

COP26 Policy Brief

YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT EUROPE'S POSITION AT COP26

About this document:

The Climate crisis is one of the greatest existing threats to our Earth systems and human livelihoods. Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) is committed to the protection of the Environment and the empowerment of young people by supporting the achievement of climate and social justice in Europe and in the world. This is why we have developed an *advocacy strategy ahead of COP26*, while ensuring European Youth's perspectives will be represented by sending a small delegation to the UN Climate Change conference for the first time.

Our advocacy strategy towards COP26 includes:

- The organisation of three **Youth Climate Hubs**: a series of online capacity-building Workshops focusing respectively on COP26 Education, Advocacy, and Policy, specifically tailored for young people coming from all over Europe.
- The completion of a **COP26 Toolkit** which provides an open-access, accessible range of resources and social media banks which can be downloaded and used freely
- The drafting of a **COP26 Policy Brief**: a document fully expressing YEE's position at COP26, composing an integral part of YEE's COP26 Toolkit. It has been compiled thanks to:
 - The input of our youth-led Member Organisations via a consultation form open between the 13th October for a period of two weeks;
 - The input of young youth leaders who participated to YEE's Policy Youth Climate Hub Workshop;
 - The precious role of YEE's delegates to COP26 and the YEE Advocacy Team in gathering youth demands and helping to translate them into a set of clear proposals by drafting YEE's COP26 Policy Brief.

This Policy Brief is structured as follows:

- The first section will introduce COP26 and highlight its global relevance;
- The second section exposes our Network's main objectives and lays down a set of overarching themes and challenges which essentially make up the backbone of YEE's Youth policy position.
- The third section of this Policy Brief is topic-focused and explores existing challenges and how to most effectively address them under the scope of UN climate change negotiations and from a youth-based viewpoint.
- Lastly, a set of conclusions ultimately representing YEE's key messages in the context of COP26 youth-led advocacy.

Policy background: Why is COP26 a watershed event?

The UN Climate Conference is going to be a watershed event: science has clearly shown that this might be the world's last chance to enhance climate ambitions to collectively meet the emissions reduction target established by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

COP26 is a key moment to get world leaders to substantially improve their climate ambition by *submitting new, more ambitious **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)***. This is particularly topical as the voluntary commitments submitted in 2015 with the entry into force of the Paris Agreement have generally failed to match the final goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C by mid-century. Right after COP26 negotiations, there will also be *the first Global Stocktake*, which evaluates the progress of State policies under the Paris framework.

COP26 will also need to address a series of decisions that Parties failed to make during COP25 in Madrid, such as *finalising the **Paris Rulebook***¹. Decisions of the Paris Rulebook include: defining global *carbon markets* (Art. 6), setting up an Enhanced Transparency Framework for climate policies' progress and implementation, deciding on a common deadline for renewing NDCs and developing finance plans on **loss and damage** (Art. 8).

Ultimately, the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference is going to take place during global post-pandemic recovery efforts. The success of this process will therefore say a lot about the role that climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts will play in the road to a healthier and just global system in the coming years, too. In this sense, the ongoing energy crisis represents a clear signal for the need to introduce sustainable choices in our daily consumption.

YEE's overarching priorities and main goals: an overview

a) YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Young people play and should play a forefront role in shaping international, national and local strategies to fight the climate crisis, ultimately striving towards protecting future generations.

- Although a series of UN-level initiatives and programmes exist to promote the participation of youth to UN climate change negotiations, especially YOUNGO², it is also true that climate - and especially youth-led - NGOs still lack significant support and massively rely on private philanthropy, reducing an already strained organisational capacity. YEE therefore urges all relevant stakeholders to **allocate specific funding and facilitate institutional support to youth-led climate networks and organizations**.
- Under the UNFCCC framework, there has been no UN-level binding decision that requires establishing a youth consultation that impacts decision making. There is a need for Parties to **establish binding frameworks to ensure coherent enduring consultation with youth representatives, especially those coming from underrepresented and vulnerable communities**.

