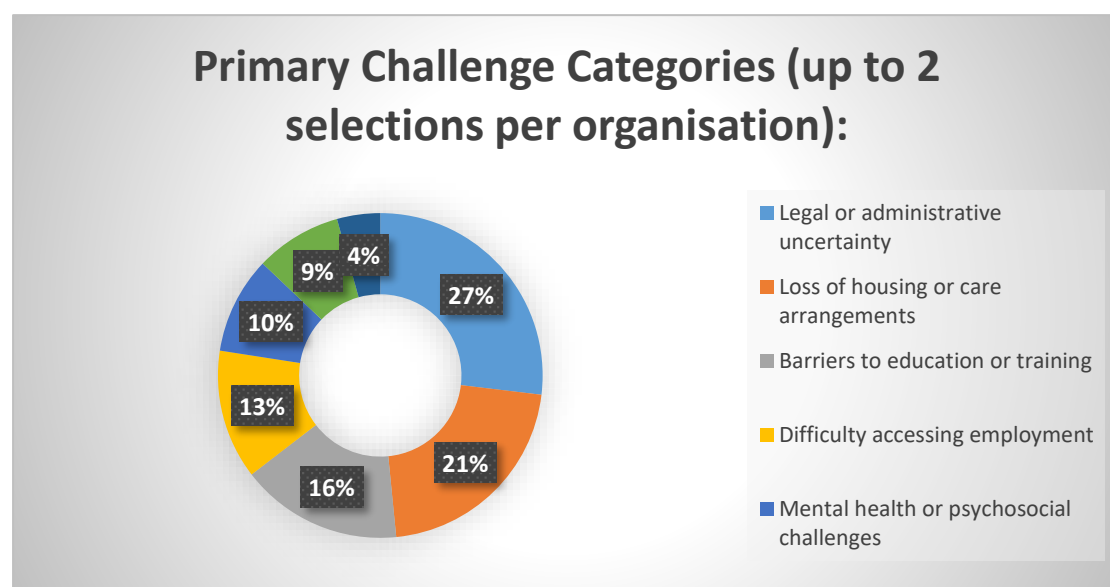
In this context, the Recommendation offers a vital framework which, as respondents shared, is not being used in its full potential. Throughout discussions, interviewees noticed that they would like to explore how to make good use of the recommendation both as a guiding tool and a protective reference point for practitioners advocating for the rights and inclusion of young refugees. Its emphasis on youth participation, access to services, and democratic engagement could equip practitioners with the language and legitimacy to continue their work in often adverse environments. By anchoring youth-focused refugee work within a Council of Europe standard, the Recommendation could support practitioners in maintaining their commitment to human rights and social cohesion; this is an avenue that respondents expressed eagerness to understand, capture and walk through.

2.1.3. On “transition support” programmes provided by CSOs

Many organisations referred to the “18-year cliff edge”: a sharp cut-off in services, legal protections, and support systems once young people reach the age of majority. Respondents from several countries noted that protection and care structures designed for minors often end abruptly, with no continuity mechanisms in place to support transition to adulthood.

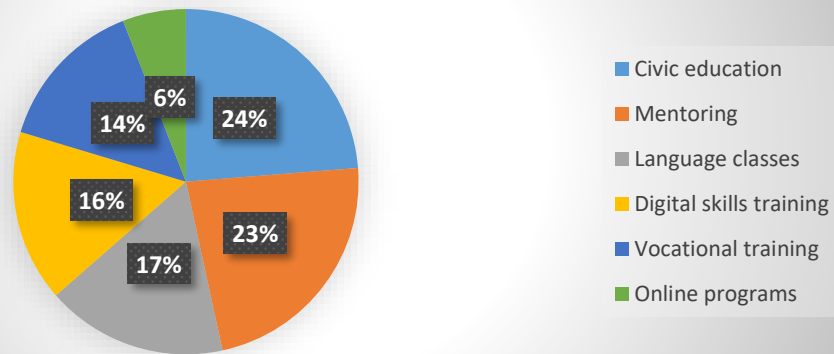
This indicative quote reflects the broader sentiment among CSOs that the Recommendation is timely and valuable but can only realise its full potential if accompanied by policy reforms, structural investment, and meaningful cooperation across sectors.

