

# YOUTH ACTION FOR CLIMATE: COMPENDIUM OF PRACTICES



## Youth Partnership

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





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# INTRODUCTION

**“WE KNOW THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OFTEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ENSURING THAT DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WHERE THEY SHOULD BE. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE, THE BACKSLIDING OF DEMOCRACY, OR SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE, WE KNOW THAT OUR ACTIONS ARE A BAROMETER, AND OUR NEEDS ARE A COMPASS OF WHERE WE SHOULD BE GOING.”**

Nina Grmuša, Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe, in the opening speech at the Youth Partnership symposium: “Young people, democracy and climate action” (24 September 2024).

Today, all around Europe, young people are taking action in response to climate change. The climate strikes that emerged around the world in 2018 and 2019, and around the 2021 Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and subsequent conferences, are no longer receiving the attention they once had.

However, the decline in high-visibility mass student protests can be attributed to the rise of political repression and the increase in surveillance by states across Europe, rather than by the decline in youth activism (Amnesty International 2024). In the face of triple planetary crisis (climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution), democracy and young people's fundamental civic rights are also being challenged.

Despite these setbacks, youth climate action has not died down. Instead, it is transforming, taking different forms and democratic repertoires, as the climate catastrophe continues unabated. This compendium aims to capture a mere snapshot of the stories of activism and advocacy, by profiling examples of contemporary youth climate action.

This compendium follows on from the Youth Partnership symposium, “**Young people, democracy and climate action**”, held on 24-26 September 2024 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, France.

Considering the consequences that the climate crisis poses to democracies, including ecological disasters such as heatwaves, droughts and rising sea levels, famine, food scarcity, instability and their direct challenges, the topic still remains an important priority. For the Council of Europe, among other frameworks such as the Bern Convention, the Committee of Experts on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (PC-ENV) and the CM Recommendation on Human Rights and the Protection of the Environment, its commitment to environmental and human rights is enshrined in the Reykjavik Declaration (Council of Europe 2023), the European Convention on Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights 2021) and the recently adopted recommendation of the Council of Ministers on young people and climate action (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers 2024). At the EU level, green priorities fall within various policy programmes such as the Clean Industrial Deal, with its commitment for the EU to become a decarbonised economy by 2050, a new circular economy act under the new 2024-2029 European Commission (European Commission 2024a), the European Green Deal, as the overarching policy framework on the green transition (European Commission 2024b), 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 and the initiatives such as Green Erasmus+.

The compendium profiles 10 examples of youth climate action, organised according to the same themes discussed at the symposium.



**Global dimension of engaging with the climate crisis**, which covers youth activism at the international level.



**Young people engaging with the climate crisis through local activism** examines how young people take climate action in their immediate surroundings.



**Young people's mental health in the context of the climate crisis**, which explores young people's experience with 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 (Pihkala 2024; Stapleton and Jece 2024).



**Multiple insecurities and their relation to the climate crisis**, which covers action relating to overlapping identities and vulnerabilities that can create differential effects of climate change on young people.



**Young people engaging with the climate crisis through climate litigation**, which focuses on children and young people utilising the court system and legal challenges to claim rights relating to climate change.

The examples profiled here are not exhaustive, nor were they selected in a systematic way. The authors instead received recommendations from experts and participants who attended the symposium, using a snowball sampling approach to mapping the practices that relied on their networks, personal experience and research in the field of youth climate activism. Where possible, the authors attempted to provide a diversity of practices and geographic locations, however the selection is limited by the availability of the activists/practitioners that could be reached within the given time frame. Desk research was conducted using publicly available sources, and when possible, interviews were also held with the young people active in the initiatives.

The aim of this compendium is to continue and extend the conversations that began in September 2024 at the symposium by documenting real-life examples of youth climate activism. Providing ideas, reflection, and ideally inspiration, these practices serve to demonstrate that young people are continuing to take action in the face of mounting challenges to democracy and ecological collapse.



# GLOBAL DIMENSION OF ENGAGING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Across the globe, young people are redefining climate activism by engaging directly with international legal and political systems. Two standout initiatives (World's Youth for Climate Justice, WYCJ; and the Youth Negotiators Academy, YNA) demonstrate how young people are transforming the climate justice movement from their local lives to the highest levels of global diplomacy. They show that youth are not only demanding change: they are building the frameworks to achieve it.



**World's Youth  
for Climate  
Justice**

## WORLD YOUTH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE: ICJ ADVISORY OPINION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### DEFENDING CLIMATE RIGHTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

In 2019, a group of 27 law students from the University of the South Pacific decided to take matters into their own hands. Frustrated by the lack of meaningful progress, they founded Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC), an organisation dedicated to leveraging international law in the fight against climate change.

Today, that seed has grown into **World's Youth for Climate Justice** (WYCJ) a vibrant, global movement that has dared to challenge the status quo by turning to the highest judicial body on the planet: the **International Court of Justice** (ICJ) located in The Hague, in the Netherlands.

One of the young people helping to lead this global effort is Henrieke Bünger, a committed activist within WYCJ whose insights reflect not only a deep engagement with climate law and advocacy, but also a shared belief that legal systems must evolve

to protect those most at risk. The WYCJ initiative is not only a legal campaign, but also a generational call to action.

### WHY WOULD A GROUP OF STUDENTS USE INTERNATIONAL LAW AS A TOOL OF CLIMATE ACTION?

Their efforts gained momentum when in September 2021 the archipelago of Vanuatu announced its intention to seek an advisory opinion from the ICJ on the connection between climate change and human rights, following an initiative led by a youth group. At a regional meeting of Pacific states, Vanuatu was able to gain the support of 18 other countries, which positively acknowledged this proposal. Such an opinion would clarify states' legal responsibilities in addressing climate change, potentially setting a transformative precedent in international law.

However, achieving this objective required more than regional support. To pass in the United Nations General Assembly, the resolution needed a simple majority of the 193 UN member states. Recognising this challenge, the campaign expanded beyond the Pacific, mobilising support from youth and legal advocates worldwide.

What began as a local student initiative soon grew into a movement that would redefine climate activism on a global scale.

### THE STORY OF WYCJ IS ABOUT LEGITIMACY

The story of WYCJ is not only about legal strategy; it is about legitimacy. From the Caribbean to Africa, from Europe to South-East Asia, young people have stood up and said: "We are the ones inheriting this crisis and we have something to say about it." The movement did not wait for permission. It is organised across time zones, across languages, across systems of power that often treat youth as symbols, not as sovereigns. In doing so, a new space was opened up in the legal and political architecture of our time.

This happened in spite of being aware of the personal dangers involved in claiming this space. As Henrieke Bünger, a WYCJ activist from the Netherlands, remarked, “the right to protest is under threat and being suppressed immensely, with many young people being scared to engage in these manifestations due to unjustified discrimination, violence and future consequences” all over the world.

WYCJ established itself worldwide, created a broad network of activists and achieved visibility and impact within a very short time. In 2019, there were only 27 students; today, there are thousands of activists spread across the globe.

Specifically, they have organised themselves into different regions at a global level. As described by Bünger, “it was incredibly important for us to make underrepresented voices heard globally, and to ensure we can bring all parts of the world back to The Hague”. The main regions of activity are Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean.

### **WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONCERN OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE INVOLVED IN THE ORGANISATION?**

Some specific challenges include confronting the main global polluters and issues of accountability and historical responsibility.

