

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (98) 8

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 September 1998
at the 641st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity among its members, for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage;

Having regard to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its system of effective international protection of fundamental rights and freedoms;

Bearing in mind the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights;

Bearing in mind the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action on Combating Racism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Intolerance of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Vienna in 1993;

Having regard to the following recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: Recommendation 874 (1979) on a European charter on the rights of the child; Recommendation 1019 (1985) on the participation of young people in political and institutional life; Recommendation 1121 (1990) on the rights of children; and Recommendation 902 (1980) on youth co-operation in Europe;

Bearing in mind its own Recommendation No. R (84) 4 on parental responsibilities, Recommendation No. R (87) 6 on foster families, Recommendation No. R (83) 13 on the role of secondary school in preparing young people for life, Recommendation No. R (94) 14 on coherent and integrated family policies, and Recommendation No. R (97) 3 on youth participation and the future of civil society;

Bearing in mind Resolution 237 (1992) of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on the Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life;

Taking into account the great importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reflected by the fact that all Council of Europe member states have now ratified it;

Bearing in mind the diversity and richness of work already undertaken by the Council of Europe relating to children's participation in family and social life;

Conscious of the increasing importance of children's participation in Council of Europe member states and the growing and varied experience of such participation;

Recalling Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, whereby "States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents";

Bearing in mind that children are full members of both today's and tomorrow's society ;

Recognising the importance of the parent-child relationship and of an adequate family and social environment for the wellbeing of children ;

Noting the need to promote from early childhood onwards a policy of equality between girls and boys, and women and men ;

On the one hand being aware that the child's participation, in his or her own interest, also involves tasks and responsibilities that are appropriate to his or her age and capacities, and on the other hand being convinced that children should not be overburdened by duties which are beyond them and/or which upset them,

Affirms the following principles relating to the participation of children in family and social life :

1. every child should have the opportunity to participate without any kind of discrimination ;
2. participation is essential for bringing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into life ;
3. peace and friendship within and between families, societies and nations, including the concepts of non-discrimination, non-violence and tolerance are essential for ensuring respect for the individuality and dignity of the child, and for enabling the realisation of the child's best interests ;
4. participation is a decisive factor for securing social cohesion and for living in a democracy in accordance with the values of a multicultural society and the principles of tolerance ;
5. participation of children is crucial in influencing the conditions of their own lives, in that participation is not only involvement in institutions and decision-making but above all a general pattern of democracy relevant to all areas of family and social life ;
6. participation is a necessary process in the development of the child ;
7. participation in family life in various forms and degrees is possible and desirable in all stages of childhood ;
8. participation in family life is a form of dialogue which develops the ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts peacefully ;
9. participation in social life as a form of practising citizenship provides the opportunity for learning individual and collective responsibilities ;
10. children from socially excluded families should have the possibility of participating sufficiently in the economic resources of society ;
11. the participation of the child should not serve as a pretext for crushing the child with burdens and responsibilities it cannot assume because of its age ;

Recommends governments of member states to promote and support children's participation in family and social, and particularly school, life and to identify and to remove barriers to this participation according to the principles and recommended measures appearing in the appendix.

Appendix to Recommendation No. R (98) 8

Measures for the promotion of children's participation in family and social life

Information

1. Make information on participation available and accessible, in particular information on different forms of participation and related legal instruments.
2. Relate such information on children's participation to the possibilities of different types of participation.
3. Make information available in a form which is related to the child's age and capacity to understand.
4. Make information available to parents, as well as to all bodies and institutions working with children, concerning the implementation of different forms of participation.
5. Disseminate information concerning the experiences of children and families in exercising participation.
6. Enable schools, residential and day care centres, youth organisations, family associations and the media to play their role in developing concepts and in helping children to gain access to information.
7. Ensure that public authorities, municipalities, educational institutions, children's associations and institutions for children living in residential care provide information on participation both by traditional means and through new information technologies. Such information should illustrate how to participate in practical ways, and it should be made regularly available to the children concerned.

Education

8. Ensure that school curricula at all levels promote the acquisition of the skills and knowledge which children need to participate fully in family and social life.
9. Encourage educational, day care and residential care institutions for children to create possibilities for children to make their opinions heard on matters concerning them, and ensure that their views are taken into account in the decision-making processes in these institutions.

Out-of-school activities

10. Offer the possibility to all children to be involved in out-of-school activities that allow them to experience participation, such as appropriate recreational, sporting and cultural activities.

Children's associations

11. Support children's associations by providing the legal framework and resources, where possible, for the establishment and membership of children's associations, thus recognising the child's right to associate in organisations promoting his or her interests. Within these organisations children should have the possibility of experiencing participation.

Participation in public life

12. Encourage local authorities and municipalities to promote children's participation, as well as parent's and children's participation, in as many areas as possible of municipal life, as a way to develop community responsibility, and make citizenship a real-life experience for children.
13. Encourage the development of different forms of children's participation at the local, regional and national levels.

Work

14. Ensure that any form of work authorised for children be so organised as to promote their effective participation in family and social life, and contribute to their training and development, it being understood that illegal work by children is unacceptable.

Training

15. Develop interdisciplinary training models and programmes for professionals working or dealing with children and families. Target groups should include teachers, judges, social workers, nurses and medical practitioners.

Media

16. Encourage the media to place greater emphasis on the production of information and educational programmes geared to promoting the participation of children in family and social life.
17. Encourage a more active role for children in participating in the programming of media products, both those addressed to them and those related to them, as well as in producing media themselves.
18. Promote the access and the familiarisation of children, without discrimination, to the new technologies and to the new communication services, and encourage the use of interactive means for the exchange of information on good practice in the field of child participation.

Social cohesion

19. Take into account specific language and cultural needs of children when ensuring participation in family and social life.
20. Take into account the specific needs of children with disabilities when ensuring participation in family and social life.
21. Heighten public awareness about the importance of promoting social integration and participation of children at risk of social exclusion, such as children with behavioural problems, juvenile offenders, drug addicts, and other children who are in difficult circumstances

Research

22. Invite academic and research institutions as well as non-governmental organisations to develop research and programme evaluation to improve children's participation, and to produce, test, evaluate and distribute instruments illustrating how to develop and improve participation skills.

Legal framework

23. Provide for the appointment of an ombudsperson for children (or another similar structure) to further safeguard the interests of children.

European co-operation

24. Exchange information between and within member states on models, skills and knowledge concerning children's participation. Governmental and non-governmental bodies should create pan-European networks and exchange schemes for children and adults with examples of good practice.
25. Promote and support initiatives that make it possible for children to participate in international meetings and other international programmes, both with other children and/or together with adults.