Based on their contextual experience, respondents identified the following top challenges that young refugees face after turning 18:



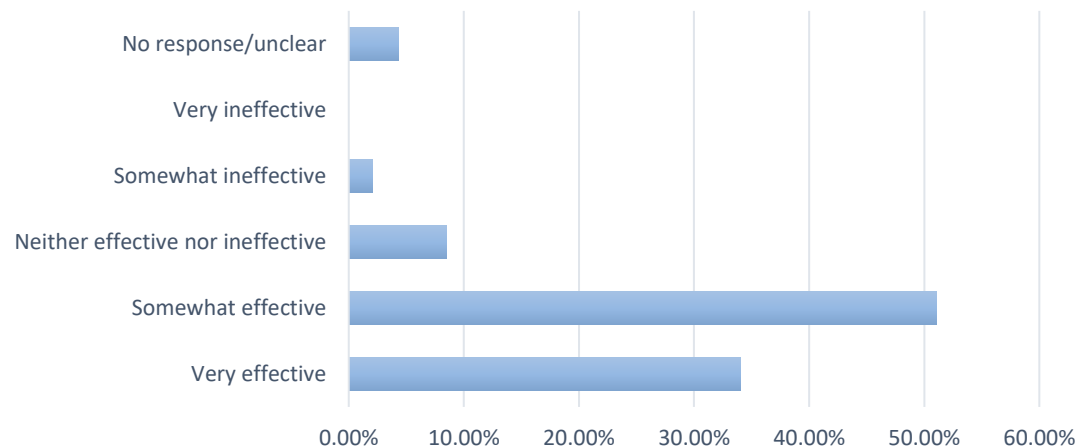
Asked about what kind of programmes or projects they provide to support or ‘smoothen’ this abrupt transition, respondents presented a wide repertoire of tools and resources, from mentoring schemes to creative workshops and hands-on training courses provided in different languages, tailored to different target-communities’ needs and requests:

Most Common Programme Types



Rating the efficiency of such endeavours, either based on outcomes of program monitoring and evaluation conducted or, if not applicable, on their own, lived perspective, an encouraging 85.1% of CSOs (added amount) rated their programmes as “somewhat” or “very effective” in supporting the transition to adulthood.

How organisations rate their own programmes



The combined amount of positive effectiveness shows an encouraging 85.1% of organisations rating their programs as effective or very effective.

From the analysis of both the survey data and the interview narratives, a clear trend emerges: interventions are most impactful when services are integrated rather than fragmented. Programmes that incorporate mentoring, civic education, and legal orientation were identified as particularly effective.



This supports a core principle of the Recommendation: the need for holistic, person-centred approaches.

Certainly, the application of such models is often contingent on flexible funding, cross-sector collaboration, and sustained institutional backing—conditions that are not consistently present.

As illustrated in the table below, many respondents emphasised that the Recommendation's impact is constrained by structural barriers beyond their control, such as legal and administrative obstacles, lack of political will, and insufficient public funding. Respondents have repeatedly emphasised the need for systemic change beyond individual program interventions.

2.1.4. Implementation barriers and enablers

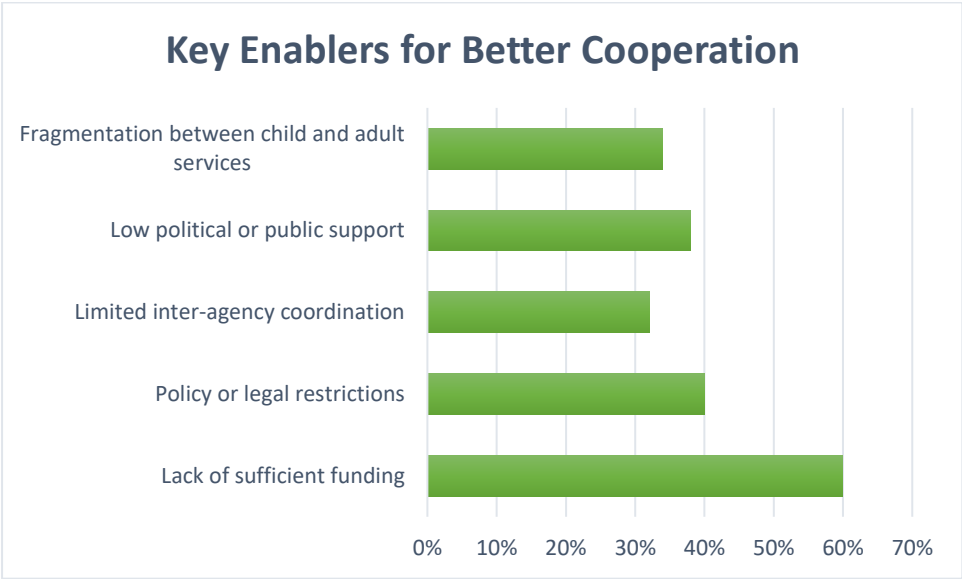
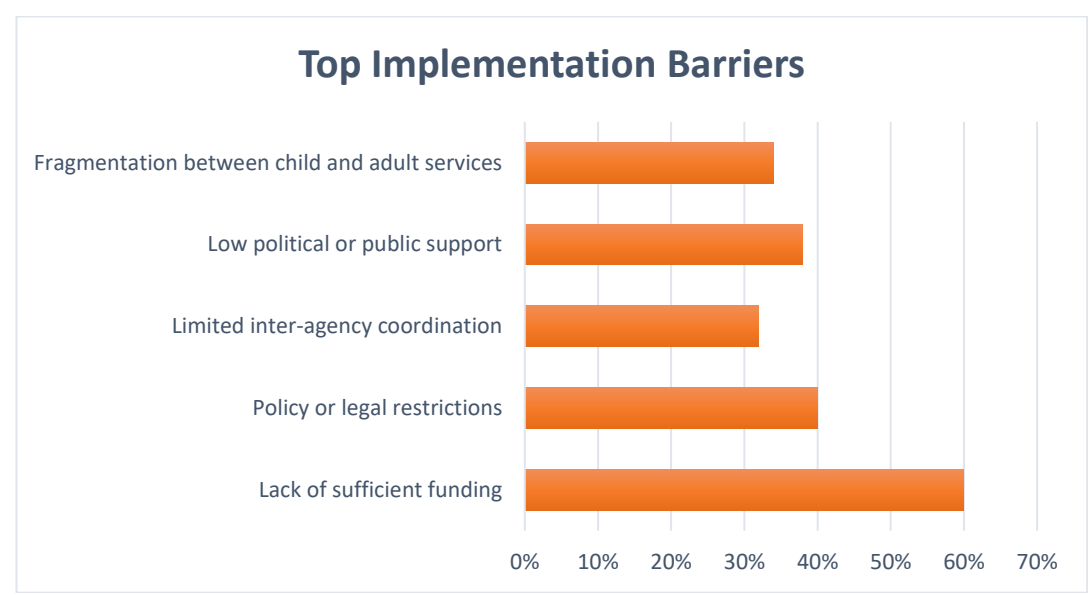
The survey findings highlight systemic and structural challenges that constrain the effective implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4. Resource limitations emerge as a central barrier, signalling that many organisations lack the capacity to fully operationalise the Recommendation without sustained and flexible funding. Institutional and policy constraints, including legal restrictions, low political or public support, and fragmented service provision between child and adult sectors, point to the need for coordinated policy frameworks that bridge sectoral divides and reinforce continuity in support for young refugees.

