



SYMPOSIUM REPORT

YOUNG PEOPLE, DEMOCRACY AND CLIMATE ACTION



Youth Partnership

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



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

This document is based on the detailed notes taken during the symposium, the five workshop summaries provided by rapporteurs and the feedback from the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

Moreover, the report does not claim representativeness of the views expressed during the symposium nor the broader debate on young people’s climate activism. Omissions are inherent. Nonetheless, we hope it captures the main messages and contributes to the discussion on young people, democracy and climate action.

The opinions expressed in this work, commissioned by the European Union–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of either of the partner institutions, their member states or the organisations co-operating with them.

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March 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 24 to 26 September 2024, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth hosted the symposium **“Young people, democracy and climate action”** at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, France. The symposium gathered 120 participants based in 30 Council of Europe member states, with a total of 34 nationalities, including young people, policy makers, youth workers and youth researchers. The event aimed to give the European youth sector an opportunity to discuss and engage with how youth research, youth policy and youth work can adapt and respond to the changing context of youth climate action and the state of democracy.

Over the three days, the symposium participants first mapped the existing ways young people engage with the climate crisis, then explored what had been done so far by different actors (policy, practice and research) and, finally, looked ahead at the competences, capacities and policies needed to move forward.

The event was structured around five thematic areas: young people’s mental health and well-being in the context of the climate crisis and eco-anxiety; local climate activism of young people; the global dimension of engaging with the climate crisis; the emergence of climate litigation; and multiple insecurities and intersectionality, and their relation to the climate crisis.

Looking ahead, participants proposed actions that are needed for and from the youth sector. Some of the recommendations targeted national governments and their role in defending and safeguarding the (young) environmental human right defenders and youth climate activists’ right to protest. Others focused on civil society and youth-led organisations and movements, urging them to consider economic models and other root causes as part of climate action, in their advocacy strategies and messaging. Recommendations were also made for schools and educational institutions to integrate critical media and science literacy on climate change in the curriculum, and for the development of skills and capacities of youth workers to provide support to young people in dealing with the eco-anxiety and other emotions surrounding the climate crisis.

Finally, a need was identified for the research community to further develop knowledge on eco-emotions and mental health in activism; and for other relevant actors, such as journalists, to amplify the voice of young people in climate reporting and to use youth-friendly language when reporting on climate issues.

Participants also developed a set of recommendations for the European Commission, Council of Europe and the Youth Partnership. These include: monitoring and promoting the right to protest; building knowledge on eco-emotions and youth work and providing training to youth workers; creating more spaces for young climate activists to connect and experiment with creative and new formats; increasing accessibility for young people to utilise climate litigation, including training and legal education for advocacy; and providing more support for green activities and green travel in the European Youth Foundation, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.



PART 1

SYMPOSIUM CONTEXT, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change officially warned in 2022 that the window of opportunity to secure a sustainable future was closing (IPCC 2022). Ecological disasters, such as heatwaves, droughts and rising sea levels, have severe societal consequences, including famine, food scarcity, instability, conflict and war.

Climate change also poses direct challenges to democracies in Europe. Increased migration flows, economic decline, growing income inequality and other effects strain governance systems and challenge institutional capacity (International IDEA 2021). Moreover, policies required to address climate change necessitate profound structural changes in economies and societies, and the spectre of these transformations is fuelling polarisation, resentment and a rise in radical right-wing populism within Europe (ECFR 2024).

At the same time, we have seen a rapid rise in young people's political action as a response to the climate crisis. The climate strikes that occurred worldwide in 2018, 2019 and around the 2021 Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as subsequent conferences, demonstrated that young people are at the forefront of climate action. They have taken a leading role by utilising experimental techniques and engaging in radical democratic practices (Sloam et al. 2022, Batsleer et al. 2022, Gorman and Kiilakoski 2024).

However, young people's activism is not without risks. As Amnesty International reports, there is a continent-wide pattern of repressive laws, the use of unnecessary and excessive force by police, and the increasing use of surveillance technology against climate protesters across Europe (Amnesty International 2024). So, while the climate activism of young people is increasing, pace for civic activism is narrowing.