WYCJ describes itself as “the stubborn optimists working from Europe on securing support for the ICJ Advisory Opinion on climate justice. WYCJ is an initiative that started in the Pacific, but if we want to make this a reality, all regions are needed!” (WYCJ 2025). The call is clear: European youth play a fundamental role in global generational responsibility.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, WYCJ lobbied for state and civil society support for the ICJ advisory opinion campaign. Youth from multiple countries engaged with legal advisors and contributed to ICJ proceedings. For example, in the [Caribbean](#), WYCJ partnered with several regional and international organisations like [BREEF](#), [Breadfruit Collective](#), [Roots](#), and [FXB International](#). In doing so, it also advanced its capacity-building efforts and developed regional training modules.

In Africa, WYCJ mobilised youth and stakeholders, fostering dialogue on climate justice and intergenerational equity. Capacity-building initiatives highlighting Africa’s vulnerability to climate change increased youth participation in ICJ-related discussions and submissions. WYCJ urged all stakeholders to unite in championing the ICJ

advisory opinion as a crucial instrument for climate justice.

**WYCJ Asia** has [mobilised youth](#) across the continent to advocate for the ICJ advisory opinion as a concrete tool against the climate crisis and to secure its place on the political agendas of Asian countries. Through [capacity building](#) and [advocacy](#), they aimed to inspire leaders to take decisive action. This led to invitations for [regional consultations](#), such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consultations on human rights and climate change, led by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in Malaysia in May 2023, and participation in drafting the ASEAN Peoples Declaration on Environmental Rights in Bangkok in August 2024.

### **WHAT HAS RESULTED FROM THIS WORK?**

According to Bünger, “we have successfully pushed for the opening of what is now the most important case in the world, not only the most important climate case globally, but also the case with the highest level of participation in history. We are making history thanks to the stubborn optimism of young people”.

This organisation is particularly interesting as it represents one of the most active global movements with direct influence on the world’s main judicial and political bodies. It is the first time that a group of young people from an island state has organised to request an advisory opinion before the ICJ.

Their approach is intersectional, addressing gender equality and the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and youth. By integrating these considerations into legal and policy discussions, they aim to shape more inclusive and just climate action strategies. Moving forward, they seek to further empower young people and vulnerable groups, ensuring their voices are represented in international climate processes.

### **ARE YOUNG PEOPLE DISENGAGING?**

As described by Bünger, youth climate action is evolving: “I would not necessarily say that [young] people are disengaging, quite the contrary ... I think we are mostly diversifying the ways in which we are engaging and fight the system from within, while keeping up public pressure through protests.”

WYCJ is deeply committed to intergenerational climate justice, recognising that young people, especially children and marginalised communities, are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. A significant part of their

work involves advocating for the rights of future generations and promoting legal frameworks that protect them from climate-related harm: “our main aim is to ensure that the climate crisis is recognised as a human rights crisis and that climate protection is deeply rooted in human rights law”, Bünger elaborated.

Furthermore, they are expanding their academic reach through contributions to publications and plan to participate in ongoing legal proceedings by submitting amicus briefs and conducting legal analysis to advance the legal field in this regard.



## YOUTH NEGOTIATORS ACADEMY: CLIMATE YOUTH NEGOTIATOR PROGRAMME

### TRAINING YOUNG ACTIVISTS AT CONFERENCES OF THE PARTIES (COP)

The **Youth Negotiators Academy** (YNA) was established in 2022 with the aim of redressing the systemic inequality in young people’s participation, both procedurally and in representation in multilateral environmental negotiations.

It seeks to equip young leaders with the necessary skills, knowledge, networks and resources to effect transformative change in decision-making processes. Although it is a programme supported by transnational public institutions and aimed at their development, the legal basis and initiative of the Academy is **Future Leaders Network**, a private British non-profit organisation.

YNA also strives to address systemic inequalities in the representation and leadership of young people within multilateral and environmental treaty negotiations, particularly focusing on the Three Rio Conventions (and their COPs):

- ▷ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- ▷ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
- ▷ Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

## A PROJECT TO INCLUDE YOUTH VOICES IN CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

For years, young people have led the most powerful climate movements around the world, but when it comes to actually shaping decisions on the future of our planet, too often they are left outside the room. YNA was created to change that, not just by opening the door to more young people, but also by building an academy for those who walk through it.

Veena Balakrishnan, a young activist from India and YNA co-founder and Axel Eriksson a young activist from Sweden and YNA training manager, explained that the heart of the Youth Negotiators Academy is about transforming global climate diplomacy.

YNA offers several key programmes:

- ▷ **Climate Youth Negotiator Programme (CYNP):** this programme trains, connects and empowers young negotiators to participate meaningfully in the UNFCCC negotiations.
- ▷ **Land Youth Negotiator Programme (LYNP):** launched in November 2023, LYNP aims to develop the next generation of land negotiators. It was implemented for the first time in 2024 at the 16th Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD.
- ▷ **Biodiversity Youth Negotiator Programme (BYNP):** YNA has committed to developing BYNP, expanding its activities to encompass all three of the Rio conventions. This initiative was announced at the 16th COP on the CBD in Cali, Colombia.

The inaugural programme, CYNP, focuses on removing systemic barriers, such as funding availability, for both capacity development and in-person participation at the negotiations. It offers a pro bono programme for all participating countries and their negotiators. It also supports as many young negotiators from the global majority and frontline countries to participate in-person at the COPs as part of their countries’ negotiation teams by funding their travel, accommodation and subsistence.

Under this programme, YNA funded 37 negotiators for COP27, 68 for COP28 and 53 for COP29, while also connecting other negotiators with different funding sources to ensure young people’s leadership and representation at these conferences were established (YNA 2024).

CYNP’s funding support facilitates not only the inclusion of young people within national negotiation teams, but also strengthens their country’s presence in multilateral settings, thereby advancing climate justice through participation justice.

## WHY IS YNA ORIGINAL?

YNA builds a community rooted in compassion and courage, committed to delivering outcomes that are not only technically sound, but also socially just. The initiative wants to highlight that multilateralism must evolve not only through laws and protocols, but through solidarity, imagination and shared leadership across generations.

For YNA, the climate crisis is not only a carbon crisis: it is a crisis of power, of voice, of access. YNA is showing the world that when young people are given the tools and the trust to lead, they do not only rise to the challenge, but they also raise the standard of what climate diplomacy can be.

As noted above, this initiative emerged in response to the lack of youth representation at COPs. Since 2005, COPs have included a space for young people: the Conference of Youth (COY), which takes place prior to the COP and involves youth delegates. Despite being an established space, young people have actively demanded to be present in the actual decision-making arenas.

Climate activists, Balakrishnan and Eriksson, became involved during their childhood. Later, as committed young persons, both started their UNFCCC journey through advocacy, and are now empowering others to step into international spaces. Their journeys embody YNA's mission: building a new generation of skilled, committed and inclusive climate negotiators, supported by engaged young people.

The issue of youth representation in climate negotiations inevitably raises the need to address the structural and systemic barriers that hinder their equal participation. Without overcoming these obstacles, the voices of those at the forefront of climate action will continue to be sidelined, limiting the effectiveness and inclusivity of global climate policies.





# YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

As the climate crisis intensifies, so too does its emotional toll on young people. Two pioneering initiatives – Youth and Environment Europe's project Dealing with Eco-Anxiety and Finland's **MIELI: Mental Health Finland** supported by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Tunne ry, and Nyyti ry – highlight the urgent need to address climate-related mental health. These programmes provide psychosocial tools, peer support and educational resources to help youth process eco-anxiety and build emotional resilience. By creating safe spaces and empowering young people to transform distress into action, these initiatives recognise that mental well-being is essential for sustainable activism and democratic participation in the face of ecological uncertainty.



## YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT EUROPE: DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY

### DRIVING ACTION ON CLIMATE-RELATED MENTAL HEALTH

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1983. In 2024, this organisation created a specific project called Dealing with Eco-Anxiety, which focuses on providing support to young people who are experiencing climate-related mental health challenges. The aim of the programme is to create safe spaces for young people to express their feelings, and to equip them with tools to cope with these emotions. The project supports this process in several ways:

- ▷ **Webinars.** Online sessions aimed at raising awareness of the topic with experts in

eco-anxiety research and psychology. "Understanding eco-emotions" explored core concepts in climate emotions, and "Diving deeper into eco-emotions: youth and activism" looked at topics relating to activism burnout and sustainable climate action.

- ▷ **Handbook: Youth, emotions, and the planet (2024).** The handbook aims to help readers explore their emotions, build resilience and find ways to channel anxiety into meaningful action. It was drafted by a team at Youth and Environment Europe, which included a project psychologist and the trainers of an in-person workshop to ensure that it responds to the needs identified by young people themselves.
- ▷ **Train-the-Trainers.** Targeted at youth workers, the training aims to equip participants with knowledge on eco-anxiety and mental health impacts, and enables them to gain an understanding of training methodologies and non-formal education techniques on the topic of eco-anxiety, and build the necessary skills in order to include eco-anxiety in their own youth training.
- ▷ **Resource pack.** A collection of online resources and materials relating to eco-anxiety and eco-emotions, including guides/booklets, articles, exercises, tools, webinars and Q&As. The resources are selected by experts from the project, and created by youth participants in their on-site training and workshop.

## WHAT ARE CLIMATE EMOTIONS?

Dealing with climate emotions necessitates the existence of an adequate vocabulary to explain them. Existing research attempts to provide a more coherent conceptualisation of this range of emotions (Patrick et al. 2022; Wullenkord et al. 2021).

Pihkala (2022) provides a taxonomy of climate emotions through his comprehensive Climate

Emotions Wheel. In addressing this foundational challenge, this visual tool aims to equip young people with the knowledge and awareness to be able to identify an emotion and its cause as a first step to being able to adequately address it.

## CLIMATE EMOTIONS AS A TOOL FOR ACTIVISM

While it is not accurate to say that simply feeling a certain climate emotion will lead to action (Chapman, Lickel and Markowitz 2017; Innocenti et al. 2023), the process explores the possibility that eco-anxiety can be addressed by channelling it towards activism, particularly for existing activists. Using webinars, handbooks and training, the approach adopts a holistic understanding of activism, which considers the role of emotions and the well-being of activists alongside their political, strategic and tactical work, thus promoting sustainability and the mental health of activists themselves, and of the climate movement as a whole.

### INTERVIEW WITH HANNA TRÆLAND ROSTØL, PROJECT LEADER, DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY, YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT EUROPE



#### Q: What was your motivation to join Youth and Environment Europe?

**A:** I was a climate activist from quite a young age, mostly in Norway, where I'm originally from. I've worked mostly on the local level, but in Youth and Environment Europe, we work all across Europe, and I found this very interesting to get involved in activism on a European level. Because we're dealing with different challenges, but obviously we all have a common goal. It's very inspiring to get connected with like-minded people from different countries.

#### Q: Can you tell us a little bit more about how the eco-anxiety project came about?

**A:** The environmental crisis is a very emotional issue, especially for young people. We wanted to do a project specifically related to the emotional impact of climate change, which we have all experienced, but which we know hasn't been explicitly addressed in the past. Young people are really lacking knowledge and resources on how to deal with it.

#### Q: Why do you think working on eco-anxiety is important?

**A:** Unfortunately, we see that if people lack the skills and knowledge to be able to deal with eco-emotions, it can isolate them. This means that they are not able to take action because the whole issue feels too overwhelming. So, we want to address its emotional impact, to make the climate activist space a healthier one for the people that are in it, but also for those young people who are not really involved in youth activism. They are still experiencing the emotional impacts of the news they see every day. It's a question of well-being for young people in general.

#### Q: What are some challenges you face?

**A:** One of the challenges is a lack of knowledge and awareness about eco-emotions in general. We see that with the people we've been working with, they lack the vocabulary to even address these questions at all, despite having experienced all these emotions. Another problem is the lack of spaces to be able to talk about these issues. We wanted to create safe spaces where people can discuss it, because they experience a lot of judgment, since many don't take the emotional impacts of the climate that seriously.

#### Q: Is it related to a broader trend, of youth mental health being underappreciated?

**A:** Yeah. I've met some people who find it difficult to understand why we need to focus on emotions at all. They ask, isn't this just a digression? It's just stealing time from the action. But our approach is: no, to be able to have sustainable activism, it's essential to address the mental health of activists. In the activist space, they feel so strongly about the issue that they have an extremely developed sense of urgency. But the problem is that they burn out. So we need to act wisely and in a way that the action can be sustained on a long-term basis.

#### Q: What is the most concrete demand you have for European authorities to support the aim of your action?

**A:** The core of Youth and Environment Europe is for young people to be involved in decision-making processes at a European level. Not just as a symbolic act, but to give youth actual agency. We see that a lot of eco-emotions are related to hopelessness, and this relates to feeling like we have a voice but we're not able to make a difference.

### Q: What gives you hope?

**A:** What gives me hope is seeing these incredibly dedicated and inspiring young people across Europe, who are fighting so hard. We see how difficult it is, and the emotions that lie behind the work that they do. But despite this, they are still motivated. I think that's the number one thing that gives me hope.



## TUNNE RY, NYYTI RY AND MIELI MENTAL HEALTH FINLAND: THE ECO-CRISIS, OUR FUTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

### PROVIDING SUPPORT TO THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY CLIMATE ANXIETY

**MIELI: Mental Health Finland** (2023-2025) is a project supported by the NGOs, Tunne ry and Nyyti ry, which aims to support people who are vulnerable to environmental anxiety. These are people identified as working with or studying environmental sciences, people with a strong environmental identity, young people, individuals with other burdening life experiences and students. The goal of the project is to offer them psychosocial tools to protect their mental well-being, build supportive communities and increase their overall mental resilience. The project focuses on five specific areas.

- ▷ **Individual support and guidance.** Free discussion or chat support (maximum 45 minutes) with a project employee over the phone, video (Zoom or Google Meet) or by email.
- ▷ **Group and peer support.** WhatsApp group to share current news and social media content, then discuss and digest it as a group; participation is voluntary, and everyone can choose to speak or not speak.
- ▷ **Self-directed exercises.** Online activities on topics including meditation, reflecting on climate feelings, visioning exercises on desirable futures, and crafting compassionate words and concepts.
- ▷ **Resources.** Tools, articles and guides,

such as "A brief guide to eco-emotions: an information pack for activities with young people and students".

