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Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2026 at the 1554th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

Preamble

The Committee of Ministers, under Article 15.*b* of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1),

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress;

Considering that member States of the Council of Europe have committed themselves to ensuring the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") to everyone within their jurisdiction, and underlining their obligation to refrain from human rights violations;

Having regard to the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35, adopted in 1961 and subsequently amended and supplemented by its additional protocols: ETS Nos. 128 (1988), 142 (1991) and 158 (1995), and revised in 1996, ETS No. 163), as applied and interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights;

Having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly in its Resolution 44/25);

Having regard to the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122);

Building on the provisions of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

Considering that participation is a core element of democracy and is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all member States of the Council of Europe;

Considering that it is at the local level that this right can be exercised most directly;

Underlining the applicability of existing principles set out in relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States, in particular:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 on young people and climate action;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights;

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)2 on the evaluation, auditing and monitoring of participation and participation policies at local and regional level;
- Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life;

Recalling Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030, in particular the priority of "revitalising pluralistic democracy" with special emphasis on "broadening youth participation, so that young people participate meaningfully in decision making, on the basis of a broad social and political consensus in support of inclusion, participatory governance and accountability";

Recalling the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values" adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16-17 May 2023), which underscores the willingness to include "a youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue";

Recalling also the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the declaration), which underline the importance of supporting young people's participation in democratic life and decision-making processes as an investment in a democratic future;

Having regard to the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, adopted by the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth held in Malta on 8 and 9 October 2025;

Considering that the participation of young people is a determining factor for a sustainable democratic future of Europe;

Considering young people in all their diversity and consequently considering that youth participation and youth policies at all levels should be evidence based, tailor-made and intersectional, with a view to addressing young people's diverse needs;

Considering the importance of permanent structures that foster youth participation and the role of youth civil society in learning, practising, defending, promoting and innovating democracy;

Highlighting the importance of equal access to fundamental rights, equal opportunities for all young people and, where needed, support systems for the participation of young people, including youth centres, youth work and youth civil society;

Recognising that youth participation is essential not only in times of democratic stability, but also in situations of armed conflict, forced displacement and post-emergency recovery, as it contributes to safeguarding democratic values and fostering civic trust;

Recognising that young people in exile, young human rights defenders and young people with refugee or asy

Bearing in mind the consultative process set up by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Joint Council on Youth, and its conclusions, on the proposed text of the charter in the appendix to this recommendation, and acknowledging it as an example of good practice of the participatory process for young people and youth civil society, as well as local and regional authorities;

Considering the conclusions of the European Youth Conference “Young people in local and regional life: democracy in action!” (Braga, 5-7 February 2025), as a good example of co-operation between the Youth Department and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Portuguese national authorities, the Municipality of Braga and youth civil society;

Taking note of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Resolution 516 (2025) and Recommendation 537 (2025) on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

Having regard to Recommendation Rec(2004)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of young people in local and regional life, and considering that the changes which have taken place since its adoption justify that it be replaced by this recommendation,

Recommends that the governments of the member States:

a. promote and support, taking into account their legal and constitutional framework, the implementation of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, which aims to promote and strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes and in political life at the local and regional levels, and to ensure an enabling environment for their active and meaningful engagement;
b. encourage the development of adaptable youth participation mechanisms in times of crisis, conflict and recovery, ensuring that young people continue to engage in democratic processes, decision making and community rebuilding through safe, inclusive and accessible formats;
c. invite local and regional authorities to implement the measures in this recommendation and its appendix that fall within their sphere of competence;
d. give due consideration, when implementing these measures, to the specific needs and situations of all young people in all their diversity;
e. translate and disseminate widely this recommendation and its appendix (including in accessible and youth-friendly formats), especially among national, regional and local authorities and key stakeholders that address or are concerned by youth issues; and
f. review, within the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of this recommendation by member States five years after its adoption and every five years thereafter.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

Scope and purpose

1. The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (hereinafter "the charter") aims to promote and strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes at the local and regional levels, and to ensure an enabling environment for the participation of young people. Participation is at the core of democracy; strengthening the participation of young people contributes to the sustainability and resilience of democratic societies.

2. Young people and their participation in decision making at the local and regional levels are at the centre of the charter. Young people are equal actors in society and their participation in democratic processes is essential to the sustainability and development of democratic systems. As the generation that will be most affected by today's decisions, young people have the right to participate in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.

3. Local and regional authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic system. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles shared among all member States and this right can be most directly exercised at the local level, as outlined by the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207).

