
Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 2025
at the 1528th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

Preamble

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of 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 recalling their obligation to refrain from human rights violations;

Having regard to the European Social Charter (adopted in 1961, ETS No. 35, 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;

Considering the principles enshrined in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (adopted in 1992, ETS No. 148), emphasising the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity as a vital cultural asset;

Recalling the importance of landscape as a key element of well-being for European citizens, and its role in cultural, ecological, social and economic identity, as enshrined in the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (adopted in 2000, ETS No. 176), as amended by its Protocol (adopted in 2016, CETS No. 219);

Recalling the importance of cultural heritage for the well-being of societies, particularly in rural areas, and its role in fostering a sense of identity and community belonging, as emphasised by the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (adopted in 2005, CETS No. 199);

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"; and the priority of "living together in peaceful and inclusive societies", with special emphasis on "allowing young people, including those experiencing any form of discrimination and exclusion, to benefit from opportunities that develop their commitment to and exercise of democratic citizenship";

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

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 on young people and climate action;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)15 on the role of culture, cultural heritage and landscape in helping to address global challenges;
- 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(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(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;
- Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life;
- Recommendation Rec(2004)13 on the participation of young people in local and regional life;
- Recommendation Rec(2003)8 on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people;

Recalling the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values" of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16 and 17 May 2023), which underscores the imperative of integrating 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 Reykjavík 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;

Recognising the importance of promoting active and meaningful youth participation in democratic processes, safeguarding young people's rights and advancing youth policies and strategies that address their unique challenges;

Recalling Resolution 481 (2022) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe "The future of youth in rural areas: responsibilities of local and regional authorities", which invites local and regional authorities to reflect and address, in their policies, the daily challenges experienced by rural youth, ensuring social inclusion and fostering intergenerational solidarity to enhance their well-being and potential;

Recalling the Conclusions on providing "glocal" opportunities for young people living in rural and remote areas (C/2024/7404), adopted by the European Council on 25 November 2024;

Considering that the advantages of living in rural and remote areas may be outweighed by challenges, including among others, fewer job opportunities, weaker infrastructure (including in the digital, energy, transport and information sectors) and poorer access to quality education, social services, healthcare, sport, cultural and leisure activities;

Concerned by the lower participation and inclusion of rural youth in different decision-making structures, the lack of youth structures and access to youth services which are essential for creating an environment conducive to the participation of rural youth, as well as fewer youth engagement opportunities in rural areas;

Recognising that rural youth face barriers to mobility stemming from a lack of infrastructure, as well as social and psychological barriers, and acknowledging the role of youth work in lifting these barriers;

Concerned that the risk of unemployment and job insecurity is greater for women and girls in rural areas, as there are many obstacles to employment, including social and psychological obstacles and childcare issues;

Highlighting the importance of youth work in rural areas, which plays a crucial role in empowering young people by providing them with the opportunities, skills and support needed to overcome the challenges of living in a rural area and actively contribute to the well-being and development of their communities;

Acknowledging that rural areas must not only be seen from their productive or environmental dimensions, but also from their cultural, innovative, social and aesthetic ones;

Recognising that, while challenges to youth participation are widespread, rural youth encounter these challenges in distinct ways and need specific responses;

Noting that rural youth is a heterogeneous group and that policies should be evidence based, tailor made and intersectional, with a view to addressing the diversity of this cohort;

Underlining the importance of tackling the complexity of the challenges posed to the participation of rural youth with a cross-sectoral and co-ordinated approach involving all stakeholders concerned;

Highlighting the importance of ensuring equal access for all young people living in rural areas to essential services and youth structures to promote and guarantee meaningful social, economic and political participation,

Recommends that the governments of the member States:

- a. promote and apply the measures proposed in the appendix to this recommendation, which aim to address the specific challenges that face rural youth, to remove barriers to and promote their social, economic and political participation at all levels;
- b. give due consideration, when implementing these measures, to the specific needs and situations of all young people living in rural areas, including those experiencing social inequalities and/or with fewer opportunities, and/or who are from marginalised or disadvantaged groups;
- c. promote these measures, review and share the progress made in their implementation, by involving local and regional authorities, rural youth and youth civil society organisations in the process;
- d. ensure that this recommendation, its appendix and explanatory memorandum are translated into the language(s) of their country and, in a way they consider appropriate, are published and brought to the attention of national, regional and local authorities, as well as other key stakeholders involved in addressing youth-related issues in general and issues related to rural youth in particular;
- e. invite local and regional authorities to implement those measures in this recommendation which fall within their sphere of competence;
- f. review, within the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of this recommendation by member States five years after its adoption.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3

Scope and purpose

1. The recommendation aims to address the challenges faced by rural youth and to eliminate the barriers with which they are confronted in order to ensure better access and full enjoyment of human rights under international and national law. It also aims to improve the accessibility of essential services, including youth services, and to facilitate the meaningful and active participation of rural youth in social, economic and political life by building on existing, and/or by creating new, opportunities in rural areas. When referring to “rural youth”, the recommendation encompasses all groups living in rural areas, including those from marginalised, Indigenous and under-represented groups.

2. The recommendation aims to encourage member States to:

- ensure access for rural youth to essential services and rights, in particular decent housing, quality education, affordable and safe mobility options and public transportation, social security and healthcare, through evidence-based and tailor-made policies and programmes for rural areas;
- identify the specific needs, challenges and aspirations of rural youth and mainstream them in policies at all levels;
- promote the inclusive democratic participation of rural youth to ensure their voices are heard, their interests are represented and their meaningful engagement in the development of rural areas is enabled, so that they have a say in shaping their communities and the wider political landscape;
- consider the disparities and diversity among rural youth and eliminate discrimination on the basis of age, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or discrimination based on any other ground, address cultural norms that hinder the participation of all rural youth, and actively engage them in social, economic and political life;
- continuously review existing mechanisms of inclusion of young people from rural areas in national youth policies and youth programmes and empower them to address rural youth issues using intersectional and needs-based approaches, grounded in up-to-date and accurate data;
- support, both financially and structurally, rural youth organisations, youth clubs, youth centres and informal youth groups and organisations, working with and for rural youth, at national, regional and local levels;
- ensure economic, educational and training opportunities for rural youth to support their autonomy, personal and professional development, including employment or self-employment;
- reinforce their commitment to meaningful youth participation in democratic life through co-operation, co-creation and consultation with young people at all levels, by creating accessible youth services and structures in rural areas, involving rural youth in democratic processes and allowing them to shape policies through the use of inclusive, effective and diversified tools (including digital) and best practices in youth participation, youth work, human rights and human rights education for young people within the Council of Europe.

Principles

3. The recommendation is based on the established principles outlined in the instruments referred to in the preamble. It also acknowledges the critical role that interventions and support, tailored to the specific needs of rural youth, serve in enabling young people to fully realise their potential; participate actively in social, economic and political life; contribute to pluralistic democracy; and foster inclusive, peaceful societies throughout rural areas in Europe.

Measures

4. The following measures aim to fill the gaps in standards and policies related to rural youth participation in social, economic and political life by ensuring they have access to rights and to essential services in the member States of the Council of Europe. The standards referred to herein stem primarily from the Council of Europe youth sector's policy guidance. The aim of the current framework is to create an enabling environment where rural youth can exercise fully their human rights, become informed and active citizens, and act as agents of positive change.

5. The measures are transversal and encompass the needs of the diverse groups within the rural youth cohort and ensure that policies cater to their unique needs and challenges.

