

## Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



### Symposium Young people, democracy and climate action

**24-26 September 2024**  
**European Youth Centre Strasbourg**

Climate crisis is one of the key priorities for young people, which also features highly on the policy agenda. The Council of Europe's commitment to a healthy environment has been reaffirmed through the 2023 Reykjavik Declaration adopted by the 4th summit of Heads of State and Government. The Council of Europe's Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) has also been active in this field, setting up, for example, a task force on greening the youth sector in 2021, which has resulted in the drafting of a Committee of Ministers recommendation on young people and climate action.

At EU level, the Green Deal and the recently adopted Nature Restoration Law have placed a focus on sustainable development, which has further been reinforced in the youth sector through the commitments to sustainability and green transition in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes and initiatives such as the Education for Climate Coalition and the 2022 Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, as well as the more specific GreenComp: the European sustainability competence framework. National and regional governments have also developed strategies for sustainable development, with more recent focus on future generations.

The current state of play on the theme of young people and climate includes several emergent topics. Examples are **reframing of the climate crisis** away from climate change mitigation, which typically focuses on technological fixes and incremental change, towards the systemic nature of the climate crisis, which is reframed as "climate justice" and "ecocide", and its differentiated effects on vulnerable or marginalised groups or communities, such as minority groups or young people in rural and remote areas.

In relation to **young people's participation**, young people's climate activism has moved the debate further from the social movements and climate protests towards a more targeted legal action with a

focus on climate and rights (including the right to a healthy environment and intergenerational justice), and approaches to claiming those rights including strategic litigation (lawsuits against States for not upholding rights obligations that seeks to bring about social change beyond the individual case), civil disobedience and direct action in the climate movement, in the context of increased criminalisation and repression of climate activism.

Moreover, a range of **climate emotions**, including “**eco-anxiety**”, is emerging as a theme requiring further research, including conceptual refining, understanding how young people are affected by it and in which context, and relating to the overall topic of mental health, which is a key component of youth wellbeing. Synergies with other fields, including psychology and psychiatry, are seen as potentially helpful in thinking about responses from youth policy and youth work.

Finally, **youth work and youth organisations** continue their efforts towards greening the youth sector, through education and training activities focused on the environment and climate justice, and practical guidelines for organising sustainable educational and learning mobility activities.

In this context, the Youth Partnership will organise a [Symposium: Young people, democracy and climate action](#) on 24-26 September 2024, to offer to the European youth sector an opportunity to discuss how young people are engaging with these issues, the main emerging topics and challenges, and how youth research, youth policy and youth work can adapt and respond to the changing context.

The Symposium will bring together 100-120 participants from the European youth field, including young people, policy makers, youth workers and youth researchers.

### Discussion questions

- 1) What characterises the shift away from climate change mitigation, towards the systemic nature of the climate crisis, including reframing it as “climate justice” and “ecocide” in the youth sector? What is needed to work jointly towards a just transition?
- 2) How are different groups of young people engaging with the eco-crisis? How has the shift towards climate justice impacted the goals, aims, methods, and style of climate activism?
- 3) How is the current eco-crisis impacting young people’s mental health and wellbeing? What type of climate emotions, including “eco-anxiety”, are emerging and how can the youth field respond to them?
- 4) What are the European, national, regional and/or local policy responses to the climate crisis and young people’s demands? Is there an overlap between youth and environmental policy?
- 5) How can youth work and youth organisations best engage with and support young people’s demands for climate justice? What skills do youth sector professionals need in this context?

### Objectives

The event aims to:

- Explore and contextualise the consequences of the climate crisis on young people and the youth sector in Europe, including young people’s changing way of engaging with the climate crisis and eco-anxiety;

- Examine and reflect on how youth policy and youth work can adapt to and respond to the changing context; What do youth workers need to respond to these changes?
- Share good practices of effective and successful youth policy and youth work in relation to youth climate action;
- Connect actors working on these themes, from within and beyond the youth sector, to continue, develop or innovate in relation to that work;
- Promote the Youth Partnership's existing research and resources on this topic as well as the work done by the partner institutions and other youth sector stakeholders;
- Provide guidance for further developing policy and youth work practice in this field.

### Timeline

- 27 February expert group meeting with the representatives of the European youth sector; to discuss the focus, objectives and methodology for the Symposium;
- End of April call for participants;
- May/June finalising selection of participants;
- April-August development of two research papers:
  - Climate emotions - impact of the climate crisis on young people's mental health and well-being;
  - Legal actions taken by young people against states;
- Early July preparatory meeting (organising team only);
- September Symposium, European Youth Centre Strasbourg (EYCS);  
publication of the Youth Knowledge Book: Youth and democracy in the climate crisis;  
podcast episode(s) (under the [Under 30' series](#)) on the topic of young people and democracy in the climate crisis;
- End of 2024 publication of the Symposium report;  
publication of visual and video materials and highlights;
- Early 2025 compendium of practices from the event on how young people and the youth sector are working on sustainability.

### Additional reading

The Youth Partnership has also contributed to this topic through a variety of publications and resources:

- Youth Knowledge Book on young people and democracy in the climate crisis (on-going);
- [Coyote magazine issue #35 on sustainability](#) (2023);

- Research on [sustainability and learning mobility](#) (2021-2023);
- [Greening the youth sector: Sustainability checklist, animated video](#) and [podcast](#) (2021);
- [Disobedient youth: Lessons from the youth climate strike movement](#) analytical paper and [What's up with the youth climate strike movement?](#) animated video (2021);
- [T-kit on sustainability and youth work \(2018\)](#).