

Recommendation 1978 (2011)¹

Final version

Towards a European framework convention on youth rights

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly has long given high priority to issues of youth rights and policies. In its [Recommendation 1585 \(2002\)](#) on youth policies in the Council of Europe, as well as in its [Recommendation 1844 \(2008\)](#) and Resolution 1630 (2008) on refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe, the Assembly encouraged the Committee of Ministers to step up intergovernmental co-operation in youth matters and support the activities of the Council of Europe's youth sector. The resolution called upon "young people in general and on youth organisations in particular to insist on the possibilities that exist for interaction with the Council of Europe and in particular with the Parliamentary Assembly".

2. Other texts adopted by the Assembly concern specific aspects of youth policies, such as [Recommendation 1552 \(2002\)](#) on vocational training of young asylum seekers in host countries, [Recommendation 1632 \(2003\)](#) on teenagers in distress: a social and health-based approach to youth malaise, [Recommendation 1717 \(2005\)](#) on education for leisure activities, as well as a series of recommendations and resolutions concerning higher education and training. Most recently, [Recommendation 1930 \(2010\)](#) on prohibiting the marketing and use of the "Mosquito" youth dispersal device called on governments to ban the use of this high-frequency sound device used to chase young people from places where they might gather.

3. With respect to the present European context, the Assembly acknowledges that, due to the demographic and cultural changes that have taken place in Europe over the last few years, young people face increasing difficulties in accessing and exercising their rights. Their autonomy is increasingly threatened as a consequence of economic, geographical and socio-cultural inequalities. Youth policies are also particularly vulnerable to economic recession, as they are often relegated to a secondary place in governmental priorities and resource allocation.

4. Young people have often been at the centre of action for democratic change and progress, as illustrated by the recent popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and in other countries on the African continent. In the above-mentioned [Recommendation 1585 \(2002\)](#), the Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to re-launch the

Euro-Arab youth dialogue, and work in this area has been brought forward by the Council of Europe's Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre), in partnership with the European Commission and youth organisations, since the 1st Africa-Europe Youth Summit in 2007. Young people's energy and ideas should be used to the full by giving young people better access to personal autonomy and democratic participation, including voting rights.

5. It is therefore necessary to provide opportunities for youth to effectively benefit from their rights, while raising awareness of them in society and among young people themselves. Positive and tangible measures should be taken at national and international levels to help young people take advantage of existing possibilities and to build upon them, as well as to harmonise access to rights.

6. Many of the rights to which young people are entitled are covered by existing legislation, but a stronger legal basis allowing for systematic implementation and monitoring is needed to protect them. It is necessary to find direct, rapid and effective solutions. Young people all over Europe are expecting policy makers to produce concrete visible results, a change of reality that will make all the difference.

7. The Assembly is convinced that the transition period between childhood and adult life is crucial for the development and self-fulfilment of individuals and that the specific challenges of this period require specific solutions. Therefore, the Assembly adopts the principles in the appendix to the present recommendation and calls on member states to:

7.1. take measures to facilitate young people's access to fundamental rights as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), in particular opposing multiple discrimination against young people;

7.2. sign and ratify, if they have not yet done so, the Council of Europe Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service for Young People (ETS No. 175);

7.3. step up measures in their countries to implement:

7.3.1. the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

7.3.2. the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;

7.3.3. Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2006)1 on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development and Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 on youth information;

1. Assembly debate on 24 June 2011 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12629](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Ms Kovács). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 June 2011 (27th Sitting).

7.4. prioritise measures allowing young people individual autonomy and full European citizenship by promoting their rights to:

7.4.1. take part in democratic processes and in cultural life;

7.4.2. participate in and contribute to intercultural dialogue, thereby enhancing the cohesion of multicultural societies;

7.4.3. free access to information and to the Internet;

7.4.4. non-discrimination;

7.5. consider adopting the new “youth centre label” for national youth centres, thereby ensuring that these centres become multipliers of the fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe.