Young people, however, persist in their advocacy of climate issues using a diverse range of tactics, such as continued protests at the global level, including

intergovernmental negotiations at the COP, as well as at the local level, with grass-roots campaigns addressing local environmental challenges, like fracking and coal mining (Gorman 2021).

In recent years, young people have also resorted to the use of climate litigation, meaning the use of lawsuits against the states, which aim to improve climate and environmental conditions. The number of climate litigation cases has doubled in recent years (Bárta and Tuménaitė 2024), indicating a reframing of the climate crisis as a justice and legal issue. Meanwhile, other adverse effects of climate change on young people are coming to the fore, like the worsening of mental health and eco-anxiety, which stems from the understanding that the climate crisis will affect the future lives of young people (Stapleton and Jece 2024). There is also an increased recognition of the intersectional nature of the climate crisis and that there are many other identities, in addition to age, that shape young people's experience of climate change and which mean that the effects are not evenly distributed. These include gender, nationality, class and geographic location, among others (Gorman 2021).

Within this context, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth hosted the symposium **"Young people, democracy and climate action"** from 24 to 26 September 2024 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, France.

The symposium fits within the broader aims of the two partner institutions in their policy responses to climate change. At the European level, the climate crisis features prominently on the institutional policy agenda of both the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Council of Europe reaffirmed its commitment to a healthy environment and a human rights-based approach to environmental protection in its **Reykjavik Declaration**, adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2023). The European Court of Human Rights is also strengthened by safeguards contained in the **European Convention on Human Rights** that address environmental protection (Vallado and Pasic 2024).

The Council of Europe's recently adopted recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on young people and climate action (October 2024) draws the link between democracy, climate and youth even more explicitly (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers 2024), recognising the increased hurdles faced by young environmental defenders when making their voices heard, and proposes measures to member states to protect their rights (Council of Europe 2024).

At the EU level, the European Green Deal is the overarching policy framework on the green transition (European Commission 2024), with its related initiatives such as the Nature Restoration Law (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2024) and the recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (Council of the European Union 2022). Together, these shape the EU youth sector's priorities through its commitments to sustainability in the EU youth programmes, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

SYMPOSIUM APPROACH AND STRUCTURE

The symposium gathered 120 participants based in 30 Council of Europe member states, with a total of 34 nationalities, including young people, policy makers, youth workers and youth researchers. Participants were selected through an open call and direct invitations, and special attention was paid to having a diversity of backgrounds, experience levels and other demographic considerations, including gender, age, an ethnic, religious or cultural background, and geography.

The event aimed to give the European youth sector an opportunity to discuss and engage with how youth research, youth policy and youth work can adapt and respond to the changing context in youth, democracy and climate action.

Michael Teutsch, Acting Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+, European Commission; Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy, Council of Europe; Jorge Orlando Queirós, Chair of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), Council of Europe; and Nina Grmuša, Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe, introduced institutional perspectives and policy priorities related to youth, climate and democracy.

The symposium was structured in three stages, with each day covering the following questions.

- Exploring the complexity:** where are we? Mapping ways of engaging with the climate crisis.
- Understanding the action:** what has been done by different actors (policy, practice and research) and what is emerging?
- Looking forward:** what is needed (competences, capacities, policy) to move forward?



These questions were approached from five angles, and participants worked together in thematic groups reflecting these themes.

1. **Young people's mental health in the context of the climate crisis.** Young people experience a range of emotions related to the climate crisis and its consequences: anger, sadness, hope and (eco-)anxiety, which affect their mental health and well-being (Stapleton and Jece 2024; Pihkala 2024). While the youth sector does not necessarily have the expertise in youth mental health, this thematic group focused on understanding the topic and existing support systems and the competences needed by the youth policy and youth work.
2. **Young people engaging with the climate crisis through local activism.** Young people engage at various levels with the climate crisis, including starting in their immediate surroundings. This thematic group focused on community- or locally based initiatives to address climate change.
3. **Global dimension of engaging with the climate crisis (movements, COP, etc.).** As climate change is a global crisis, the activism of young people is also targeted at the international level. This thematic group looked at young people's participation in global negotiations or international movements.

