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The right to be heard – child participation: a foundation for democratic societies

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2218 (2022)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2218 \(2022\)](#) “The right to be heard – child participation: a foundation for democratic societies” and forwarded the text to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) for information and possible comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers agrees with the Assembly that child participation is an important and increasingly recognised aspect for building democratic societies. It recalls that the Council of Europe has historically demonstrated leadership in giving a voice to and involving children and giving due respect to their views in its standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation projects. Under the framework of the previous Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), the Organisation not only promoted the right of the child to participate in Council of Europe bodies and national governments, but practised it, including through a child consultation process when preparing the new Strategy and also by involving children in its relevant intergovernmental work and numerous co-operation activities. A large number of child-friendly tools and publications has been produced as a result of consultation processes, and the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT) has been promoted to allow national stakeholders to assess their child participation mechanisms and practice.

3. With regard to the new Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), mentioned in paragraph 5.1 of the recommendation, the Committee of Ministers recalls that the Strategy, adopted on 23 February 2022, will guide the work of the Council of Europe over the next six years. Under the implementing and innovating objectives noted in its fifth strategic objective, the Strategy is expected to continue focusing on “giving a voice to every child”. Children participating in the consultation process towards the new Strategy emphasised the importance of finding places where they can express their own views in the framework of decision-making processes, and to have their voices heard. The Launching Conference for the Strategy, which took place in Rome on 7 and 8 April 2022, included a dedicated thematic session on “empowering children and overcoming obstacles to their right to participate”, which addressed legal clinics as a means of enhancing children’s participation in judicial proceedings and the particular situation of children acting as defenders of human rights.

4. In response to paragraph 5.2 of the recommendation regarding synergies with other institutions, the Committee of Ministers informs the Assembly that over the past years, partnerships have been pursued and consolidated between its relevant Steering Committee and numerous international and European stakeholders, including UN bodies and offices, different directorates of the European Commission and other agencies of the EU, ensuring dynamic and very regular collaboration. For example, last year, the second multilateral regional project CP4EUROPE, co-financed by the European Union, was launched. It aims at enhancing children’s participation in decision-making processes through very concrete measures and tools, starting with five pilot countries, and also creating tools and methodologies that will be useful for further member States of the Council of Europe.

1. Adopted at the 1442nd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (14 September 2022).



5. The Committee of Ministers has taken note of the recommendation in paragraph 5.3, and notes that there are a number of activities that contribute to the implementation of the Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)7](#) on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. For example, the Council of Europe Education Programme strives to support schoolchildren and students in developing their competences for democratic culture as set out in the [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#). This contributes to promoting systematic, effective, and inclusive child participation, not only by preparing children to act as democratic citizens, but also by creating favourable conditions for children to practice those competencies in schools, in their educational communities, their families and beyond. The project “[Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All](#)” is also focused on this dimension. Finally, the World Forum for Democracy held for the first time on 13 June 2022, a “Forum for secondary school pupils” dedicated to living together during which the participating children were able to share their concerns and discuss how to prevent and fight against school bullying and cyberbullying.

6. Other initiatives include the important digital dimension of participation of children, in particular the Digital Citizenship Education project, linked to the Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)10](#) on developing and promoting digital citizenship education, which refers to “Ten digital domains”, one of them being active participation (online). A number of resources have also been developed to support refugee and migrant children in their linguistic integration, necessary for making their voices heard in the hosting communities. The Committee of Ministers also notes that renewal of the Civic Mission of Education, including the dimension of democratic participation of children and young people, will be at the core of the next session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education scheduled for 2023.

7. Finally, in response to paragraph 5.4 of the Assembly recommendation, the Committee of Ministers would point out that its relevant Steering Committee has a specific task to ensure that the rights of the child are mainstreamed into all relevant Council of Europe committees and bodies; so is already acting along the lines recommended by the Parliamentary Assembly. Moreover, since 2010, the Inter-secretariat Task Force on Children’s Rights brings together representatives of all operational sectors of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights, and the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights to mainstream the rights of the child by sharing information, obtaining insight from experts, agreeing on action, joining forces and addressing specific issues, including child participation. The Committee of Ministers suggests that this Task Force consider dedicating, at one of its future meetings, a focused exchange on current practices of child participation and means of further promoting it throughout Council of Europe bodies; on this occasion, the opportunity of a future inter-sectorial panel on child participation at the Council of Europe might be considered.