8. National parliaments of member states have an essential responsibility. The Assembly therefore calls on them to:

8.1. encourage and give added value to the participation of young parliamentarians in parliamentary work, enhancing their status and public awareness of their contribution, and submit the present recommendation to national youth parliaments or their equivalents, and constituent organisations for their consideration and comment;

8.2. promote the participation of young people in democratic processes and in real decision making, especially by offering opportunities for dialogue between the national representatives of youth associations and the relevant parliamentary committees, and by encouraging the establishment of youth parliaments;

8.3. encourage the participation of young people in society by giving them better access to personal autonomy and democratic participation and by considering lowering the voting age;

8.4. follow closely the Council of Europe’s “Youth Peace Ambassadors” project and respond positively to requests for support for projects which will be led by these young people at local levels.

9. The Assembly welcomes the Committee of Ministers’ support for the activities of the Council of Europe’s youth sector, particularly its unique model of co-management by representatives of governments and youth non-governmental organisations, and current youth projects such as ENTER! and Youth Peace Ambassadors. It calls on the Committee of Ministers to:

9.1. continue its support for the work of the youth sector, as well as other Council of Europe activities such as education for democratic citizenship and the work of the North-South Centre on global citizenship education and on Euro-African co-operation;

9.2. include the present recommendation and its appendix in the documents submitted to the participants in the 9th Council of Europe

Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth to be held in 2012 on the themes of the social inclusion of young people, democracy, participation and living together in diverse societies;

9.3. instruct the co-management bodies of the Council of Europe’s youth sector to compile a comprehensive handbook of instruments, programmes and policies for the use of young people, youth leaders and organisations, as well as policy makers, as a guide to youth rights;

9.4. step up Council of Europe co-operation with the European Union and its flagship initiative “Youth on the Move” beyond the successful Youth Partnership joint programme, and with the United Nations, in particular in the context of the International Year of Youth 2010-2011 and its follow-up;

9.5. instruct the relevant intergovernmental authorities to study the possibility of drafting a framework convention on the rights of young people, based on the ten principles below, which include common indicators as tools for monitoring the implementation of youth rights.

Appendix – Ten principles for a European framework convention on youth rights

Youth rights are those rights which enable young people to successfully make the transition between childhood and adulthood, to become informed, independent, autonomous, responsible and committed citizens at local, national and international levels. Ensuring young people's access to their rights is a means of ensuring cohesive, sustainable societies and is an investment in the future of the European construction. An instrument for the implementation of youth rights should serve as a framework for modelling national youth policies and should be based on the following ten principles.

1. Definitions

What is missing at the moment is a clear and comprehensive definition of the meaning of youth. Member states should define the age groups covered by their youth policies, which should be coherent with other legal provisions concerning young people, and as far as possible correspond to those of other European countries. A framework convention on youth rights should seek to provide common definitions to facilitate the implementation of rights and the monitoring of their implementation through statistics.

2. Education and training

States should provide education that is universal, free and accessible. Beyond economic considerations, education should be valued as a means of self-fulfilment and of empowerment for young people. As well as equipping young people for employment, education should promote values. Education systems need to be reorganised to better correspond to rapid economic changes and the skills and sectors of the economy of the future. Moreover, educational policies should be characterised by flexibility and allow for vocational retraining and mobility.

Member states should adopt measures which enable the mobility of students in higher education and establish validation procedures for recognition of academic achievements and professional qualifications across Europe. To this end, they should promote the effective use of the European Higher Education Area, and implement the Bologna Process and other mechanisms for recognition of qualifications.

Non-formal education, intercultural learning and volunteer work should be more recognised as an integral part of young people's qualifications. Quality vocational training should be provided as an alternative or accompaniment to university education. Young people also need to be given opportunities to gain language proficiency throughout their education, especially when their mother tongue is other than that spoken in their community.

3. Employment

Employment is the primary means of ensuring young people's autonomy. Across Europe, the highest unemployment rates are among young people. Member states should take concrete measures to facilitate the

entry of young people into employment (active employment policies and tax and financial incentives to encourage companies to recruit young people into agreed training programmes with on-the-job certification), thereby facilitating the transition between education establishments and the labour market and preventing the excessive use of unpaid work experience or low paid employment. Policies should aim to encourage businesses to assist young people's transition from insecure contracts to stable jobs. National systems and bilateral agreements should ensure that gaps in social security protection systems and problems with labour market integration are identified and closed.

4. Housing

Young people have a right to decent, affordable housing of a quality in line with European standards, to enable them to achieve a stable environment for their development as adults and their relations with the community. The ability to become independent by leaving one's parental home should be enabled through access to housing of an adequate standard.