4. **Young people engaging with the climate crisis through climate litigation.** Increasingly children and young people utilising the court system and legal challenges to claim rights relating to climate change (Bárta and Tuménaitė 2024). This thematic group examined this emerging tactic in climate activism and explored its potential relevance for the climate action of young people.
5. **Multiple insecurities and their relation to the climate crisis.** Overlapping identities and vulnerabilities that can create differential effects of climate change on young people, this thematic group looked at how to respond to this complexity, in youth policy, youth work and youth research.

Thematic group sessions comprised theoretical and/or academic input from researchers or expert speakers, and practical workshops detailing the type of climate action young people engage in. The list of speakers and workshops is available in Appendix II.

In addition, the **Youth Knowledge Book #31 Youth and democracy in the climate crisis** was launched during the event. The book's editorial team presented the rationale and the content of the book, and its main findings.



PART 2

MAIN INSIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS

MAIN INSIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS

A. EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITY

“CLIMATE JUSTICE”: WHERE THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MEET

Climate change does not only have an ecological impact, but it also aggravates already existing cleavages in society: social and economic inequality, poverty and injustice. Therefore, young people are increasingly speaking not only of the climate crisis, but also of climate justice. This shift from the “climate crisis” to “climate justice” was explored by the keynote speakers. Eimear Manning, National Youth Council of Ireland, explained that climate justice is an overlap of the environmental crisis and social justice: “Climate justice means caring for the needs of the most vulnerable people while we care for the needs of the vulnerable planet.”

One example of such correlation is “eco-bordering”, which is a type of far-right environmentalism that uses ecological protection as a rationale for xenophobic border and migration policies. An environmentalist approach that includes liberal values of inclusion and respect for human rights is necessary.

Anuna De Wever Van der Heyden, Youth Climate Action Belgium, emphasised how this reframing means looking at systemic issues and root causes. As such, the crisis is not simply or only about climate change; it is a symptom of a larger crisis, that of capitalism. In this economic system, a focus on unlimited economic growth drives the dependence on fossil fuels and the dominance of corporations over politics, where only a few people benefit at the expense of many. For example, an Oxfam report recently found that due to the lifestyles of the world’s 50 richest billionaires, they emit more carbon in just under three hours than the average British person emits in an entire lifetime (Watts and Ambrose 2024). Therefore, striving

towards climate justice is within the frame of fighting for justice broadly speaking, which, in De Wever Van der Heyden’s analysis, means tackling systems of oppression that include capitalism, colonialism and white supremacy.

The concept of climate justice was further explored in the thematic groups, from various perspectives: eco-emotions, local climate activism, the global dimension of climate action, climate litigation and multiple insecurities. There was scepticism that “climate justice” is a new buzzword from civil society with little explanatory power. However, from the discussions, many participants demonstrated how their understanding of the climate crisis also includes considerations of social justice, similar to the conceptualisation provided by Manning in her keynote presentation, as described earlier.

For example, the thematic group dealing with the global dimension of climate activism discussed how youth environmental activism exists alongside other social justice campaigns. Participants emphasised that there is greater awareness of the impact of imperialism and colonisation on power distribution in global fora and in spaces such as the COP. The thematic group which examined the relation between the climate crisis and multiple insecurities discussed how climate justice could refer to the inequity between the Global North and Global South. In particular, the hegemony of international financial institutions (for example the World Bank, International Monetary Fund) pushed for liberalisation of markets in the Global South as a condition of loans. This has led to environmental degradation primarily concentrated in the countries of the Global South, making them the most vulnerable to climate change (United Nations Climate Change 2024). Similarly, the thematic group on local activism saw climate justice as relating clearly to upholding human rights for current and future generations. In framing it through the lens of human rights, activism at the local level therefore was part of sustaining and renewing democracy. The group dealing with the topic of climate litigation discussed how corruption and state capture make achieving climate justice difficult, given that the biggest polluters are corporations who lobby politicians. Therefore, addressing climate change would also require addressing the imbalance of power between corporate interests and the greater good.