A further barrier is the insufficient recognition and resourcing of youth work, which undermines the ability of youth workers and organisations to provide frontline support and foster meaningful participation. These barriers collectively indicate that achieving coherent implementation requires not only financial investment but also strategic governance interventions to align stakeholders, clarify mandates, and strengthen inter-agency collaboration.

At the same time, the data identifies actionable enablers that can strengthen implementation. Organisations' calls for clearer roles, more inclusive consultation processes, capacity-building initiatives, and recognition of youth actors underscore the importance of participatory governance and professional development. Strengthening youth work through sustainable funding, structured training, and formal recognition emerges as a particularly powerful enabler, as youth workers are uniquely positioned to bridge policy frameworks with the lived realities of young refugees.

Leveraging these enablers suggests that targeted efforts to foster institutional capacity, support multi-stakeholder engagement, and validate the contributions of civil society can transform fragmented implementation into coordinated, sustainable practice. For policymakers and the Council of Europe, these insights imply that

interventions should combine resource allocation with structural and procedural reforms that both empower youth organisations and embed the Recommendation within a broader, coherent policy framework.

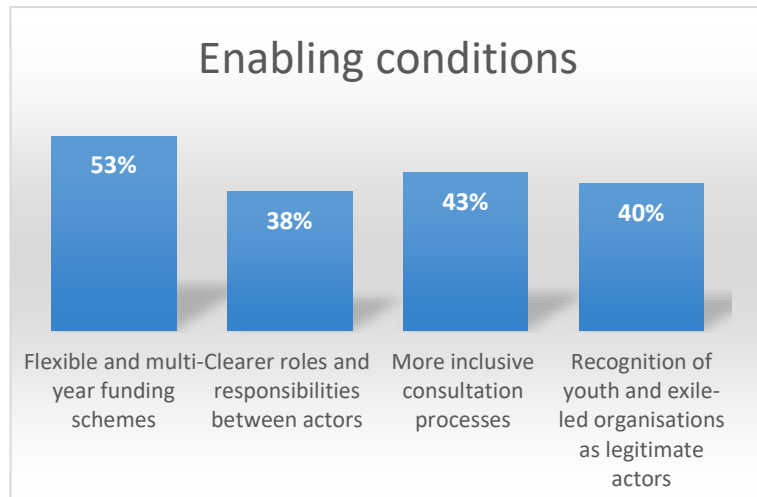


Opportunities for Improved Cooperation

CSOs expressed strong interest in deepening cooperation with public authorities, highlighting that such collaboration is contingent on a set of enabling conditions. Flexible and multi-year funding schemes, clearly delineated roles and responsibilities between actors, inclusive consultation processes, and formal recognition of youth- and exile-led organisations were consistently identified as critical enablers. These conditions signal that meaningful partnership cannot be achieved solely through top-down directives; it requires institutional mechanisms that support sustained engagement, accountability, and legitimacy for civil society actors.