- ▷ **Support for parents and professionals.** Resources, workshops, training and networking opportunities, such as the Mental Health in Eco-Crisis Network aimed at parents, teachers, youth workers and other professionals working on the topic.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACHES TO ECO-ANXIETY

Addressing and coping with eco-anxiety requires relational processes (not simply individual processes), as well as social support from trustworthy adults to support young people in such processes (Pihkala 2024). This project combines a variety of psychosocial approaches, which is why it was chosen. It provides direct mental health support to young people (individual and group) who are dealing with difficult climate emotions, in addition to self-directed exercises and resources. It also addresses climate emotions within a larger ecosystem of support, targeting parents and other professionals (such as teachers, youth workers and healthcare staff) that work with young people. Therefore its innovation lies in its multimodal approach, which treats climate emotions not simply as an individual challenge, but one that requires community and system-level interventions.

## WHAT INSIGHTS DOES THIS PRACTICE SHOW US ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND CLIMATE ACTION?

The ways that climate is handled in the political realm can evoke emotions among young people that range from indignation to enthusiasm (ibid.). Young people can also experience resentment due to a lack of recognition from adults, impacting intergenerational relations (ibid). Using a variety of methods to support young people in processing their climate emotions can help them to navigate the feelings caused by the eco-crisis, in turn increasing their resilience, and allowing them to strengthen their personal capacities to be able to act as citizens.



## INTERVIEW WITH TANELI SAARI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TUNNE RY – KÄNSLA RF

### Q: How does your NGO, Tunne ry, support young people?

**A:** Our organisation provides support for climate emotions for all ages. But one day we received survey results that told us that young people experience more anxiety and worry about the future. This uncertainty touches them more than older people. This is something we thought, but the survey results confirmed that. So it was sort of natural that we would have a specific project that targeted people under 30 years, and it became one of our main activities.

### Q: What kinds of supports do you provide to young people?

**A:** We provide different kinds of group supports, like peer groups and workshops. Teachers invite us to their school, and we do visits, sometimes in a psychology course at a workshop. We also provide individual support, where young people can call us, book a video call, or write to us. It's kind of like counselling but it's not therapy, and they get support to process these emotions, confidentially and free-of-charge. We also train professionals, like youth workers, teachers, as well as psychologists who work in social care and healthcare.

### Q: What motivated you to work in this field of climate emotions?

**A:** It hit me about a decade ago, when I personally went through a climate anxiety phase. I was talking to a friend about it, who is a psychologist, and it turned out that she was experiencing the same thing. We shared our experiences with each other, and gained an understanding of how serious it was, and how the science was starting to say that climate emotions were a real thing that exists and is impacting people. I have a background in social work, and she has a background in psychology, and with our education and professional experience, we had these tools and methods to process our own emotions and thoughts together. But we wanted to share this with other people, somehow, because we felt that climate emotions and climate anxiety was going to be a big, big thing, later on.

### Q: Why do you think that within the realm of mental health support providing support specifically on climate emotions is important?

**A:** The climate is a really polarising topic. I've been working for 20 years in the social work sector, and there's no other topic that has been so politically polarising. So, when young people want to talk about the climate, they sort of scan the room first, to see if it's OK to talk about, because someone might judge you. They know that there could be people there that say that climate change isn't real, or that don't believe in the science.

So, if a young person says they are worried about the climate, others can respond and say that they are worrying about nothing, or that it's not so serious to have anxiety about. So we saw the need to bring together people who experience the same things, can share their thoughts, and who can understand that these feelings and emotions are real.

### Q: If you were in public office tomorrow, what would be the first thing you would change based on your experience with this work?

**A:** We are a sort of Band-Aid – we can stop the bleeding for a while, but our work doesn't cure the disease, and the disease is inaction at the political level in climate policy.

On top of that, if I was in Finnish public office, I would cancel the budget cuts to mental health services. [Recently], they made the announcement that for funding in 2026, our programme can't apply. So we've had funding for six years and now we just found out we can't apply for more. So I would definitely cancel that decision.

### Q: In spite of this, what gives you hope? What are you looking forward to tomorrow?

**A:** We have been meeting with climate psychologists from other EU countries, but also the US and Australia. The circle of people who work on this topic is still pretty small, but it really connects people across continents. So we are going to continue co-operating, thinking of different projects, and try to gather more funding from different sources, like foundations. We want to share our expertise, and push this new mindset, to push the idea that climate emotions aren't just about treating the individual, it's also about treating communities.



# YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS THROUGH CLIMATE LITIGATION

Young people are increasingly turning to climate litigation as a powerful tool to demand environmental justice and systemic change. Organisations like the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) are empowering youth through legal support, training and advocacy. From landmark court cases to the creation of the Youth Climate Law Hub, these initiatives highlight the critical role of youth in shaping environmental law and policy. By bridging activism and legal expertise, young leaders are challenging institutions, influencing international frameworks and ensuring their voices are heard in the fight against the climate crisis.



CENTER for INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

## CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW: YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN LEGAL ACTIVISM

### THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The **Center for International Environmental Law** (CIEL) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion and defence of international environmental law. Through legal strategy, CIEL works to protect the environment and promote environmental justice globally. CIEL was founded in 1989 with the goal of using international law to address emerging environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. Since its establishment, it has been a pioneer in integrating law and policy for environmental protection.

CIEL has a diverse pool of lawyers, advocates and public policy experts. Its board of directors is composed of professionals with extensive

experience in environmental law, human rights and sustainable development. The organisation also collaborates with a wide network of partners and allies, including NGOs, affected communities, and public and private sector actors. The organisation specialises in three main areas of activity, all of which involve young professionals from different parts of the world.

- ▷ **Litigation and legal advocacy.** CIEL engages in strategic legal cases aimed at holding governments and corporations accountable for environmental harm and human rights violations related to the environment.
- ▷ **Policy advocacy.** The organisation works with governments, international organisations and other stakeholders to influence policies and laws that promote environmental justice and sustainable development.
- ▷ **Research and education.** CIEL produces reports, analyses and educational resources on critical issues in international environmental law and trains lawyers, advocates and communities in using legal tools to protect the environment.

Through its Protocol campaign, CIEL works across Europe with hundreds of civil society groups, legal experts and youth activists to push for this change.

- ▷ **Over 470 civil society organisations.** A diverse coalition comprising environmental groups, human rights advocates, youth organisations and academic institutions.
- ▷ **More than 190 scholars and experts.** Academics and professionals contributing research and insights to strengthen the campaign's foundation.
- ▷ **Regional and international institutions.** Organisations such as ENNHRI (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions) have reiterated calls for a binding protocol, emphasising its importance for environmental justice.

This broad-based support underscores the campaign's significance and the collective commitment to advancing environmental human rights in Europe.

## WHAT IS CIEL'S ROLE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, AND WHAT IS THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CIEL?

CIEL has played a fundamental role in supporting climate litigation led by young people, as indicated below.

- 1. In Europe** in 2022, in the case of *Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Others*, where six Portuguese youth filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights against 33 countries. It highlights the important role played by CIEL, in co-operation with numerous non-profit youth organisations and national youth councils, in supporting participation by providing technical-legal support in the call for the adoption of an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. In addition to general support through informal networks of young people involved in climate litigation, CIEL was one of the organisations that formalised an amicus brief to the Court in support of the case.
- 2. In Americas**, the landmark case *Juliana v. United States*, where 21 young people sued the United States government, alleging that its policies that exacerbated climate change violated their constitutional rights.
- 3. In Asia**, the amicus curiae participation in the case *Kim Do Hyun et al. v. Korea*, before the Constitutional Court of South Korea in 2021, highlighting the impact of the climate crisis on young people and future generations.