SYSTEM CHANGE OR BUST? THE CHALLENGE OF “SMALL” ACTIONS IN THE FACE OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Symposium participants argued that climate justice means tackling the climate crisis’s ecological effects and social effects, such as deepening inequality, exclusion, exploitation and poverty. Addressing these additional dimensions requires not simply technical or policy change but systemic change. The familiar activist slogan “systems change, not climate change” repeatedly emerged throughout the symposium.

While participants broadly agree that long-lasting change requires a consideration of root causes, many expressed feeling overwhelmed by the task. The thematic group working on the topic of eco-emotions delved deeper into how young people experience climate change at an emotional level. Young people feel a lot of ambivalence because of the enormity of the problem of climate change. It was seen that solutions would require fundamental changes of people’s core beliefs about life in the modern, industrialised world. Powerlessness was a prevalent sentiment, contributing to eco-anxiety.

“Smaller” or more localised actions were described as more tangible for young people, such as greening practices at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg or during youth activities. Moreover, the group working on the topic of climate litigation noted that while legal actions against the states and large companies seem to be on the increase, such technocratic tools were not seen as appropriate for addressing the change at the systemic level. This is because rather than looking at system-wide change, such as reconsidering the functioning of the economic system, it is reactive and often seeks specific policy change. However, it is also noted that litigation can target change at one layer deeper than politics, as it operates from the perspective of fundamental rights. The respect for human rights undergirds most climate litigation cases, bringing states to task for their failure to protect basic rights, such as the right to life (for example by under-regulating industries), but also civic and political rights, such as the right to freedom of expression and assembly as it pertains to climate protests.

The age-old dichotomy between working “within the system” and “outside the system” was continuously debated. “Within the system” tactics included using formal participation platforms (such as youth advisory groups), working within institutions, engaging policy makers and focusing on incremental change

(sometimes involving compromise). In contrast, “outside the system” tactics were usually associated with street protests, direct action and, in some cases, civil disobedience to push for more radical measures. The group working on global dimension of climate activism discussed this dilemma, using the example of COP conferences as a context where the tension between these two types of approaches could be seen in the various youth activists who attend.

WHO ISN'T PRESENT? WHO IS MISSING? INCLUSIVITY AND CLIMATE MOVEMENTS

Climate justice is also about the inclusion of a diverse group of people in setting the aims of the climate movement and participating in the decisions regarding the ways in which those movements organise and operate. Many symposium participants agreed that climate movements should aim to consider the differentiated impact of climate change on different populations. In the thematic group exploring the connection between the climate crisis and multiple insecurities, participants emphasised how some voices are historically excluded, and bringing those voices into climate activism should be one of the main tasks.

However, several groups noted that current climate action falls short of this task. The group on global dimension of climate activism discussed concerns relating to climate activism being exclusionary. Research presented to the group by Sarah Pickard, from her book *Politics, protest and young people: political participation and dissent in 21st century Britain* (2019) looked at interviews with young black male climate activists, who reported a lack of recognition in activist circles. They also reported not being able to engage with climate activism in the same way as white climate activists, given that the impact of arrest can be much harsher for people of colour. The example of Vanessa Nakate, the black Ugandan activist who was cropped from a photo at a press conference in Davos with white youth activists, was brought up (Evelyn 2020). Relating to this, the group working on emotions discussed how diverse people may need diverse practices to deal with environmental emotions.

Differentiated effects on groups also need to be considered when looking at the impact of climate policies. For example, young people in rural areas often live in communities which are economically reliant on energy-intensive industries, such as coal or agriculture. A green transition will affect their way of life dramatically and, in many ways, negatively. This tension between youth environmental action



and rural scepticism towards the green transition is also mentioned by Théodore Tallent in his chapter “The challenges of the green transition for youth in rural France: addressing discontent, building a just transition”, in the Youth Knowledge Book #31 *Youth and democracy in the climate crisis*.

