

THE ACTIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITY YOUTH



Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)9

Adopted by the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe
on 4 October 2023

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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French edition:
*La participation politique active
des jeunes issus de minorités nationales*

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Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)9

of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the active political participation of national minority youth

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 October 2023
at the 1477th 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,

Considering that the member States of the Council of Europe have undertaken to secure the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, “the Convention”) for everyone within their jurisdiction, and that human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated;

Emphasising that the enjoyment of certain rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention and its protocols is key to political participation and democracy, notably freedom of expression (Article 10), freedom of assembly and association (Article 11), the right to free elections, including the right to vote and the right to stand for election (Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, ETS No. 9) and the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14 of the Convention and, where applicable, Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention, ETS No. 177);

Recalling the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157, “the Framework Convention”) and in particular its Article 15, according to which its “Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural,

social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them”, and its Article 4, according to which the Parties undertake “to guarantee to persons belonging to national minorities the right to equality” and to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures to promote, in all areas of political life, full and effective equality;

Considering, as has been observed by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention, that the degree of participation of persons belonging to national minorities in all spheres of life can be considered as one of the indicators of the level of pluralism and democracy of a society; that their effective participation is crucial for enhancing social cohesion, as leaving persons belonging to national minorities on the periphery of society can lead to social exclusion and tensions among groups; and that marginalising persons belonging to national minorities in socio-economic life also has implications for the country as a whole, with the risk of losing their contribution and additional input to society;

Stressing that the participation of young people in politics and public life is essential for strengthening human rights, democracy and societal cohesion and that providing opportunities for young people to participate in public life can strengthen civic, social and political engagement as an integral part of an individual’s personal and social development;

Underlining therefore that young people belonging to national minorities (referred to hereafter as “national minority youth”) must be included in democratic structures and processes and that they must have their voices heard and be able to contribute to decision-making processes on issues that affect society as a whole and their lives in particular, thereby also contributing to a better reflection of the diversity in societies and within national minorities;

Stressing that national minority youth, and in particular girls and young women, and other young people belonging to national minorities who are exposed to intersectional discrimination, face various obstacles to active political participation and that they are often underrepresented in political life, as underlined in the Study on the active political participation of national minority youth in Council of Europe member States, which the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion adopted in June 2021 and which provides further background to this recommendation;

Bearing in mind that those obstacles may include, to varying degrees in different member States, the following issues. National minority youth may be subject to prejudice, discrimination and sexism at community, local or national

levels. Furthermore, they may not have access to sustainable funding and lack human or technical resources; their organisations may have few members; and some minority groups are not officially recognised as a national minority. Moreover, there may be a lack of trust between national minority youth and political institutions. National minority youth may not benefit from quality education of regional or minority and State languages, or information about opportunities for civic and political participation, and they are not always given sufficient space by organisations representing national minorities, including in leadership and representation roles. National minority youth may also be underrepresented in the media, suffer from social exclusion and poverty and some lack citizenship, registration in the civil registry or registration on electoral lists. In addition to sometimes being affected by geographic distance, fragmentation, isolation and spatial segregation, they also may not be taken seriously;

Taking into account other relevant Council of Europe treaties, in particular the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), and other legal instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendations Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism, CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes, CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation, 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, Parliamentary Assembly Resolutions 1985 (2014), 2196 (2018) and 2368 (2021) and the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities;

Taking into account the findings and recommendations of the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies, in particular the second thematic commentary of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention on the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs;

Underlining the importance of mainstreaming the perspectives of all those exposed to intersectional discrimination, including women and girls, children

and young people, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons in the fields covered by this recommendation,

Recommends that the governments of member States:

1. take legislative and other measures, with the active involvement of representatives of national minority youth, towards the implementation of the principles and guidelines appended to this recommendation;
2. take appropriate measures to encourage and support national human rights institutions, equality bodies, civil society organisations, including those representing or working with national minority youth, the media, internet intermediaries and other stakeholders to implement, as appropriate, the measures that are outlined in the principles and guidelines appended to this recommendation;
3. promote the goals of this recommendation at local, regional, national and international levels and engage in dialogue and co-operation with all stakeholders to achieve them;
4. ensure that this recommendation is translated into the official language(s) of the State as well as regional and minority languages insofar as possible, and that it is disseminated as widely as possible, including in simple and youth-friendly language, and through all accessible means among competent authorities and stakeholders;
5. regularly follow up on the implementation of this recommendation, in consultation with national minority youth representatives, with a view to enhancing its impact, and inform the Committee of Ministers about the measures taken by member States and other stakeholders, the progress achieved and any remaining shortcomings.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)9

I. Scope

1. This recommendation aims to promote the active political participation of national minority youth while acknowledging the diversity among and within different national minorities and their different needs.
2. As there is no binding or universally accepted definition of the term “national minorities” at the international level, member States may, when implementing this recommendation, refer to the meanings used in the national

legal framework or context of each member State, while respecting the right of persons belonging to national minorities to free self-identification as enshrined in Article 3.1 of the Framework Convention. Member States are encouraged to apply the principles and guidelines of this recommendation also to other groups with a common ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or religious identity.