Furthermore, CIEL itself includes many young people committed to changing traditional legal frameworks. Camilla Pollera, Programme Associate at CIEL who works in their initiative, **Healthy Environment Europe** described why timing is crucial for climate litigation: "We are now in a very political phase where states play a key role in adopting an additional protocol within the Council of Europe. Mobilisation at the local level is essential right now: citizens must put pressure on their governments. This is a crucial moment."

The **Healthy Environment Europe** initiative is a prime example of the significant power of young legal activism. It seeks not only a modern reinterpretation of existing law, but also genuine legislative change. The aim is to adopt an additional protocol (binding

law) to the European Convention on Human Rights. This initiative has garnered the support of more than 500 NGOs (as of January 2025), including several very important youth organisations (such as WYJC, YEE and Youth for Climate), as well as national youth councils, political youth organisations and even religious youth organisations. The content of the Protocol request is formulated in line with the contents of the UN Human Rights Council in Resolution 48/13 of 2021 and the UN General Assembly in Resolution A/76/300 of 2022, with the aim of improving guarantees at the European level.

Over the past 25 years, CIEL has trained more than 500 interns and fellows (the overwhelming majority of whom are young people) from 54 countries, providing them with practical experience in international environmental law. These programmes, carried out in collaboration with institutions such as the American University Law School in Washington and in Geneva, Switzerland, offer young lawyers the opportunity to participate directly in urgent environmental issues, thereby fostering a new generation of skilled leaders committed to environmental justice.



## YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT EUROPE: YOUTH CLIMATE LAW HUB

### IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**Youth and Environment Europe** (YEE) is an independent pan-European network that brings together 45 youth environmental organisations in 24 countries. Its mission is to unite these organisations to foster international co-operation, increase awareness of the climate crisis, raise consciousness about environmental issues, and strengthen youth participation in environmental decision making. As part of its work in environmental law and litigation, YEE aims to become a hub for young people and youth movements seeking to launch their own climate litigation initiatives. It actively participates in the Aarhus Convention, the European UN treaty that guarantees access to justice and public participation in environmental matters.

YEE launched the Youth Climate Law Hub (YCLH)

in 2023 under the **Legal Seeds** project. In a world where access to environmental justice remains a challenge, especially for young people, this initiative builds bridges between youth activists and legal experts. It offers pro bono legal support, training and a community of practice for those ready to take environmental issues to court.

According to Emma Pagliarusco, Advocacy Lead, YEE, “The goal of our network is to enable discussion and build capacity among youth groups willing to undertake legal action on (primarily) climate and environmental law ... Moreover, the YCLH serves as a vital link between youth organisations and legal experts, empowering young people to navigate and engage with environmental and climate law more effectively.”

Pagliarusco described three main challenges:

- ▷ **Funding:** one of the most pressing challenges is securing stable funding to ensure the continuity of these initiatives. Many youth-led projects, including climate litigation efforts, depend on external grants, which can be uncertain and inconsistent.
- ▷ **Legal barriers:** in climate litigation, young activists often face significant legal and procedural hurdles, such as high litigation costs, lack of access to pro bono legal support and prolonged court proceedings.
- ▷ **Limited institutional recognition:** while youth advocacy and activism are gaining traction, young voices still struggle to be taken seriously in high-level decision-making spaces, particularly in legal and policy frameworks.

Despite these, Pagliarusco offered some optimism about the opportunities that exist with youth and climate litigation:

- ▷ **Strengthening cross-border co-operation:** initiatives like the Global Dialogues for Climate Justice and the Youth Climate Law Hub create opportunities for youth across different regions to collaborate, share knowledge and build stronger advocacy strategies.
- ▷ **Innovative legal strategies:** climate litigation is an emerging tool that has the potential to hold governments and corporations accountable. Strategic cases, like those supported by YEE, can set legal precedents that drive systemic change.
- ▷ **Amplifying youth-led solutions:** by integrating nature-based solutions and youth perspectives into global policy discussions, initiatives can influence long-term climate

strategies, ensuring that young people play a central role in shaping climate justice frameworks.

Pagliarusco gave an indication of what the future looks like for YEE in the area of climate litigation: “Looking ahead to 2025-2026, we plan to further develop the Global Dialogues for Climate Justice project with a specific focus on nature-based solutions (NbS) and the role of youth in implementing and advocating for these solutions. Our objective is to strengthen cross-border youth networks leading up to COP30, fostering collaboration between young people from the Global North and Global South. Through this initiative, we aim to develop bottom-up, youth-driven national and global visions on NbS, ensuring that youth voices play a central role in shaping climate justice discourse and solutions.”

## WHAT IS NOTEWORTHY ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE?

What makes YEE truly stand out is its intersectional approach: it acknowledges that climate justice is deeply linked to social justice and brings this awareness into every project. Through workshops, volunteering, non-formal education and direct advocacy in global and EU institutions, YEE prepares young people not only to raise their voices but to be heard.

To make all of this a reality, YEE is guided by four principles: youth-led, youth-centred, independent and legitimate. These principles are evident in all its projects, including the Hub.

As Pagliarusco explains: “One of our key advocacy initiatives is our participation in the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP), where our board and staff represent YEE. Our primary focus is on influencing the European Union and its member states to adopt ambitious positions in international climate negotiations and policy-making processes.”

The Youth Climate Law Hub is one of the first initiatives in Europe that provides young people with a structured, supportive pathway into the complex world of climate litigation. Many young activists care deeply but feel unprepared to navigate legal systems. YEE is changing that by offering skills, resources and real opportunities to make a legal difference.

YEE has received recognition for its work. According to Pagliarusco, “In addition to our advocacy work, we co-lead the **Global Dialogues for Climate Justice** project in collaboration with We Are Tomorrow Global Partnership (WAT-GP). The collaboration

brought together four YEE European member organisations and four member organisations from WAT-GP from the Global South. Launched in 2024, the project aimed to empower young people in advocating for climate justice by facilitating cross-border discussions. A key milestone of this initiative was the participation of project attendees – many for the first time – at COP29, where they had the opportunity to engage directly with global climate negotiations and present their national agendas. The project's impact and innovation were recognised when it was selected as one of the 14 awardees of the **2024 Global Education Youth Award**.”





# YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS THROUGH LOCAL ACTIVISM

Local activism offers young people a powerful entry point into climate justice. Ireland's Future Generations Climate Justice Project and the British Council's Active Citizens Programme empower youth (especially from marginalised communities) to address climate challenges in their own environments. Through non-formal education, leadership training, and community-based projects, these initiatives foster civic engagement and amplify youth voices in policy spaces. From water testing to food waste reduction, young participants transform local concerns into global awareness. These practices show that meaningful climate action begins with listening to young people where they are – and supporting them to lead change from the ground up.

and **Gaisce – The President's Award**, with **1Planet4All** (a project of **Concern Worldwide**). It acts as a supportive organisation, which helps to link local climate justice projects in Ireland with other local projects around the world. The **National Youth Council of Ireland** is the lead agency that manages the funding for the NGOs and provides subject matter expertise on the topic of climate justice.