4. The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life was adopted in 1992 and is one of the key European standards with respect to youth participation. The current revision was initiated in 2024 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in partnership with the Joint Council on Youth. This revision included a consultative process with young people, youth organisations and local and regional authorities to respond to current changes in the realities of young people and incorporate the lessons from the implementation.

5. The definition of the age range covered by the terms "young people" or "youth" should reflect the legal and constitutional framework of each member State.

Chapter I – Youth participation and its principles

6. Youth participation means that young people have the right, the means, the space, the structures, the opportunities, the tools and the necessary support to participate in and influence decision making at local and regional levels.

7. Youth participation is a process based on democratic values. In a rapidly evolving world, the ways young people choose to participate are as diverse as they are. Local and regional authorities should create an enabling environment for young people to participate and be motivated to participate. They should support and recognise stable, democratic and transparent structures for youth participation in decision making, such as youth councils and youth organisations, and other forms of participation that empower young people to shape their communities, including informal youth groups, youth-led, community-based movements or similar initiatives.

8. Local and regional authorities should strive to create the conditions, structures, processes and procedures that allow for the highest levels of participation of young people in the decisions and processes that affect their lives. They should promote the principle of co-management, as practised by the Council of Europe, involving young people, through their chosen representatives, in taking decisions as equal partners together with local and regional authorities. It includes the involvement of young people in setting the agenda, decision making, implementation and evaluation.

9. The principle of equality and the prohibition on discrimination, as enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5), apply fully to youth participation. All young people should have equal access to participation structures and processes without discrimination on any ground such as "race",[1] colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, political affiliation, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status.

10. Local and regional authorities, together with young people, should constantly identify and take measures to remove the barriers to the active participation of young people. This may entail adopting tailored measures to support the participation of specific groups of young people in local and regional affairs. These measures should consider all forms of discrimination, including structural, multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination.

11. Local and regional authorities should pay particular attention to gender equality when providing young women and men with access to participation spaces in social, political and cultural life in general, and to leadership positions in particular. This includes taking measures to eradicate gender-based violence.

12. Local and regional authorities should take inclusive and proactive measures to facilitate youth participation, giving particular attention to the realities of young people seeking refuge and asylum or facing the challenges of forced displacement or statelessness.

13. Youth participation requires the investment of time and resources by young people. Local and regional authorities should ensure that sufficient time is foreseen for young people to take part in decisions and processes that affect their lives. Local and regional authorities should recognise the time invested by young people through adequate means, ensuring that financial barriers to participation are removed, including through means of compensation.

14. The relevant authorities in member States should create an enabling environment for youth civil society, in full respect for the freedom to associate and recognising their essential role in securing a thriving, democratic future. This includes an appropriate legal framework, structural support and access to funding and to decision-making processes.

15. Democracy, human rights and participation are learnt. The relevant authorities in member States should ensure that all those involved in youth participation, notably young people, youth organisations and local and regional authorities, including staff and elected representatives, have continuous access to information, education and training to develop their competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes).

16. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth participation happens in environments that are physically and psychologically safe and where all participants are treated with respect. It is essential for trust in democracy that young people can express their opinions and engage without fear of discrimination, intimidation or backlash. Young people should be informed of existing mechanisms for reporting and remedy, and, where such mechanisms do not exist, they should be created.

17. The formats of youth participation should be firmly anchored in decision-making procedures, yet flexible and adaptable to constantly changing political or socio-economic realities. They should allow for innovation and creativity, offering a variety of ways for young people to engage that suit their schedules, interests and levels of commitment.

18. The structures, processes and platforms for youth participation should be designed in ways that are accessible to all young people. They should be adapted to the changing needs and interests of young people, while paying particular attention to the needs of those with fewer opportunities.

19. Youth participation should be voluntary, productive, engaging and enjoyable, creating the conditions for a meaningful and empowering experience for young people, while encouraging commitment to democratic values. Feedback should be provided to young people on the results of their participation.

[1]. In line with General Policy Recommendation No. 15 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on combating hate speech, the term "race" is used in this charter with the sole purpose of ensuring that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as belonging to another race are not excluded from the protection provided for by the charter.

20. Youth participation requires dedicated and adequate financial and qualified human resources. Local and regional authorities should ensure that provisions for youth participation are incorporated into regular planning and budgeting processes. Sustainability means that youth participation is ongoing and is not limited to one-off events, and that it is supported by permanent structures and qualified and sufficient human resources, which are accessible to all, to ensure that youth engagement continues to thrive.