Member states should ensure that higher education institutions provide affordable student lodgings, especially in areas with high rents; social housing should enable young people to live independently at the beginning of their professional career and states should insist on the implementation of percentage quotas for such housing in all regions. Secure and sustainable financial facilities should be made available to aid the granting of mortgages and loans to young individuals and families and ensure that low-interest opportunities are open to them.

5. Health and the right to a healthy environment

Health education must be taught at all educational levels. There must also be policies in place to prevent and protect against sexually transmitted diseases, undesired pregnancies, sexual abuse or violence, alcoholism, nicotine poisoning and drug abuse. Comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education should be provided as part of the school curriculum. Member states should conduct health-awareness campaigns directed at young people about health risks and their avoidance, including practical information such as on access to treatment and guarantees of confidentiality.

Young people should also be involved in environmental policies as they are directly affected by their consequences, and are a more certain source of forward-thinking, idealistic and creative ideas concerning environmental preservation and sustainable development. Young people can serve as highly efficient multipliers of good individual and group practices.

6. Participation

In order for young people to understand their rights, accept the accompanying responsibilities and be given opportunities to express themselves, full and effective participation of young people in the life of society and in decision making must be encouraged from an early age. States should promote the implementation of the

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and Recommendation Rec(2006)1 of the Committee of Ministers on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development. The Council of Europe's 2010 Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education should also serve as a policy guideline for training youth leaders and member states should foster the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youth organisations in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

Youth parliaments serve to emphasise the importance of developing the capacity of youth for the purpose of preparing them to assume responsibilities, to engage in dialogue, exchange ideas and introduce them to democratic processes. Young people should not, however, be relegated into youth parliamentary structures to the detriment of their participation in core decision-making procedures.

It is important that young people participate in democracy by voting. Therefore, member states should consider lowering the voting age.

7. Culture and sport

Cultural policies must ensure young people's access to cultural activities and exchanges, as well as the right to maintain their cultural and personal identity; state spending on culture should not be sacrificed during periods of economic downturn. Universities should recognise the need for students' cultural development and cultural institutions should have the means to use modern, interactive methods of communication and awareness raising. Spaces for artistic creation need to be made available to young people for all cultural activities, including art and music.

Everyone should have the right to maintain their cultural heritage. School students speaking a minority language should be offered lessons in the language in question. Optional courses on minority language and culture should also be offered to students from the majority population.

Particular attention should be paid to ensuring the right to freedom of expression for every young person without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers. Appropriate measures should be adopted in order to facilitate the access of young people to the media and, in particular, to the Internet.

Sport is an important way for young people to explore and use their physical capacities, and a potential factor of greater social cohesion and integration. Sports facilities should be provided free of charge in all regions and in both rural and urban areas. Young people must be allowed to develop their personal abilities and identities as they wish.

8. Non-discrimination

Member states should ensure that young people are not discriminated against because of their age, for instance in assuming political or professional responsibilities. The specific problems of young people in vulnerable

population groups such as Roma, migrants and refugees, or other minority groups in society should also be addressed, as well as discrimination based on gender and nationality and homophobia, to which young people are particularly exposed.

Positive measures adopted by member states in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective implementation of youth rights, taking due account of the specific conditions of young people within society and their particular needs in relation to their age, should not be considered to be discriminatory as regards the rest of the population.

9. Communication on youth policies

It is necessary to raise awareness of the existence and importance of youth rights by increasing, centralising and harmonising the information available to policy and decision makers and to the general public. Youth policies in member states should be disseminated through the most up-to-date communication channels, and be made available in as many languages as are necessary to ensure they are understood by all. In order for young people to be able to act in accordance with their rights, these rights should be recognised, protected and implemented.

10. Implementation

A European framework convention on youth rights would serve as a tool for the effective implementation of national and international provisions applicable to young people. The instrument should contain a set of common indicators, based on concrete statistics for the age groups concerned in each of the above areas. It should also provide guidelines for co-operation between member states in the same areas and common goals to be attained, and regular shared stocktaking exercises should be part of the follow-up to the convention. A new arrangement should be found to allow national youth parliaments or their equivalents to undertake an assessment of progress on youth rights and give further guidance on future programmes. What is needed is better recognition and implementation of the rights of young people in Europe.