3. The terms “young people” or “youth” should be understood in the same manner as in the legal and constitutional framework of each member State, while also taking into account the practice of the Council of Europe, which covers the ages from 13 to 30 years old. In line with CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, appropriate protective measures should be in place where young people under the age of 18 are involved.

4. The term “political participation” should be understood as the right and the process by which individuals participate in and have the opportunity to meaningfully influence political decision-making processes at local, regional and national levels, whether alone or in community with others, and whether on a voluntary or professional basis, with the aim of ensuring that their needs are adequately reflected in the outcomes of those processes. It encompasses, among others, the right to freedom of expression, including on social media; the freedom of assembly, including online debates and demonstrations; the freedom of association, including the establishment and joining of political parties; and, depending on their age and other conditions foreseen in national legislation, the right to vote and to stand for election, to participate in referendums, youth councils and similar structures and to hold public positions.

5. Member States should, where appropriate, use regional or minority languages, as well as simple, youth-friendly language, when implementing this recommendation in order to overcome language barriers and to reach as many national minority youth as possible.

II. The right to political participation

6. Member States are encouraged to enshrine the right to active political participation of national minority youth in law, for example in legislation on the rights of young people or in legislation on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Member States should provide national minority youth with the opportunity and space to effectively participate in drafting and amending such legislation.

7. To secure the right to political participation for national minority youth, member States should develop and enact general strategies and action plans to prevent and combat prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism and gender-based violence, including against national minority youth. These should cover intersectional discrimination, harassment, hate crimes and hate speech, as outlined, for example, in Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech. Member States are strongly encouraged to include in these strategies and action plans clear objectives, indicators, baselines, targets, budgets and timelines, and to identify those responsible for achieving each objective. In this context, member States should also strengthen institutions that promote equality and combat discrimination, including of national minority youth.

8. With regard to intersectional discrimination of national minority youth, member States and stakeholders should, where appropriate, take special measures designed to prevent or compensate for disadvantages suffered (“special measures”) and to ensure equal opportunities. They should, in particular, enhance the equal participation of girls and young women, young LGBTI persons and young people with disabilities belonging to national minorities, who are referred to in this recommendation as persons exposed to intersectional discrimination.

III. The space for political participation

9. Member States should ensure that there are spaces that enable national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, to participate effectively in youth, minority and mainstream political life at local, regional, national and international levels.

10. Member States should, where appropriate, take adequate measures to increase the representation and ensure effective and meaningful political participation of national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, in elected bodies and governmental institutions at local, regional, national and international levels, for example, by encouraging diversity and a gender balance among their membership or by taking other special measures that facilitate the representation and participation of national minority youth.

11. Member States should take appropriate measures to involve national minority youth and mainstream their views from an early stage of the legislative, budgetary and policy-making processes of elected bodies and other public authorities, including equality bodies and national human rights institutions,

while respecting the independence of these bodies. This involvement could be achieved, for example, through:

- a. the creation of youth parliaments, youth councils, school and student parliaments, advisory and consultative bodies or other processes for regular youth participation, ensuring that a wide range of national minority youth is represented;
- b. consultation procedures based on different working methods (oral, written, social media, online meeting, etc.); or
- c. providing for the right of national minority youth to submit opinions and statements to those entities on their own initiative and informing them of this right in a timely manner.

Elected bodies and executive authorities should take these opinions and statements into consideration and provide a reply, and they are encouraged to foster, as far as possible, shared ownership of decisions.

12. Member States should, while respecting the independence of the media, consider contributing, through their regulatory frameworks, to ensuring that national minority youth are given adequate space in local, regional and national media reporting and news coverage to express their views and present themselves, including in their minority languages, especially during election campaigns. This could be done, for example, by providing for the presence of national minority youth in governing boards, or minimum provisions regarding the reporting and news coverage on national minorities, including national minority youth and explicitly prohibiting any discrimination by the media.

IV. Opportunities, means and support for active political participation of national minority youth

13. Member States should, with the active participation of national minority youth, regularly assess, identify, prevent and remove obstacles to their participation, including those cited in the preamble.