Chapter II – Young people's rights and means to participate

21. Youth participation is rooted in the international human rights framework, which emphasises the importance of involving all individuals, including young people, in the decisions and processes that affect their lives and those of future generations.

22. By engaging in decision making at the local and regional levels, young people exercise their human rights, including the right to participate in public affairs and cultural life, either directly or through representatives of their choice.

23. Local and regional authorities play an essential role in the respect for, and the protection, fulfilment and promotion of, the human rights of young people by creating the necessary conditions for their participation in the life of the community.

24. Respect for the freedom of expression of young people is fundamental to the exercise of the right to participate and ensures that young people can voice their opinions without fear of intimidation, repression or backlash. At the same time, young people need access to unbiased and reliable information to make informed decisions, including the use of appropriate and diverse channels to inform young people about opportunities to take part in decisions and processes that affect their lives.

25. The right to privacy requires additional protection with respect to participation processes, in both online and offline environments. Local and regional authorities should take all necessary measures to protect young people's right to privacy and respect their right to data protection, clearly informing them, and where applicable their legal guardians, about all aspects involved.

26. Freedom of assembly and association, including the protection of youth civil society is a requirement for meaningful youth participation at any level. Young people exercise these rights in various ways, including through engagement in youth organisations, local and regional youth councils and movements, and by taking part in demonstrations and advocacy groups. Young people should be protected while acting or appearing as human rights defenders, including those in exile or in vulnerable circumstances.

27. Member States have an obligation to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights. All relevant authorities should take the necessary measures to ensure that young people have access to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in both formal and non-formal settings. This involves recognising and supporting the important role played by youth organisations in information, education and training programmes.

28. Young people's social rights should be guaranteed, including housing, education and training, health, employment and work, leisure and culture, without discrimination on any grounds. Local and regional authorities and other authorities in member States should pay particular attention to the fulfilment of social rights as well as to disadvantaged groups of young people, especially those who are subject to multiple and/or intersectional discrimination.

29. Youth participation is an individual right with a collective dimension, which ensures that young people can make an impact not only as individuals but as part of a broader group.

Chapter III – Spaces and structures for youth participation

30. Member States should take the necessary measures in all areas and at the most appropriate levels to create an enabling and stimulating environment for youth participation, with particular attention paid to democratic structures and processes for youth participation, such as local youth councils, youth civil society and youth-led spaces, including youth centres.

31. Local and regional authorities should support, resource and promote the creation of independent and youth-led structures for participation in decision making at the local level, and to formally recognise their role. Whether they are called local and regional youth councils, youth advisory bodies, youth parliaments or youth forums (hereafter “youth councils”), they serve as permanent structures that enable young people to actively and meaningfully engage in decision-making processes on a regular basis.

32. Youth councils require the existence of a clear framework for their functioning, including a clear and public set of objectives, roles and responsibilities with regard to young people and local and regional authorities, and to the rules and procedures discussed and approved by the members. These procedures should be co-created by youth councils and local and regional authorities.

33. Youth councils should ensure their composition is fair and representative of the diversity of local youth. Youth council members should be elected or designated by young people and/or youth civil society through a fair and transparent procedure. Youth councils should adopt and implement non-discriminatory policies and practices that ensure all young people, regardless of their background, can participate, thus safeguarding representativity.

34. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth councils can follow and contribute to their decision-making processes, allowing young people the possibility of maximum impact.

35. Youth councils can facilitate consultations with young people on relevant issues, serve as forums for the development, monitoring and evaluation of youth projects and encourage youth participation in other local consultative bodies.

36. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth councils have an adequate budgetary allocation that is included in the regular budget of the local or regional authority, as well as adequate infrastructure (for example meeting space, equipment, technology, materials) and human resources that support their activity and safeguard their independent functioning. To preserve independence, youth councils and youth organisations should be supported through unrestricted and recurring funding that does not compromise their critical voice. This should not impede youth councils from seeking any additional funding and resources necessary for them to conduct their activity, nor influence in any manner their functioning.

37. The activity of youth councils should be transparent, well communicated and made visible to young people and youth civil society in the community they represent.

38. Local and regional authorities should also devise democratic processes for the consultation and engagement of young people, notably specific consultations, youth assemblies and other practices of deliberative democracy or participatory budgeting. Such processes should adhere to the principles of youth participation outlined in Chapter I and should be seen as complementary.