Participants proposed several ways forward to increase the inclusion levels of diverse groups of youth in climate movements, including more and better co-operation between youth civil society organisations (CSOs), particularly those comprising or working with communities facing marginalisation. Youth workers were seen as key to reaching out to such communities. However, more training was required to support this work effectively. Lastly, ensuring participatory decision making would hopefully allow more diverse voices to shape decisions on climate, helping young people of various backgrounds access rooms where policies are being discussed.

ECO-ANXIETY: AN EVER-PRESENT FEATURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S CLIMATE ACTION

There is much to be anxious about regarding climate change. In her keynote presentation, Manning introduced the concept of “solastalgia”, which she defines as “the opposite of nostalgia – to want a future you know you should have but will never have”. Manning highlighted that the ECO-UNESCO¹ study on eco-anxiety among over 1 000 young people in Ireland found that 97% of young people are concerned about climate change, and 33% do not feel they have enough knowledge or skills to engage with climate action. The study also showed that 65% feel anxious about climate change (ECO-UNESCO and Spunout 2022).

The thematic group dedicated to eco-emotions looked specifically at the mental toll of climate change on young people and explored the climate emotions wheel. Panu Pihkala presented a global study which examined how young people’s anxiety is fed by a feeling of being betrayed by their politicians (Hickman et al. 2021). This generation of young people has more awareness of emotions than previous generations, and eco-emotions are one manifestation of this. Other emotions related to eco-anxiety include anger, positivity, sadness and fear, as well as several others, which can be seen on a climate emotions wheel (Pihkala P2024).

While the focus was often on negative emotions, the group also discussed how eco-emotions can also be uplifting and part of a process to support people in searching for solutions. A model was presented to the group, which shows how climate emotions are often processed. It starts with a state of unknowing, leading to semi-consciousness and then a moment of awakening and shock. From here, a phase of coping and changing occurs, giving way to grieving, distancing and action as a way of living with an ecological crisis (Pihkala 2022). The climate litigation group reflected on how eco-anxiety can help raise awareness and elevate the urgency of climate change, which can motivate people to bring claims to court.

B. UNDERSTANDING THE ACTION: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND WHAT IS EMERGING?

“I DO ACTIVISM. I AM NOT AN ACTIVIST.”: THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE ACTIVIST LABEL

As youth climate action was the key pillar of the symposium, the participants also explored the ambivalence around the label “activist”. Firstly, there is no universal definition of what an activist is. For example, does lobbying your school to start a recycling programme make a person an activist? Or can only those who take more radical actions, such as gluing themselves to highways to block traffic, be considered activists? Does attending the 29th session of the COP to the UNFCCC (COP29) as an official youth delegate with your national delegation count as activism? The symposium provided a space for young people, researchers and policy makers to delve deeper into these questions.

Participants have raised the issue of heightened police repression of climate activists and environmental human right defenders, which can have a chilling effect on young people associating themselves with the label, regardless of how radical or not their political engagement may be. As highlighted by Manning in her keynote speech, in Germany, if police discover that you are planning a climate protest, you could be marked as a criminal organisation and detained for 30

¹ *Environmental Conservation Organisation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, an Irish environmental education and youth organisation that works to conserve the environment and empower young people.*

days through the protest date (Alkousaa and Jabkhiro 2023). The thematic group covering global dimension of climate activism also stressed that long-term prison sentences in the UK can affect a young person's desire to be part of institutions rather than oppose them, thus changing the political landscape.

Moreover, participants highlighted that there is a fine line between “activism for show” and activism that had “real power and impact”. This ambivalence on efficacy has a temporal aspect. Original Fridays for Future activists felt that their original strikes were no longer effective, and many migrated to different techniques or groups, such as Just Stop Oil, which utilises more direct-action techniques (BBC News 2024).

The thematic groups discussing climate litigation demonstrated how alternative tools to conventional activism are utilised to enact change. Strategic litigation is a tactic that, through an individual legal case, aims to bring about broad societal change on an issue to tackle injustice (ECCHR 2024). Strategic litigation works in opposition to the state, using the rule of law as the mechanism by which to hold states to account. However, it was noted that in contexts where the rule of law is not widely upheld, such a tool loses its efficacy when the government can simply ignore rulings.