CSOs also emphasised the importance of co-designing policies and programmes with affected young people, recognising both their lived experience and leadership capacities. The findings suggest that current approaches often underutilise this expertise: youth-led initiatives remain underfunded and insufficiently recognised, despite being uniquely positioned to reach refugee communities and respond to their needs in culturally and contextually sensitive ways.

From a policy perspective, these insights underscore the need for structural reforms that integrate civil society and youth-led organisations as equal partners in decision-making, ensure adequate and flexible resource allocation, and institutionalise participatory mechanisms that translate lived experience into actionable policy and practice.



Illustrative practice from PICUM

Turning 18 and Becoming Undocumented — [PICUM's](#) Policy Guidance (Belgium)

PICUM's thematic work on undocumented youth, particularly the publication "*Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood*", spotlights a critical vulnerability: many migrant children in Europe abruptly lose access to essential rights and services upon turning 18, often becoming undocumented overnight.

The resource advocates for procedural safeguards that allow young people to remain in legal status beyond age 18, promoting coaching, regularisation routes, and continued access to services regardless of residence status. It urges that support must begin *before* a young person turns 18 and continue *after*, ensuring access to education, housing, mental health care, and legal assistance during this transitory period.

PICUM has developed two tools:

1. Guidance on regularisation mechanisms tailored for those aged around 18 transitioning into adulthood,

2.A “Stepping Up” compendium showcasing 25 local projects that provide mental health support, housing, mentoring, legal aid, and care continuity for migrant youth.

This PICUM initiative strongly aligns with CoE Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4, which emphasises the need for continuity in care and protection beyond age 18, with tailored support for youth in transition. Both frameworks advocate for structured support, legal continuity, and respect for individual vulnerabilities as central to youth inclusion strategies. PICUM’s practical tools, combined with local case examples, offer a concrete, replicable model for implementing these principles at the national and municipal levels.

2.3 Conclusion

This review highlights a civil society sector demonstrating strong commitment and innovative approaches to supporting young refugees in transition. The opportunities identified demonstrate the potential for strengthening implementation support through targeted capacity building, enhanced resource accessibility, and expanded support for organisations serving the recommendation's target populations.

The diversity of organisational approaches and geographic contexts represents valuable assets that can be leveraged to improve outcomes for young people transitioning out of care. Youth-led and refugee-led organisations represent a particularly valuable segment for enhanced support, given their direct engagement with populations addressed by CM/Rec(2019)4. These organisations often operate through innovative approaches outside traditional institutional networks, presenting opportunities to develop tailored resources that leverage their unique perspectives and community connections. Strengthening their access to formal resources could significantly amplify the recommendation's impact.

While awareness of CM/Rec(2019)4 is encouraging, implementation continues to be constrained by systemic challenges, particularly funding limitations, legal uncertainty, and the abrupt end of services at age 18. Addressing these barriers through targeted policy interventions, enhanced funding mechanisms, and more inclusive partnerships offers a clear pathway to strengthen the impact of the Recommendation across Europe. Geographic variation in awareness levels across Member States provides opportunities for knowledge sharing and peer learning initiatives. Countries with higher institutional knowledge can serve as models and mentors for enhanced implementation strategies in other regions.

Given its practical relevance and user-friendly format, the guide *Turning 18 with Confidence* should be more widely disseminated by the Council of Europe. By showcasing how to operationalise the Recommendation across key areas such as legal status, education, housing, and participation, the guide serves not only as a reference but as a catalyst for structured, measurable, and inclusive action. Greater visibility, particularly among civil society organisations, and translations into different languages, would help bridge the gap between policy and practice, and ensure that more actors are equipped to support young refugees in a rights-based, coordinated, and sustainable manner. At the moment, the *Turning 18* guide has only been published in English and French, which limits its accessibility in Member States where these two languages are not widely used. Expanding translation into additional European languages would broaden its reach, empower grassroots organisations and local

authorities, and foster a shared understanding of the Recommendation's objectives across diverse national and cultural contexts.

The findings also underline the central role of youth work in realising the Recommendation. Youth workers and youth organisations are often the first point of contact for young refugees, providing non-formal education, psycho-social support, and pathways to participation. Yet, their contributions remain underfunded and under-recognised, limiting their potential impact. Strengthening the Recommendation's implementation therefore requires greater investment in youth work, including sustainable funding, structured training opportunities, and formal recognition of youth workers as essential actors in refugee inclusion processes.