14. To overcome such obstacles, member States should create opportunities and conditions for the active political participation of national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, as detailed in the following paragraphs. To outline, this can be achieved, in particular and as appropriate, by providing for information, education, training and capacity building; organising events and projects; facilitating the presence of national minority youth in the media; and providing appropriate procedures

for accessing citizenship and registering to vote. To allow national minority youth to engage in political participation, member States may also provide them with training programmes and other job opportunities and consider providing financial support, including to organisations representing national minority youth.

15. National minority youth should be proactively provided with information on the various possibilities of participation in political life through different channels, such as awareness-raising campaigns, including for first-time voters, formal and non-formal education, online platforms or social media. Member States are encouraged, where appropriate, to make this information available in regional or minority languages, and in forms that are appropriate to the age, needs and circumstances of national minority youth.

16. Member States should ensure that general education about political participation, and in particular on democratic citizenship, the right to vote and to stand for election, contributes to strengthening the political participation of national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination. To facilitate the effective and meaningful political participation of national minority youth, member States should provide them with quality education of regional or minority and State languages.

17. To make society as a whole more receptive to the concerns and perspectives of national minority youth, member States are also encouraged to include learning about national minorities' history, culture, traditions and language, as well as their rights, in national education curricula. Equally, member States are encouraged to foster education about the Holocaust, *inter alia*, by including the history of Jews and Roma and Travellers¹ in school curricula as recommended, for example, in Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials.

18. Member States should:

- a. ensure the organisation of targeted training and capacity-building activities both for national minority youth, including those who no longer

1. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

attend school or university, and for organisations representing them; such activities could aim to empower and prepare national minority youth to stand for election and bring them into contact with relevant decision makers; and

- b. organise training and capacity-building activities for professionals working with or in fields relating to national minority youth, on promoting and increasing their political participation; such training should, in particular, be offered to teachers, youth workers, youth policy experts, media professionals, politicians, decision makers and other staff of relevant public authorities at local, regional and national levels.

Such training and activities should put a specific focus on intersectional discrimination and could be organised by the authorities themselves in consultation with national minority youth, or the authorities could support and fund such activities run by independent or civil society organisations.

19. Member States should proactively support the participation of national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, in structures, events and projects promoting political participation. Member States should also promote national minority youth's active participation in youth and women's organisations, networks, structures, events and projects, as well as in national minority organisations, networks, structures, events and projects.

20. Member States should support the training of national minority youth to work in journalism so that they can actively participate in the formation of public opinion, including about the specific situation of national minority youth. They are also encouraged to support national minority youth to establish new media, including online platforms.

21. Member States should take effective measures to reduce as much as possible the number of national minority children and youth who lack citizenship, to ensure that national minority youth have identity documents and to enrol them in electoral registers. Where appropriate, information regarding citizenship should be made available in regional or minority languages.

22. Member States should consider providing adequate and sustainable funding and technical support to organisations representing national minority youth.

23. Member States should facilitate the independent personal development of national minority youth, starting at a young age, by organising, supporting

and facilitating access to training programmes, internships, mentorship programmes and other special measures that create opportunities for national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, to accede to politically relevant positions.

24. Member States should ensure the access of national minority youth to such programmes by providing grants, including for participation in non-formal education, specific capacity-building programmes for effective political participation and higher education in general.

25. National human rights institutions and equality bodies should be encouraged to reach out to national minority youth, support them and contribute to creating favourable conditions for their political participation.

V. Specific guidelines regarding stakeholder organisations

26. National minority organisations, including the elected bodies of national minorities and other national minority structures of self-governance at local, regional and national levels, should be encouraged to provide space for youth, and in particular girls and young women and others exposed to intersectional discrimination, to participate in their organisational, advocacy and other activities, while ensuring that a wide range of views of persons belonging to national minorities is represented.

27. The bodies mentioned in the previous paragraph should be encouraged to develop their own strategies for promoting political participation of young people, to include in those strategies and action plans clear objectives, indicators, baselines, targets, budgets and timelines, and to identify those responsible for achieving each objective. National minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, should participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of such strategies.

28. Political parties, especially those of national minorities, should be encouraged to take effective measures to achieve an appropriate representation of national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, within their structures, for example by encouraging and supporting their presence in governing structures, by introducing quotas for their representation and by including young candidates belonging to national minorities in good positions in election campaigns.

29. While respecting the independence of the media, national, regional and local media should be encouraged to give adequate space to national minority

youth to express their views and present themselves in media reporting and news coverage, including in regional or minority languages, especially during election campaigns. Media should also be encouraged to promote inclusive and gender-sensitive content on national minority youth, for example through training regarding stereotyping, discrimination and sexism.

30. Civil society organisations, in particular those operating in fields dealing with youth, equality and minority groups, should be encouraged to motivate national minority youth, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, and help them to join their organisations and to become involved in their activities.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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