BRINGING THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL, THE RADICAL AND THE REFORMIST, CLOSER TOGETHER

Participants discussed different tactics in the plenary, often asking the following questions. What is the best action plan? What will get us closer to where we want to be, which is a green and equitable future? As expected, some participants favoured more local activism, which involved engaging first the people around them, their schools, communities and local municipalities. Tangible and, in some cases, more immediate action – town-by-town, state-by-state and country-by-country – was seen as the most effective way to enact change. Others, such as those that operated at a policy level, favoured “larger” action, seeking big changes in industrial policy or environmental regulation. This was often seen as global action, taking place in decision-making fora such as the COP. Climate change was moving too quickly for anything less to be advocated for. These people wanted to see change at scale.

The thematic group on global dimension of climate activism questioned whether different climate action strategies could be combined. For example, more radical groups such as Just Stop Oil can use their techniques to raise the alarm on climate change, while others who work on policy or longer-term change can do the slow, strategic work. Instead of creating dichotomies, spaces or opportunities could be sought

where varying techniques could reinforce each other.

Moreover, participants recognised the importance of global negotiations, such as those at the COP, but also emphasised the need for continued efforts at the local level, particularly in changing attitudes and mindsets. After all, policies such as an emissions cap can drive structural changes to make society greener, but people's lifestyles, opinions and expectations also need to transform in order to achieve a green future. Participants advocated looking for multiple solutions and breaking down binaries in action to build solidarity and find collaborative ways of working.

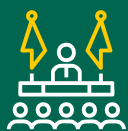
COLLECTIVE ACTION: AN ANTIDOTE TO CLIMATE ANXIETY

Climate anxiety, as a social and psychological phenomenon of climate change, is here to stay. However, beyond the political utility of the engagement of young people in climate action, participating and becoming engaged was also seen as an antidote to helplessness and despair. The eco-emotions thematic group highlighted how facing the emotions relating to climate change can help to guide young people towards imagining and constructing solutions. Far from debilitating action, confronting the negative emotions associated with climate change can push people to action. Stapleton and Jece (2024) confirm this connection and explore how recent youth sector responses to climate anxiety include supporting young people to channel their anxiety into activism.

Moreover, the social aspect of collective action can also push young people to connect and feel less alone. Working together in movement groups, strategizing collectively and in democratic ways, and exercising mutual care is a practice of prefigurative politics that aims to reflect a future society that young people wish to live in. Moreover, youth workers already use and employ skills that can help to support young people with climate anxiety, simply by being there for young people, sharing time and listening to them (Pihkala 2024). Therefore, participation and working together in groups and in communities can contribute to alleviating climate anxiety.

C. LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT ACTIONS ARE NEEDED?

The last day of the symposium focused on looking ahead. What actions are needed for the youth sector? What should national governments, civil society and youth-led CSOs and movements, schools and education institutions, youth workers, the research community and academia, and others, do?



NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- **defend** and safeguard the right to protest;
- **improve** meaningful youth participation in formal participation mechanisms relating to climate, including replicating co-management structures with young people;
- **build** the capacity of government representatives on the topic of climate litigation;
- **develop** a youth strategy that also includes consideration of measures and activities relating to climate change and climate action and the impact on future generations;
- **provide** stable funding to youth workers who support youth participation, especially in climate action;
- **conduct** regulatory impact assessments of climate policies under consideration according to age (for example youth checks);
- **include** youth delegates in their national delegations to international climate conferences.



CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUTH-LED CSOs AND MOVEMENTS SHOULD:

- **promote** intergenerational co-operation between established movements and new movements;
- **carry out** advocacy, communication campaigns and mobilisation concerning understanding eco-emotions and eco-anxiety, and their impact on young people;
- **consider** economic models and other root causes as part of climate action, and in advocacy strategies and messaging.



SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD:

- **integrate** critical media and science literacy on climate change in the curriculum;
- **provide** information about services available to young people relating to mental health and climate activism;
- **reform** teaching approaches to include embodied activities relating to eco-emotions and well-being.