2.4 Proposals from CSOs (mixed methods survey)

Funding & Resources

- CSOs highlighted the need for funding mechanisms that are flexible and responsive to the diverse needs and contexts of youth organisations, to support continuity of services.
- CSOs suggested that mentoring programs be supported through dedicated funding, given their consistently positive outcomes in supporting young refugees.
- CSOs emphasised that multi-year funding schemes are particularly valuable for planning sustainable interventions and retaining skilled youth workers.

Coordination & Integration

- CSOs proposed stronger inter-agency coordination to bridge the transition from child to adult services, reducing fragmentation in support provision.
- CSOs highlighted the importance of partnerships and co-creation between youth/refugee-led organisations, civil society, and local authorities to improve service design and delivery.
- CSOs suggested establishing formal mechanisms for collaboration and communication among government departments, NGOs, and service providers, ensuring continuity and consistency of support.

Youth Participation & Leadership

- CSOs emphasised that youth/refugee-led organisations should be engaged as key partners, not only as participants, in policy and programme development.
- CSOs proposed the co-design of programmes with young refugees, recognising their lived experience and leadership capacity as central to effective implementation.
- CSOs highlighted the importance of creating formal avenues for young people to contribute to decision-making at local, national, and European levels.

Awareness & Dissemination

- CSOs suggested improving the visibility and accessibility of existing resources, such as the *Turning 18 with Confidence* guide, through targeted dissemination strategies to both practitioners and young people.
- CSOs proposed increasing translations and culturally adapted formats to ensure materials are accessible across all Council of Europe Member States.

Capacity-Building & Training

- CSOs highlighted the need to preserve and upscale structured training for youth workers to ensure quality, rights-based support for young refugees.
- CSOs suggested joint training initiatives across organisations and countries to share best practices and foster peer learning.
- CSOs emphasised that strengthening youth work through training and formal recognition enhances both the quality and sustainability of support services.

Chapter 4-Cross-Sector Reflections from Mixed Working Groups

(Focus Groups and Academia)

Insights from 'The Next Chapter - a Seminar on Reviewing and Reinforcing the Implementation of the Recommendation CMRec(2019) on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood

June 2025



4.1 Rational to the Seminar

Between 19-21 June 2025, the Youth Department of the CoE organised at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg a seminar which aimed, among others, to contribute to the review process of the Recommendation.

The activity was designed to bring together diverse stakeholders, policy actors, youth-led organisations, refugee representatives, and practitioners, in a space for reflection and collective input on the implementation and future direction of the Recommendation.

The seminar pursued five core objectives:

1. It collected experiences related to the implementation of the Recommendation's guidelines, drawing from the perspectives of practitioners, policymakers, and young people themselves. Participants shared current challenges encountered in the field, especially in relation to care transitions, legal uncertainties, and access to rights and services.
2. It discussed, reinforced, and validated the preliminary findings of the desk research commissioned by the CoE. This included critical reflections on the Recommendation's added value and its relevance in the context of evolving refugee realities in Europe.
3. It generated proposals for future action to strengthen the rights of young refugees in transition to adulthood. These proposals were directed at youth policy actors, refugee-led and human rights organisations, and aimed to guide concrete measures for the period 2025–2030.
4. The seminar also raised awareness of the specific vulnerabilities and aspirations of young refugees and migrants in connection with World Refugee Day (20 June), offering a platform to centre their voices and lived experiences.
5. Finally, the seminar reinforced cooperation among youth, migrant, and refugee-led organisations, with a focus on supporting the inclusion of a youth perspective in migration- and asylum-related policies. It encouraged mutual learning and joint advocacy, with the goal of enabling more inclusive policy and programme development affecting young people's transition to adulthood.

4.2 Analysis of focus groups' insights

4.2.1 Generic findings

Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 continues to resonate as a relevant and forward-looking policy instrument in the current migration context, marked by rising displacement due to conflict, economic instability, and climate-related factors. Across working groups, participants consistently emphasised the Recommendation's focus on critical areas affecting young refugees, including access to education and employment, legal protection, mental health, social inclusion, and family reunification.

The groups highlighted the Recommendation's particular relevance in frontline and transit countries such as Italy, Greece, and Albania, where unaccompanied minors and care leavers face abrupt transitions into adulthood, often without the institutional

safeguards needed to support them. The Recommendation was recognised as one of the few European instruments that addresses this age group directly, though participants also noted the need for its scope to be expanded. Emerging themes identified for potential inclusion in future revisions include digital inclusion, gender-specific vulnerabilities, mental health, and the need for youth-led contributions in both design and implementation. Participants also pointed to growing restrictions on civil society space in some Member States, which can hinder the application of the Recommendation's principles.