39. Local and regional authorities should ensure that young people have access to youth-led youth spaces, including youth centres, where democracy can be learnt and practised. Such spaces require investment and financial support.

40. Local and regional authorities should consider leveraging inclusive, accessible and safe digital platforms to engage with young people and ensure their participation in democratic processes, including online consultations, virtual town halls and interactive decision-making platforms. Local authorities should consider the role that such digital platforms can play in situations of emergency (for example conflict or natural disaster), paying particular attention to their accessibility and inclusivity.

41. Local and regional authorities should secure means for reaching out to young people in rural and remote areas or who are unable to access youth centres, through means such as mobile youth centres, outreach and digital youth work, and information services.

42. Within the remit of their authority, local and regional authorities should support the creation and maintenance of democratic governance structures in schools and universities and furthermore recognise the contribution of such structures for youth participation.

43. Young people should be encouraged to participate in the political life of the community, with special emphasis placed on the right to vote in and stand for elections.

44. Member States should consider, within their legal and constitutional frameworks, measures to encourage the political participation of young people, including lowering the voting age and the introduction of youth quotas on electoral lists.

Chapter IV – Youth policy at the local and regional levels and youth perspectives in policy making

45. Local and regional authorities should adopt evidence-based youth policies and/or strategies developed together with and by young people and their representatives. Such policies and/or strategies should be implemented, monitored, evaluated and reviewed in an equal partnership with young people.

46. Member States should encourage co-operation between national authorities and local and regional authorities in the field of youth with a view to better co-ordinating and supporting youth participation.

47. Member States should encourage international co-operation in the field of youth, especially co-operation between local and regional authorities, youth councils and youth civil society active at the local and regional levels.

48. Youth perspectives should be taken into account in policy areas implemented at the local and regional levels that affect the lives of young people. This should include, but not be limited to, economic policies, employment, education and training, living and working conditions, urban planning and design, transport and mobility, rural and remote communities, equality, diversity and inclusivity, digital technologies and digitalisation, social media and artificial intelligence, environment and climate change, leisure, sport and public health.

49. Particular attention should be given to the creation of conditions aimed at safeguarding youth participation during crises, conflict, displacement or natural disasters, including alternative, cross-border or digital means of participation.

Chapter V – Opportunities, tools and full support for youth participation

50. Local and regional authorities should ensure that young people have the opportunities and the full support, including adequate tools, to take an active part in local and regional affairs. Local and regional authorities should co-design and co-evaluate such opportunities, tools and support together with young people, with particular attention to the needs of marginalised groups, including young people with a minority background, those with disabilities, those from rural areas and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, young refugees and asylum seekers, as well as human rights defenders.

51. Local and regional authorities should ensure that adequate provisions are made for access to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education both in formal and non-formal education and training. This implies recognising the role of youth organisations as providers of human rights and citizenship education and providing them with the support necessary, including financial and institutional backing.

52. Local and regional authorities should ensure that adequate conditions and recognition are provided to youth work as an essential contribution to young people’s empowerment and development. Recognition and support should be given to both paid and volunteer youth work.

53. Local and regional authorities should strive to develop tools that support youth participation, harnessing the power of virtual spaces, while ensuring the principles of youth participation are fully respected. These tools include raising awareness in the digital space (on social media platforms, forums, websites, etc.), providing education for digital literacy, critical thinking and both formal and non-formal training, as well as exchanging best practices and offering e-learning opportunities.

54. Local and regional authorities should invest in capacity-building measures ensuring that staff, as well as elected representatives, are trained in and motivated to support youth participation. This should include principles and standards for youth policy, youth work and dedicated youth programmes.

55. Local and regional authorities and, where relevant, national authorities, should take measures to assist the private sector in living up to its social responsibility.

Chapter VI – Dissemination, evaluation and review of the charter

56. Competent authorities in each member State should ensure that the charter is translated into national, regional and local languages.

57. Local, regional and national authorities should ensure the wide dissemination of the charter among the relevant authorities and stakeholders. Young people and youth organisations are key partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of dissemination strategies of the charter to ensure that these efforts are relevant, effective and resonate with young people.

58. Local and regional authorities and young people, including youth organisations and youth councils, should evaluate the implementation of the charter in their community by means of tools developed for this purpose, using indicators based on the principles of youth participation outlined in Chapter I. The evaluation process should be regular, participatory and transparent, and should be followed up with appropriate measures to strengthen the implementation of the charter.