Strengthening an enabling and accessible environment

6. Member States should:

- ensure and strengthen appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide an equitable delivery of public services, adequate data connectivity and internet access, reliable and well-connected public transportation systems, a right-based access to affordable living conditions for young people through partnerships, including public-private initiatives;
- design and implement programmes aiming to provide rural youth with accessible healthcare services, including mobile hospitals/polyclinics, and access to medical practitioners and specialised doctors;
- ensure or maintain access to a clean, healthy and safe environment, including through mitigation and adaptation activities to respond to the effects of climate change in rural areas;
- address the mental-health needs and the well-being of rural youth and ensure their access to psychological services, through awareness-raising campaigns, counselling services and support systems;
- develop and implement tailor-made programmes to facilitate integration, promote intergenerational exchange, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and enhance social cohesion among rural youth to eliminate and prevent discrimination, radicalisation and violence, as well as to prevent the marginalisation of young migrants, refugees and newcomers settled in rural areas;
- support co-operation and networking among young people, at both national and international levels, by organising exchange activities, encouraging community-building actions and supporting activities initiated by rural youth at all levels;
- ensure that all policies and programmes reflect the cultural diversity of rural communities, are inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of young people with diverse backgrounds and support the preservation, continuous transformation and transmission of cultural heritage.

Promoting youth engagement and democratic participation for all

7. Member States should:

- introduce robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including participatory assessments, and allocate sufficient resources to develop evidence-based policies that are grounded in up-to-date data derived from territorial diagnoses, to continuously improve rural youth participation;
- ensure meaningful participation and inclusion of rural youth in decision-making processes, including by giving them leading roles, equipping them with the appropriate knowledge, skills and competences, as well as engaging them in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of needs-based policies and programmes (including youth-related ones), at national, regional and local levels, by creating new platforms and spaces (including digital ones), and by ensuring that existing policies and programmes are well funded and supported by the public sector;
- ensure sufficient resources are allocated to awareness-raising programmes and platforms for sharing best practices of participatory models and practices (for example the Council of Europe's co-management system), targeted at policy makers, to foster co-operation among public, private and civil society sectors and enhance rural youth participation at all levels;
- create a national interministerial working group or any other type of body on rural youth to undertake research, mainstream youth perspectives into this work, monitor and evaluate ministries' strategies (for example in the fields of health, labour, education, internal affairs, culture, transport, etc.) to ensure targeted and comprehensive solutions for rural youth issues;
- foster social, political and civic engagement among rural youth by supporting projects and initiatives aimed at developing a sense of belonging and promoting community development, as well as active and meaningful participation in public life, including in electoral processes;

- establish and/or strengthen direct contact, continuous dialogue and collaboration with rural youth and their organisations to learn about challenges to their participation, needs and aspirations, as well as to share good practices of participation in democratic life from the earliest age;
- promote existing participatory mechanisms among rural youth, for example by supporting and funding grass-roots initiatives such as youth-friendly campaigns, ensure they are available in accessible formats and in minority languages, in order that as many young people from rural areas as possible may engage in political decision making where their interests, issues and needs are concerned;
- promote the access of, and eliminate barriers to, education and employment for young women and girls from rural areas, to empower them to actively engage in social, economic and political life;
- promote and invest in volunteering, community service and leadership-development programmes to provide rural youth with opportunities to contribute to their communities, develop necessary practical skills and confidence to take on active roles in society, and to cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their communities.