While the Recommendation provides a valuable normative and policy framework, its practical usefulness remains uneven. Almost half of the group, particularly frontline professionals, were unaware of its existence prior to the seminar. Once introduced, however, it was widely seen as a helpful tool for reflection, policy alignment, and advocacy, particularly in identifying systemic gaps such as language barriers, diploma recognition, and fragmented service delivery. Notable positive examples emerged from Portugal, where it informed civil society programme design, and from the Czech Republic, where it helped to build cross-sectoral networks among youth workers. In Serbia and other contexts, its application has been limited, largely due to the absence of institutional prioritisation and resourcing.

A major concern across all groups was the Recommendation's low visibility. Even among organisations working directly with refugee youth, few had engaged with the document, and refugee youth themselves were largely unaware of the rights and principles it outlines. Although many organisations operate in line with its spirit, they do so without directly referencing the Recommendation. Respondents identified as primary barriers the absence of accessible, youth-friendly formats; limited translations; and the lack of a dedicated funding or implementation mechanism were identified as key barriers. Participants called for targeted outreach efforts, simplified materials in multiple languages, and greater integration of the Recommendation into training curricula and national policy dialogues. There was also strong support for establishing a shared platform to highlight successful practices and increase recognition of the Recommendation at local and national levels.

The analysis of their answers identifies an obvious gap in knowledge regarding the existence of helpful resources. Except for the barriers related with funding and translation, which are often interconnected but at a certain level manageable, the CoE has been indeed proactive in creating "youth friendly, accessible material", which is the guide *Turning 18 with Confidence*, a resource that apparently is being underutilised primarily by the CoE itself and consequently, by targeted practitioners and stakeholders. These findings have been informed by interviews with academic experts, including the authors of *Turning 18 with Confidence*, who have emphasised the importance of enhancing the visibility of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4. Despite the promising launching of the Guide, complemented with a two-day [seminar titled "Supporting Confidence at 18"](#) in June 2024, aimed at training youth workers and other practitioners on its use, little structured follow-up has taken place. Evidence suggests that this valuable resource has a better potential to be constantly integrated into CoE seminars or capacity-building activities and promoted through official communication channels.

The authors interviewed made also a significant remark: Visibility, as they stressed, should be understood as a two-way process: not only should the Recommendation be more broadly known and accessible among stakeholders, especially grassroots and refugee-led organisations. but the efforts of those actively implementing its principles must also be recognised and valued. Civil society actors often lack the institutional support or recognition that would enable them to scale their work or build sustainable partnerships. The Council of Europe can play a key role in addressing this by publicly showcasing good practices, creating platforms for mutual learning, and amplifying the voices of organisations that work directly with young refugees.

One concrete proposal emerging from consultations with academics is the development of a "Recommendation-Friendly" label, similar to the Council of Europe's [Quality Label for Youth Centres](#). Such a label could serve both as a visibility tool and as a benchmark for alignment with the Recommendation, encouraging organisations to self-assess, adapt and improve their approaches while receiving formal recognition for their commitment. A starting point for this process could be the self-assessment tool incorporated in the guide (Stapleton, Özerim et. al in Gomes:74), adaptable to youth workers, CSOs, educational or research institutions and public institutions. As demonstrated by the findings, there is great interest, especially among CSOs in understanding and using the Recommendation; training and capacity building on how to do so has been emphatically requested by respondents. This is an indispensable opportunity for the Council of Europe to rethink and update its strategy of using and disseminating its existing tools and then, proceed to consciously creating multipliers. Participants have underscored that, to fulfil its promise, CM/Rec(2019)4 must move beyond being an aspirational reference document. It should be accompanied by operational tools, resourcing, and participatory mechanisms that support its use on the ground. With strengthened visibility, institutional backing, and the inclusion of youth perspectives, the Recommendation can evolve into a practical and transformative instrument for improving the lives of young refugees across Europe.



Table 4.2.3 What We Heard Across Stakeholders (Mixed Working Groups)

Theme	Key Messages from Stakeholders	Illustrative Country Notes	Implications for Policy & Practice
Continuing Migration Pressures & Vulnerability at Age 18	Recommendation still relevant amid conflict; economic-, and climate-driven displacement. Age 18 often triggers loss of care/status.	Abrupt transitions observed in frontline States (e.g. Italy, Greece); transit relevance emerging (e.g. Albania); gaps for care leavers.	Maintain/strengthen focus on 16–21 transition; ensure continuity of care across status changes and borders.