The various projects create space for young people from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds (including rural youth) to explore the topic of climate justice, and develop their skills to become advocates of climate justice with policy and decision makers at the local and regional levels.

Using non-formal education and youth work approaches, the projects support the social inclusion and meaningful participation of young people who are typically missing from the climate discourse. There are also resource kits, such as **How to Create Change at the Local Level** and **How to Get Young People Involved in the Climate Justice Movement**.



## NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND – FUTURE GENERATIONS: CLIMATE JUSTICE PROJECT

### YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS THROUGH LOCAL ACTIVISM

The **Future Generations: Climate Justice Project**, hosted by the National Youth Council of Ireland, aims to bring to the fore the voices of young people who are frequently missing from the climate debate: young people from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as from rural areas where people are often at risk of isolation. Since 2020, the project has been seeking to ensure that the voices of young people from vulnerable backgrounds are represented in national and global policies.

The 2023-2024 round of the Future Generations project is a consortium between three NGOs: **Sphere 17 Regional Youth Facility**, **YMCA Ireland**

### WHAT IS NOTEWORTHY ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE?

This project showcases how young people can engage with the climate crisis at a personal and home/community level, and can also activate a young person to push for more structural changes at the policy/political level. Utilising the youth work principle of “meeting young people where they are at” and focusing on the challenges in their immediate surroundings, the example in the interview below describes an environmental challenge (in this case, accurate information about drinking water quality) that originates within one’s own family, and how responses must therefore be at the community level. The experience of addressing climate misinformation at the interpersonal level demonstrates to a young person self-efficacy in addressing a climate-related issue, and springboards them into taking interest in wider ecological issues (e.g. water quality impact on marine life). The result is a motivation to engage more at the structural level on climate issues, and pushing for policy change.

## BRIDGING A DIVIDE BETWEEN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CLIMATE ACTION

As discussed by Henn, Sloam and Nunes (2021), if young climate activists are predominantly “post-materialist young people expressing cosmopolitan values”, what about the youth who struggle to meet their material needs? This initiative showcases youth work approaches that attempt to bridge a perceived divide between social justice and climate activism, in two ways. The first aims to focus thematically on the human rights issues relating to the climate crisis, while the second focuses on bringing into the climate debate the voices of young people from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds where they are often excluded. Reflecting on how more inclusive responses to the climate crisis could be constructed, this project shows ways forward to building more participatory (and therefore more representative) approaches to climate activism.

### INTERVIEW WITH EIMEAR MANNING, YOUTH AND CLIMATE JUSTICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND



**Q: Tell us about when you got involved with the National Youth Council Ireland, and the work you do there.**

**A:** Back in 2017, I worked more with the formal education sector, so all my work was done within the confines of schools. At the time, there was no real formal context for climate education. So I didn't really feel like my own personal interests fit within the formal education system. When there was a role for a climate justice person at NYCI, they asked if I would like to apply. A whole new world opened in front of me as to what I could do in terms of non-formal education and local-level projects specifically related to climate.

**Q: Can you describe for me what the Climate Justice Project is all about?**

**A:** We technically have four organisations that are members of the Climate Justice Project. The organisations are Gaisce – The President's Award, Sphere 17 Regional Youth Facility, YMCA Ireland and Concern Worldwide as a supportive member, meaning their main role is to link up local projects with other local projects in the Global South. The overarching theme is climate justice, and it links all of the local projects together.

**Q: What is a concrete example of a local project under this initiative?**

**A:** I can describe the project from one group, Sphere 17. The organisation is a North Dublin-based youth organisation, operating in areas that are very low on the socio-economic scale. Many of their young people can come from family backgrounds where parents or guardians would have narcotics issues, are young people who are doing poorly in school or who have dropped out, or who face challenges with racism. Sphere 17 works with these young people to give them a safe space to explore topics that they are interested in.

As a climate educator, you sometimes have this assumption that some young people do not have climate at the forefront of their minds. They have so many other issues they are dealing with, you almost feel guilty to try and discuss the climate crisis, on top of all of the other challenges they are already experiencing.

**Q: So how do you broach the topic of climate justice with this group of young people?**

**A:** The topic last year for the Climate Justice Project was water, and accessibility to water. We went to this group and said, “Listen, you might not have an interest in water, you might have never thought about water before, but just out of curiosity: what do you think of when I say the word ‘water’?”

One of the young people said, “My mom keeps buying bottled water, because she says the government is adding things to the tap water and she doesn't want to drink it. But I hate bottled water because I know it's bad for the environment.” So we said, bingo, let's have a look at that.

We decided to do a huge local project on water testing. We bought these really intensive water test kits and trained the young people how to test the water. They went to their homes, their youth centre, their schools – they tested the water everywhere. And what they found out is that the water is completely clean in every area where one might think it would be dirty, contrary to what some people in their community believed.

But their findings didn't stop there. There is one particular parameter called KH (carbonate hardness), which they discovered that in their local beach, it was way too low. They started

asking, well what does this mean? They started researching it and it turned out that while a low KH level is not damaging for humans, it's very damaging for shellfish. This led them to research more about shellfish, and they discovered all the benefits of having shellfish in Irish waters.

**Q: What did they do with this information?**

**A:** They decided, for the first time ever, that they wanted to talk to somebody in power about this. They had always been so disillusioned with talking to people who make decisions, like policy makers. They just assumed that these kinds of people didn't care about what they had to say.

But for them, it became a big enough issue [the KH levels in the water], that they wanted to talk to someone about it. So when Sphere 17 was hosting a public event for the anniversary of their organisation, and a minister was invited to attend, the young people from this group asked, "Is there any way we could grab him aside for a minute at this event, just to tell him about our project and what we found, and that we want the government to clean up the water, so that the KH levels are better for the shellfish?"

That was such a massive thing for a group who had been saying, don't even put me in the same room as any policy maker, they don't understand me. Now they were going, can we just grab him for 10 minutes to have a chat about shellfish? That was an amazing shift.

**Q: So it sounds like climate justice can be an entry point, for political participation, but also social inclusion.**

**A:** Absolutely. To be honest, the conversation sometimes cannot start at a topic as large as climate justice, because the group might just not be there yet. One of the biggest principles in youth work is meeting young people where they are at. So, to have that conversation, you have to rein it back and say, "What are you interested in?" and start from there.



## BRITISH COUNCIL: ACTIVE CITIZENS PROGRAMME

### BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE TOGETHER TO ADDRESS LOCAL CHALLENGES

The Active Citizens Programme<sup>1</sup>, established in 2009, and implemented until 2021 aimed to equip young people with social leadership skills to build trust and understanding within and between communities. The training followed a "learning journey", which builds self-awareness and confidence, demonstrates how to value the needs and perspectives of others, and deepen understanding of the key systems that make up today's contemporary society. The aim was to inspire participants to engage peacefully with others and instigate lasting change.

Active Citizens was a leadership training programme that had the following components built around a model that is called "the river":

Figure 1: "The river" learning journey. Adapted from British Council (2021).



<sup>1</sup> The programme ran from 2009-2021, although networks, learnings and insight from the programme continue to inform ongoing British Council programmes in social leadership and non-formal education. The programme was also part of British Council Climate Connection programme Together for our planet | British Council.

Active Citizens involved three groups of actors.