Strengthening youth structures in rural areas

8. Member States should:

- establish, maintain and continuously support the development of new spaces (youth centres, youth clubs, self-managed houses, virtual spaces, etc.) at the local level to ensure that all rural youth have access to youth services;
- support and communicate about existing and newly established physical and virtual spaces, including youth centres, community spaces and online platforms, to ensure rural youth may participate in decision-making processes and have access to youth work services, thereby fostering personal and professional development and community engagement at local and regional levels;
- provide long-term, structural and financial support, such as space, sustainable funding and expertise, for the creation and maintenance of rural youth organisations and informal groups of young people, and provide training for youth workers regarding the mobilisation of these opportunities;
- create a favourable environment for rural youth organisations and informal groups with limited capacity through targeted youth policy strategies and action plans, resource allocation and sustainable capacity-building programmes to enhance their access to available resources, including funding opportunities;
- streamline funding procedures for rural youth organisations by making an inventory of existing resources, simplifying application processes, giving priority to youth-led organisations working with rural youth and offering support to those unfamiliar with funding processes, and ensure a regular flow of information about the legal regulations;
- promote accessible and sustainable rural youth work (including mobile and detached forms of youth work) at the local level by supporting existing and/or creating new youth centres in rural areas;
- promote active collaboration between rural youth organisations and other civil society actors that support young people in both urban and rural areas, with the goal of sharing expertise and best practices and aligning knowledge, skills and competences to continuously strengthen youth structures in rural areas;
- offer funding and training to youth organisations to promote education and training in human rights and democracy, as well as guidance on integrating a rights-based approach to their overall youth work activities with rural youth.

Ensuring access to quality education (formal and non-formal)

9. Member States should:

- ensure equitable access to quality education for rural youth in order that they may acquire essential knowledge, develop critical-thinking skills and pursue higher education by addressing inadequate infrastructure and transportation (including public transport services), financial barriers and shortages of human resources;
- ensure that educational policies and programmes, and changes within educational systems (for example the consolidation or closing of schools in rural areas), do not hinder young people in these areas from accessing quality education where they reside;
- allocate resources to improve the access of rural youth to non-formal education and lifelong learning opportunities for sustainable development, democratic citizenship and self-realisation to enable them to obtain knowledge, skills and attitudes to play an active role in community development;
- bridge the digital divide in rural areas by promoting digital literacy and e-learning through equal access to technology and information and communication technology learning and training programmes for rural youth;
- facilitate the transitions of rural youth from school to extended education and to qualified work by providing tailored support structures for professional orientation and career guidance, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- consolidate and develop educational and training programmes, open to all young people, actors in the field of youth and youth workers in rural areas, with the aim of encouraging encounters, national (particularly between urban and rural areas) and international mobility, civic education and engagement, and intercultural learning;
- introduce and promote financial and non-financial support schemes (such as scholarships or mentorship programmes) to incentivise and support students from rural areas in accessing higher education;
- establish specialised vocational education and training (VET) programmes for rural youth tailored to the emerging sectors and labour market shortages specific to their local area;
- introduce culturally sensitive and inclusive educational policies and programmes which integrate various knowledge systems and teaching methods to contribute to the recognition, preservation and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity of rural youth.

Creating economic opportunities in rural areas

10. Member States should:

- guarantee fairly remunerated employment opportunities and decent working conditions for rural youth, including for those with a low education level or none at all, boost and diversify rural economies by supporting rural entrepreneurship, remote work, the creation of business development centres, the development of mentorship programmes, the financing of agricultural entrepreneurship “agribusiness” and environmental transition-related entrepreneurship initiatives, and support rural youth-led tourism projects;
- provide financial incentives, such as grants or subsidies, to attract and retain young families in rural areas, by ensuring both economic stability and a supportive living environment;
- connect rural youth with economic opportunities and ensure their transition from education to employment by offering upskilling and reskilling programmes tailored to current labour market needs, through the provision of quality vocational training, internships and apprenticeships in emerging and/or traditional sectors at the local level, while ensuring adequate training for educational providers;

- simplify regulatory frameworks and provide funding for rural youth to start businesses in rural areas;
- create favourable conditions for generational renewal for young farmers by enabling them to access land, knowledge, finance, equipment and essential resources through the provision of low-interest loans, technical assistance and mentorship programmes;
- provide young farmers with adequate conditions and opportunities for farming, including for sustainable farm development, addressing climate change and ensuring the transition towards environmentally friendly and sustainable production, by incentivising eco-friendly initiatives and facilitating access to green technologies and practices to ensure an adequate income for a decent life, as well as social security cover;
- encourage businesses, particularly those operating in rural areas, to actively support projects and activities for rural youth through corporate social responsibility initiatives that promote youth employment, mentorship and economic engagement.