Under-Recognised Age Group	Few instruments focus specifically on young people moving from child to adult systems. Stakeholders value this niche.	Local actors in several countries cited lack of tailored 18+ pathways.	Position Rec(2019)4 as the regional reference point; encourage national bridging protocols child→adult services.
Gaps to Address in Future Revision	Need stronger attention to digital inclusion; gender & intersectionality; mental health supports; youth voice & lived experience; shrinking civic space limiting CSO engagement.	Transit & secondary movement patterns (incl. Albania) not well reflected in current text.	Consider update/companion guidance; embed participatory processes; address enabling environment for CSOs.
Practical Use Uneven	Seen as aspirational; low awareness; non-binding limits traction; lacks tools, training, funding hooks. Yet useful once known.	Portugal: informed programme design/advocacy. Czech Republic: helped catalyse local networks. Serbia: recognised potential but low state prioritisation.	Pair Recommendation with implementation toolkit, capacity offer, and funding incentives; promote peer exchange on use cases.
Identifying Gaps in Systems	Helps map shortcomings (diploma recognition, language, mental health, fragmented services).	Cited across groups after exposure during seminar.	Encourage structured self-assessment checklists aligned to Rec(2019)4 domains.
Very Low Visibility	Most frontline actors unaware; refugee youth not informed of rights; principles applied indirectly.	Limited awareness reported in Serbia, Albania; similar patterns elsewhere.	Launch targeted visibility & translation effort; produce youth-friendly & practitioner briefs; integrate into training curricula.
Barriers to Uptake	No dedicated funding stream; technical language; weak policy platform presence.	Cross-cutting issue; surfaced in all groups.	Link funding calls to Rec priorities; develop simplified guidance; embed in national policy dialogues.
Need to Showcase Success	Demand for examples to adapt/scale.	Interest in seeing what works in comparable contexts.	Create CoE-hosted practice hub (case library, tools, contacts).

4.3. Proposals from the Mixed Working Groups

Funding & Resources

Participants highlighted the importance of encouraging donors to reference the Recommendation's priorities in calls for proposals and supporting small grants for pilot projects addressing the transition to adulthood.

Participants proposed developing multi-year co-financing schemes aligned with the Recommendation domains and integrating them into EU or national budget lines where feasible.

Coordination & Integration

Participants emphasised the value of multi-actor coordination fora to facilitate collaboration between governments, CSOs and youth/refugee-led organisations.

Participants suggested supporting structured government–CSO compacts and embedding civil society roles into national strategies for refugee support.

Youth Participation & Leadership

Participants proposed convening youth advisory panels, including young people with lived experience, to co-create youth-friendly summaries and inform programming.

Participants suggested embedding youth co-design in the revision/update cycle of policies and supporting youth-led monitoring of transition outcomes.

Awareness & Dissemination

Participants highlighted the need to translate and simplify key messages for youth, CSOs and government stakeholders.

Participants proposed briefings, webinars, and social media kits to enhance outreach and stakeholder awareness.

Participants suggested integrating these messages into national and local training curricula and linking annual awareness campaigns to youth or refugee-related events.

Capacity-Building & Training

Inspired by the practical implementation tools featured in the *Turning 18 with confidence* guide, participants proposed enhancing and expanding such tools, including, checklists, self-audit templates for services bridging the 18-year threshold and FAQs for frontline staff.

Participants suggested developing modular training packages, establishing peer mentoring networks, and creating digital resource hubs.

Policy & Evidence Infrastructure

Participants proposed mapping existing indicators (education, legal status continuity, mental health access, housing stability) and encouraging voluntary reporting.

Participants suggested developing a light monitoring framework and periodic Council of Europe synthesis of progress and gaps, potentially using a comparative dashboard where data are available.

Chapter 5- General Conclusions: Cross-Cutting Themes, Shared Outcomes and Calls to Action

Strategically paving the way forward

5.1 General conclusions: Shared themes and calls for action

The analysis of insights provided by governmental actors, civil society organisations, and seminar participants highlights a landscape of broad engagement and practical innovation in implementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood. Despite diverse national contexts and varying institutional capacities, convergent themes emerge, pointing to opportunities for coordinated Council of Europe action and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Governmental Perspectives

Data from surveyed Member States indicates a strong foundational commitment to the Recommendation's objectives, with most countries reporting alignment with CM/Rec(2019)4. Implementation, however, remains uneven: structural barriers persist, including funding constraints, fragmented legal frameworks, and the abrupt discontinuation of support at age 18. Formal transition planning, particularly for unaccompanied minors, is often lacking. Nevertheless, national and local authorities demonstrate clear willingness to deepen engagement where technical guidance, funding, and institutional coordination mechanisms are available.

Civil Society Perspectives

Civil society actors, including youth-led and refugee-led organisations, emerge as key drivers of innovation and proximity-based service delivery. While awareness of the Recommendation varies, these organisations frequently operate in alignment with its principles, providing flexible, community-responsive support that complements formal state systems. Their work spans housing, legal counselling, peer mentoring, and education access, mitigating structural transition gaps. Yet resource constraints and limited institutional support often limit their impact. Targeted investment, expanded partnerships, and enhanced access to Council of Europe tools could significantly amplify civil society contributions.