YOUTH WORKERS SHOULD:

- **develop** skills and capacities around supporting youth and eco-anxiety through workshops;
- **create** awareness among young people about their own eco-emotions and how they might be affecting them;
- **provide** physical spaces and activities for young people to work through eco-emotions;
- **raise awareness** and knowledge among youth activists to apply for grants and get funding relating to climate initiatives;
- **support** opportunities for young climate activists to be in connection with policy makers;
- **support** interdisciplinary co-operation with others working on mental health and young people, such as healthcare workers, educators and policy makers.



THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY AND ACADEMIA SHOULD:

- **increase** knowledge on eco-emotions and mental health in activism;
- **more robust engagement** with the youth sector in research on youth climate action and stronger involvement of young people in research;
- **more research** on youth behaviours and climate change.



OTHERS RELEVANT ACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS

- **Local authorities** should provide more funding and support to local youth initiatives on climate.
- **Journalists** should use youth-friendly and easier-to-understand language when reporting on climate issues and amplify the voices of young people and the effects that climate change has on their lives.
- **Artists** should create platforms for artistic expression by young people on climate issues, such as visual arts, performing arts and literature, to support young people working through their eco-emotions and to spur public debate on the climate crisis.
- **Influencers** should be more engaged on social media on issues relating to climate change.



PART 3

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

The symposium discussions have an important role in the further work of the European institutions and the way they approach the topic of the climate crisis, particularly as both the European Commission and the Council of Europe pave the way for the development of policy instruments, such as the Council of Europe strategy on the environment and the European Commission's work on the development of the new EU Youth Strategy and Erasmus. The following recommendations from participants could guide the work of the institutions in the coming period.

MONITOR THE ADHERENCE TO AND PROMOTE THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are core tenets of any democracy. Participants expressed grave concern for the closing civic space throughout Europe concerning youth climate activists, where the right to protest is being eroded in multiple contexts. The European Commission and the Council of Europe should continue to make formal recommendations or statements related to the climate crisis and its impact on democracy, such as that of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers recommendation on young people and climate action (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers 2024). Adherence to and the upholding of the right to protest should be monitored by the Council of Europe, as a human rights body, and should include the views of young people and youth activists who have had experience of excessive state action in the course of climate activism.

BUILD KNOWLEDGE ON ECO-EMOTIONS AND YOUTH WORK, AND PROVIDE TRAINING TO YOUTH WORKERS

Eco-emotions, and especially eco-anxiety, were a recurrent and ever-present theme throughout the symposium. However, the youth sector's knowledge of the topic is still developing, particularly regarding practices and responses to support young people's eco-emotions. The Youth Partnership could play a role in building a knowledge base on eco-emotions as it relates to youth work practice. National agencies and the Education and Training Division of the Council of Europe's Youth Department could also provide training and capacity-building activities for youth workers on eco-emotions and young people.

Participants also hoped that more opportunities like the symposium would be provided by the Youth Partnership, for connecting, sharing ideas, inspiring each other, debating topics and approaches, and ultimately building collaboration and solidarity between other young people, youth researchers and youth workers.

In future events, participants would like to see different formats moving away from the standard presentation or panel version towards more interactive activities that foster sharing and connecting. Embodiment practices, such as those used in the eco-emotions parallel session, are encouraged to recognise the various eco-emotions that participants may be experiencing throughout a conference on climate change. Specific workshops on eco-emotions would also be welcomed by the youth sector.

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO UTILISE CLIMATE LITIGATION, INCLUDING TRAINING AND LEGAL EDUCATION FOR ADVOCACY

Participants recognise climate litigation as a powerful yet underutilised tool in climate action. More research on climate litigation, such as the situation mapping commissioned by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership (Bárta and Tuménaitė 2024), could help increase awareness of the tactic in the youth sector. Moreover, the Council of Europe Education and Training Division could provide training and legal education on the topic, particularly for legal practitioners, to exercise more climate litigation on behalf of young people. Similarly, workshops for youth workers to increase knowledge on climate litigation could also be provided.