- ▷ **Partners.** Local organisations that operate in the social justice field, with experience in working with volunteers and diverse groups. They have in-depth knowledge of the community and voluntary sectors in their area, as well as understanding of potential conflict dynamics. They were responsible for delivering the programme locally.
- ▷ **Facilitators.** Individuals who have experience in social action in their communities. They acted as mentors throughout the programme and delivered the Active Citizen training.
- ▷ **Participants.** Participants are the Active Citizens. They undertook the training, developed their skills and knowledge to plan and implement social action projects, and went on to make links with a global network of Active Citizens, which can include attending an International Study Visit (ISV) (Active Citizens website).

### MERGING LOCAL AND GLOBAL YOUTH WORK

In 2021, the Active Citizens programme on social action projects for climate change coincided with COP26 which was hosted in Glasgow, Scotland. This iteration of the programme included participants from 18 countries around the world, as well as European Union countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Poland). By focusing on climate change, and engaging young people in particular, this project can be seen as an example of global youth work.

Global youth work combines youth work with global citizenship education, and “aims to empower young people to develop the knowledge and skills to tackle climate and global justice issues and explore their own values, beliefs and connections with the wider world” (Daly et al. 2023 in Manning and Duffy 2024: 143).

Active Citizens did this with an understanding of local action as having a “ripple effect” on global issues: “Change in the community works best when it is led by the community. Active Citizens demonstrated just how powerful local action can be. As people address local issues through social action projects, the ripple effect can be felt regionally, nationally, and globally. And the impact can be immense” (British Council 2021).

### MOVING TOWARDS A “GLOCAL” APPROACH

The Active Citizens programme attempted to disrupt the conventional dichotomy between “local” and

“global” action, by linking the two levels together, conceptualising broader systemic (and planetary) change as being the results of multiple individual and local actions happening simultaneously around the world, with similar skills, aims, formats and actors. It emphasised an interdependence between the Global North and the Global South, both in its impacts, but also in its potential solutions, as well as universalism (key to youth work) but also specification based on local context.

This was exemplified in the British Council (a UK-based international organisation) working closely with local partners, using a training and education methodology which is standard across the programme.



**Q: what was your first engagement with the [Active Citizens] initiative?**

**A:** I received an email from the Green Party asking if any of the younger members of the party were interested in joining an initiative called the Active Citizens Network that was arranged by Co-operation Ireland and the British Council. So basically I just said yes, I didn't think about it too much, but I just thought it could be a good opportunity.

Active Citizens Network was a three-day workshop, bringing together active citizens, especially young people, from across the border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, for a cross-border co-operation that was also focused on promoting active citizenship and engaging in social action for climate change.

**Q: Could you tell us a bit more about what happened after the workshop?**

**A:** At the end of the three-day workshop, there was an opportunity to gain seed funding for a social action project. I had no idea this was part of the workshop before I joined. It wasn't just about ideas; it was about actually implementing some things in action.

<sup>2</sup> These are excerpts from the Oral History interview, conducted by the British Council. This interview is reproduced with permission from the British Council and is edited for clarity and length. More information can be found at: Oral histories | British Council, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/oral-histories?shpath=/the-interviews/stories-from-around-the-world/andrew-ramsay>

One of my passions is food. I worked as a chef during my studies and very much enjoyed the kitchen and the environment of the kitchen. I thought that it would be cool to do some sort of social action that relates to food because food waste is a big contributor to climate change.

I proposed an idea, which I called Circular Gastronomy, which is a play on words for the circular economy. It was going to be about getting food from supermarkets or cafés that was going to be thrown away. Not food that was spoiled, but just no longer available for commercial use, and trying to do something with this food. So, I created an advocacy event, raising awareness around the reduction of food waste, a mini festival.

The British Council then hosted a kick-off event for COP26, and I was asked if I wanted to speak at the event about my social action project.

**Q: Thinking back on the COP26 event, how did you feel on that day? What was the highlight of your speech?**

**A:** I was quite nervous, because there were some very senior people who were speaking at the event. It was a big deal. There was the British ambassador, prominent climate scientists, politicians, and then me. You know what I mean? They were trying to have a young person's voice represented, which is cool. But I certainly didn't have the qualifications that the others did.

I talked about my project, speaking about Circular Gastronomy and its relation to climate change. It was a message to try and inspire to a certain extent, but also just to show what young people are doing in Ireland to take social action.

**Q: What role do you see civil society and youth-led action playing in the climate space?**

**A:** I've worked in the government and I know its importance [in responding to the climate crisis]. There's no question. But without buy-in from people, you're never going to achieve anything. People need to believe in the change that needs to happen, and civil society therefore has a huge role in ensuring that the buy-in exists.

[When I ask myself]: For me as an individual, what do I want? What I want is to see impact. You can achieve that in different ways but working on the local level is much more rewarding, because you could see what your work is achieving on a day-to-day basis. And for me, that's fulfilling.





# MULTIPLE INSECURITIES AND THEIR RELATION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Climate change intensifies existing vulnerabilities, creating complex layers of insecurity –especially for youth and displaced populations. This section explores two innovative practices that address these intersections: the Red Cross and Red Crescent's youth-led climate strategies, and UNHCR's Refugees for Climate Action Network. Both initiatives demonstrate how young people, often among the most affected, are leading transformative responses. By linking global frameworks with local action, they show how climate activism can be embedded within broader humanitarian efforts. These practices highlight the power of youth leadership and multilateral co-operation in tackling the climate crisis through inclusive, intersectional and scalable approaches.



## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES: A STRATEGY ON YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIONS IN SPAIN

### INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN GLOBAL AND LOCAL INITIATIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) brings together 191 national institutions known for their seven core principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntariness, unity and universality. In so doing, they focus attention on situations of need caused by multiple insecurities. From its origins of humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts, it has now evolved to also provide key social support in peacetime societies.

The Spanish Red Cross (CRE) has been developing different programmes that reveal a multisectoral approach to the insecurities caused by the climate

crisis. Red Cross Youth (CRJ, in Spanish) is the youth activism section of the Spanish Red Cross (CRE). Although CRE was established in Spain in 1864, it was not until 1923 that it paid special attention to the issue of age. The current youth structure was formed in 1970, as a section with autonomy and strong youth leadership in Spain (Gentile et al. 2021). This youth section (CRJ) enjoys a wide margin of autonomy to define its own programmes and campaigns.

Lucía Chocarro (Vice-Chair of IFRC Youth Commission, representing the European and Central Asian region) is one of the persons with the most in-depth knowledge on this subject and has greatly helped us to better understand the initiatives led by her organisation.

### SPANISH RED CROSS YOUTH ACTION PLANS

The most recent national Red Cross Youth action plans have incorporated strategic commitments established in 2015 to intervene on environmental education and awareness of the climate crisis. Among them, two deserve to be highlighted for their special importance in addressing multiple insecurities: the Pachamama Project and its 2024 eco-anxiety campaign.

#### □ WHAT IS THE PACHAMAMA PROJECT?

Red Cross Youth is currently developing the Pachamama Project, aimed at guaranteeing environmental safety and health among children and young people, by involving them directly in the preservation of the environment. The intervention involves carrying out reforestation activities, while focusing in parallel on social actions with vulnerable populations, with the explicit aim of raising awareness among activists of Red Cross Youth who do not yet share concerns about the climate crisis.