Cross-Cutting Outcome Areas

Across stakeholder groups, shared priorities emerge around four strategic outcome areas:

- ❖ Education continuity
- ❖ Housing stability
- ❖ Healthcare access
- ❖ Legal protection

These domains are not only critical to immediate protection needs but also serve as levers for long-term integration and human development. Coordinated action across these areas is essential for achieving sustainable impact.

Across stakeholder groups, youth work emerges as a critical enabler of transition support. Civil society and youth-led organisations play a central role in delivering rights-based, participatory programmes that complement formal services, providing

mentoring, peer support, and engagement opportunities that directly strengthen young refugees' social integration and empowerment.

Peer Learning and Knowledge Exchange

Geographic and institutional variation in implementation highlights the value of structured knowledge exchange. Some Member States have developed robust policy responses, while others report limited awareness or insufficient mechanisms for follow-through. CoE-led knowledge mobilisation, including peer learning, reference models, and structured exchanges, could enhance capacity and standardise good practices across the region.

Council of Europe Leadership

Stakeholders consistently affirm the added value of the CoE as both a normative standard-setter and a facilitator of practical coordination, capacity building, and advocacy. There is strong demand for clearer implementation guidance, broader access to tools and institutional mechanisms that foster regular exchange, including with civil society. These insights signal a mandate for the CoE to step decisively into a coordinating and enabling role.

Momentum for Action

The current implementation landscape reflects both challenges and opportunity. Governments demonstrate engagement, civil society actors are embedded in lived realities and practitioners call for a more coherent, strategic Council of Europe presence. The strategic challenge is not whether to act, but how to optimise institutional response through targeted technical support, inclusive partnerships and strengthened implementation infrastructure.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Programme of the Review Seminar

Wednesday, 18 June

Arrivals of participants

Thursday, 19 June 2025

08:00-08:50	Registration at the lobby area of the European Youth Centre
09:00-11:00	Opening of the meeting with Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Council of Europe Youth Department Sharing expectations for the seminar Introduction to the CM Recommendation 2019(4), work of the Council of Europe and partners in the field of migration and refugees, the scope and function of the seminar with: - Mariam Tartousi, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe - Laetitia van der Vennet, PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) - Eman Albohtori, Voicify (European Forum for Youth with Lived Migration Experiences) - Razan Damlakhi, Voices of Young Refugees Europe - Mariana Dimou, Youth Social Rights Network
11:00-11:30	Break
11:30-13:00	Presentation of the preliminary findings of the study on the Recommendation with Mary Drosopoulos, consultant/researcher
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Working groups - Preliminary findings of the study on the CM/Rec(2019)4 on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood Discussion and validation of the preliminary findings
16:00-16:30	Break
16:30-18:00	Preliminary findings of the study on the CM/Rec(2019)4 on

	Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood (continued)
	Presentation of the conclusions of the working groups and plenary discussion
18:00-18:30	Closure of the day
18:30-20:00	Dinner

Friday, 20 June 2025

09:30-11:00	Sharing experiences and practices on transition to adulthood. Roundtable with: - Mykola Pashkov, UNICEF Refugee Response Office - Laetitia van der Venet, PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) - Ege Sasi, European Confederation of Youth Clubs ECYC - João Matela, Portuguese Sports and Youth Institute
11:00-11:30	Break
11:30-13:00	Sharing experiences and practices on transition to adulthood - Working groups
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Making proposals on actions/measures to further support the rights of young refugees in the 2025-2030 period
16:00-16:30	Break
16:30-18:00	Identifying priorities and moving forward Conclusions of the seminar, with: - Mary Drosopoulos, researcher - Mariam Tartousi, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe
19:00-20:00	Marking the World Refugee Day at the Banquet organised in the framework of Strasbourg Refugee Week (Phare Citadelle)

Saturday, 21 June 2025

Departure of participants

Aim and objectives of the seminar

The seminar aims at contributing to the review process of the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood by analysing and reinforcing its preliminary findings.

Objectives

1. To collect experiences in the implementation of the guidelines of the Recommendation on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood and share current challenges faced by practitioners and young people themselves.
2. To discuss, analyse and validate the preliminary findings of the desk research commissioned by the Council of Europe to review the Recommendation especially in view to its added value.
3. To make proposals of actions/measures to further support the rights of young refugees in transition to adulthood through youth policy actors, refugees and human rights organisations in the next 5 years period (2025 - 2030).
4. To raise awareness about the plight of young people affected by migration and refugee policies on the World Refugee Day (20 June)
5. To reinforce cooperation and support among youth-, migrant- and refugee-led organisations and support the inclusion of a youth perspective in migration and refugee related policies and programmes which affect their transition into adulthood