MORE SUPPORT FOR GREEN ACTIVITIES AND GREEN TRAVEL IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FOUNDATION, ERASMUS+ AND THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

The European Commission, through its youth programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, could provide more support for green travel for youth participants. Green travel, often by train, can be more costly and time-consuming and is not often viable for many projects due to cost constraints. However, increasing the budget for travel to support alternate modes of transportation would push participants and youth organisations to opt for greener practices. At the Council of Europe level, European Youth Foundation could similarly provide more support for green activities and green travel alternatives.



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APPENDIX I – SYMPOSIUM AGENDA

23 September	Day 1 – 24 September	Day 2 – 25 September	Day 3 – 26 September
Arrivals	Exploring the complexity	Understanding the action	Looking forward
	Plenary session: setting the stage Welcoming speeches by: Matjaž Gruden , Director for Democracy, Council of Europe Jorge Orlando Queirós , Chair of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), Council of Europe Nina Grmuša , Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe Moderated by Tobias Flessenkemper , Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe Getting to know the group	Plenary moment Where do we find motivation for action? 2nd parallel thematic working groups What has been done by different actors (policy/practice/research)?	Plenary moment — 4th parallel thematic working groups What is needed (competences, capacities, policy) to move forward?
	Break		
	Keynote speeches Anuna De Wever Van der Heyden , Youth Climate Action Belgium Eimear Manning , National Youth Council of Ireland Setting the frame: from the climate crisis to climate justice Digesting and reacting to the inputs	3rd parallel thematic working groups Systemic view: what is emerging? Sensing/understanding changing ways of engaging with climate justice	Plenary session Insights and findings from the symposium — Institutional closing Tobias Flessenkemper , Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe Caillum Hedderman , Board Member, European Youth Forum Clotilde Talleu , Manager, Youth Partnership
	Registration	Lunch	
1st parallel thematic working groups Where are we? Mapping ways of engaging with the climate crisis/justice		Plenary session What are the ways forward? What actions are needed? — Launch of the Youth Knowledge Book #31	Departures
Break			
Plenary session Interlinking the main outcomes Announcements and closing of the day		Climate Action Fair Sharing projects, initiatives, resources	
Self-organised dinner	Dinner at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg Evening activity (documentary screening)	Reception and dinner at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg Ambassador Vesna Batistić Kos , Head of the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe Matjaž Gruden , Director for Democracy, Council of Europe	

APPENDIX II – PARALLEL WORKSHOPS AND SPEAKERS

THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS: WHERE ARE WE? MAPPING WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS/JUSTICE

1. Young people's mental health in the context of the climate crisis (for example feelings of eco-anxiety) – Panu Pihkala, University of Helsinki, Finland
2. Young people engaging with the climate crisis through local activism – Ben Bowman, Manchester Centre for Youth Studies & Department of Sociology, United Kingdom
3. Global dimension of engaging with the climate crisis (movements, COP, etc.) – Sarah Pickard, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (USN), Paris, France
4. Young people engaging with the climate crisis through climate litigation – Natalia Kobylarz, Senior Lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights, expert in environmental human rights law, and Sergey Dickman, Adviser on Strategic Co-operation Development, Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe, France
5. Multiple insecurities and their relation to the climate crisis – Henrique Gonçalves, SALTO Inclusion and Diversity

THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE BY DIFFERENT ACTORS (POLICY/PRACTICE/RESEARCH)?

1. Young people's mental health in the context of the climate crisis (for example feelings of eco-anxiety) – Juni Sinkkonen, Tunne ry, Finland
2. Young people engaging with the climate crisis through local activism – Afonso Borges, GAIA, Portugal
3. Global dimension of engaging with the climate crisis (movements, COP, etc.) – Sean Currie, Federation of Young European Greens
4. Young people engaging with the climate crisis through climate litigation – Alex Kassapis, YEE, Greece
5. Multiple insecurities and their relation to the climate crisis (poverty, rural youth) – Nataliia Yaroshenko, Ukraine





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