#### □ WHAT WAS THE ECO-ANXIETY CAMPAIGN?

The second project worth mentioning is the campaign **“Are you worried? It’s called eco-**

anxiety". Under the banner of celebrating World Environment Day (5 June), the organisation annually designs awareness-raising and educational intervention actions at the national level during the months before and after. In 2024, they focused their attention on the "eco-anxiety" arising from the climate crisis as an impact factor in the mental health of young people. In this way, they addressed both issues (health and climate) strategically.

In both cases, the ongoing projects have national scope and implementation throughout the country. As Alba Castillejo (CRJ national co-ordinator) emphasises, the national programming allows for the establishment and development of complementary actions by teams of local and regional activists conceiving the national frameworks as scalable base projects. In both cases, by combining socio-educational interventions of an informative and empowering nature with others of learning by direct action (reforestation, psychosocial care, etc.), the range and nature of the interventions are not uniform across the entire target population. It is significant that some of the actions are carried out in co-ordination with private companies in the country (franchises of some transnational brands), which provide logistical input to the teams of volunteers.

### WHAT IS NOTEWORTHY ABOUT THESE PROJECTS?

The originality and relevance of these projects are due to the following characteristics.

- ▷ **They are initiatives led by young activists** that have been organised in a stable way over time, providing continuity and coherence to actions throughout multi-year frameworks and generational renewal.
- ▷ **They are supported within the framework** of a transnational organisation that does not specialise in climate activism, but which incorporates this element as an intersectional concern with other areas of social intervention (especially access to non-formal education, mental health and socio-economic equity).
- ▷ **They link supranational programmes** and frameworks with local action, without imposing mechanical models of implementation, but making room for innovation in local volunteering and the development of their own co-operation networks with other public and private organisations, solidarity organisations or companies with social responsibility.

- ▷ **They have the ability to scale up actions** over time and in their locality, as a result of historical networks already established and previously based on other programmes, including the possibility of raising awareness among young non-climate activists about the inclusion of this approach in their personal and associative lives.
- ▷ **They are the actions of an organisation that faces complementary challenges**, in which social care for vulnerable groups also incorporates awareness-raising resources (such as aid for the energy adaptation of the homes of families at risk of poverty or social exclusion, etc.).

These actions reflect the possibility of incorporating the climate crisis into social activism around other complementary, not substitute, issues. It shows that long-term trajectories by historical organisations are not an obstacle to the innovation of activism, and that it is the youth sections of these large solidarity networks that often lead to new approaches. The high degree of autonomy and decentralisation of youth activism within the Spanish Red Cross favours the creativity and flexibility of campaigns and projects. At the same time, the autonomy of youth activism within the organisation empowers specific young people, who face responsibilities on a larger scale (intergenerational and transnational), both within and outside the organisation.



### UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: THE REFUGEES FOR CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

#### INVOLVING REFUGEE YOUTH AS CLIMATE ACTIVISTS

Human insecurity is rarely caused by a single factor. It emerges from the intersection of age, gender, conflict and environmental degradation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not merely acknowledge this complexity, it addresses it through an integrated and intersectional response.

UNHCR is an intergovernmental institution with a global scope, formally instituted in 1950. Its mission

is to ensure that all people have the right to seek asylum and find safe haven in another state, with the option to eventually return home, integrate or resettle.

To this end, it responds to emergency situations, advocates for the safeguarding of the human rights of refugees and intervenes by building a better future by facilitating their access to employment, education and decent housing, among other key aspects. One of its initiatives highlighted because of intersectional attention to the climate crisis is the [Refugees for Climate Action Network](#).

Almost all the people involved in this UNHCR Network are young refugees. Furthermore, they are also young people who are particularly involved in intersectional activism. This is where their exceptional contribution is enriching UNHCR's work. Some profiles of young activists from the [UNHCR Network](#) include:

- ▷ **Deline Ramiro Yihumutima** (25-year-old refugee from Rwanda). "In our current world where anyone can become a refugee at any moment, it is key to recognise their potential to drive positive change and rebuild their lives";
- ▷ **Jeanne Muhimundu** (21-year-old refugee from Rwanda). She became a leader among the young people in the refugee camp, is involved in improving their lives and raising awareness about climate and environmental issues since childhood;
- ▷ **Mohammed Anower** (18-year-old Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh). As a climate activist, he and the group he participates in have carried out a project that has significantly improved the resilience and restoration of the environment in their area against flooding, deforestation and other threats.

The Network makes visible the local activism of its members, improves their training, and has become an advisory body on climate issues for the organisation. In line with this, its influence was amplified at COP29 in 2024.

## HOW DOES THIS NETWORK RELATE TO YOUTH CLIMATE ACTIVISM IN EUROPE?

The [UNHCR Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030](#) specifies that until 2030, 22 countries are considered priority due to their vulnerability to the effects of climate change for refugees. These countries are mostly in Africa. The Network involves eight refugees, climate activists from different parts of the world (and mostly young people). In addition to those mentioned (Rwanda or

Bangladesh), they come from Afghanistan, Yemen, Haiti, Uganda and Brazil.

Nevertheless, Europe plays a crucial role in asylum and refugee rights, because firstly, the historical origins of the right to asylum are closely linked to the right initially designed for European refugees after the Second World War (and later extended globally), and secondly because Europe is currently a place of arrival for many asylum seekers. Finally, this right is also upheld by young people in Europe today through their demands to policy makers. The [position of the European Youth Forum](#) stands out in this regard.

# CONCLUSIONS

It is a challenge to prepare a compendium of success stories in the face of a crisis that is still ongoing. Addressing climate change with the backdrop of backsliding democracy and declining trust in institutions makes the challenge even more difficult. That is why, of course, there are no cases of resounding success: if there were, we would have already solved the climate crisis. Without taking away from the rich stories of bravery and hope from young activists, it must be stated that all examples presented here are limited experiences, of insufficient success, of moderate hopes. There is much work left to be done.

The preceding pages are certainly a compendium of realistic optimism. Despite all the unease that climate change generates, young people and civil society are not resigned. There are reasons for hope. Examples included in this compendium bring to the fore the following reflections.

Finally, it is important to recognise the radical interconnection with the serious threats that mark the international agenda today. Wars, desperate human mobility, economic uncertainty, mental health and the impact of artificial intelligence, to name a few, are not unrelated to the climate crisis and democratic crises.

- **1**  
**There are organised young people creating real change.**  
Youth climate protests and other forms of climate action have placed climate crisis on the agendas of global and international institutions. The National Youth Council of Ireland is a clear example of how national and local youth organisations are beginning to take a leading role within the climate movement, making it their top priority.
- **2**  
**More research is needed about inspiring successful initiatives** that could be scaled up.
- **3**  
**The value of non-formal education on the topic of climate crisis remains indispensable.** Youth work and non-formal educational activities provide opportunities for young people to engage with their peers, learn more about topics they care about and about opportunities and forms of civic engagement.

# 4

**Climate activism has transformed in a relatively short time.** In 2019, a small group of students in Sweden started the student climate strikes, and six years later youth mobilised en masse in the streets, and the European Court of Human Rights made its first ruling on a climate case brought by young people.

# 5

**However, all these actions need more professionalisation and economic resources to support them.** To this end, umbrella organisations such as YEE and CIEL that have been working for several decades are essential.

# 6

**Collaboration between international organisations and youth organisations creates new opportunities** for climate activism, as youth organisations can provide social capital and youth mobilisation, while international organisations and institutions can support their work with economic, technical and institutional support, as well as capacity building.

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