¹ A set of rules that are essential to ensure the correct implementation of the Paris Agreement.

² YOUNGO is the accredited youth constituency to UNFCCC.

- YEE demands **purposeful implementation** of the proposals for youth participation to climate-related policy-making in the UN, national, and local level, that have been presented by the *Youth4Climate Manifesto*.
 - Specifically, **the establishment of platforms and launch programmes, including a Climate Youth Delegates Program under the UNFCCC**, and a permanent body, for youth participation in climate decision-making processes, **where participants are selected through an open call and through a transparent process, to ensure the selected delegates are as representative as possible of the international youth community**;
- National authorities to establish Youth Advisory Councils on climate change and their inclusion in every national policy-making process that relates to climate change, especially in designing, implementation, monitoring and updating of NDCs;
- Building young people's capacity, by means of:
 - **Improving youth constituencies and NGOs capacity and accessibility** to even more children and youth around the world;
 - **Intensifying and devoting more funding to youth**, such as funding and research opportunities, training, mentorship programmes;
 - **Introducing national safeguards** to ensure that those initiatives are accessible to marginalised youth and vulnerable groups.

b) CLIMATE JUSTICE

No climate justice without social justice. Climate change and social injustice are two sides of the same coin, a broken system which requires transformative change.

As advocate groups, we need to highlight studies, to put the spotlight on scholars that have dealt with this issue to create more widespread knowledge and foster a deeper understanding of civil society of the issues, especially in the developed world. Creating links will help us to understand - rather than just focusing on the climate crisis alone. Creating links between the climate crisis and social issues and other crises is important to make these intersections understandable by the public.

We need to also acknowledge the need **to define climate injustice**. Climate injustice relates to how the impacts of climate change will be felt differently by different groups and how some people and places will be more vulnerable than others to these impacts. But vulnerability is not innate to some groups – it is determined by a mix of socio-economic, environmental and cultural factors and institutional practices such as planning rules and housing policy as well as people's own capability to respond. Climate injustice also refers to the way the costs and benefits of climate change policy are distributed.

How to achieve it?

- Climate change policy is largely developed and conducted separately to policy that aims to tackle social vulnerability, poverty and disadvantage. Adaptation and mitigation policy need to be integrated into activities to reduce material deprivation, and climate justice issues need to become more closely aligned with other core

government agendas. **Links** need to be made either by governments but also by people.

- To encourage policy that works across sectors, climate change policies should use **broader definitions of vulnerability, understanding it as multi-dimensional** (race and gender are dimensions that must be integrated) and not just related to individual economic circumstances or location.
- Fight against what Martinez-Alier calls “**policy making inequalities**” : governance and the policy design process need to change so that those most affected by climate change and climate change policy have more say in shaping responses. This will require new procedures and tools for engaging communities in collaborative planning processes.

c) INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

Climate change is an inherently intergenerational problem with extremely serious implications for equity between ourselves and future generations and among communities in the present and the future. Intergenerational rights to a healthy environment are protected by the constitutions of 74% of the world’s nations. These explicit commitments and similar, ancient principles of sovereign public trust are often overlooked but, if enforced, they offer sustainable protection for the biosphere. Here we call for global and local solutions :

Global :

- **Increasing children’s preparedness and including them as stakeholders.** This will give them greater visibility on their rights and needs, and stimulate their potential as agents of change.
- **Moving beyond GDP as a measure of a country’s prosperity:** this worked for older generations, current and future generations measure and define their prosperity by other factors more in line with climate change.
- Actual commissioners, such as the Ministries of Youth or Children, should have their **responsibilities broadened**, including the climate change in children rights execution.
- Global recognition on the importance of **educational programmes** on climate change and sustainability in schools.

Local :

- **Community councils** that reunite future, current and older generations in order to discuss how climate change affects their daily lives and what they expect from policy makers.
- **Implementation of educational programmes** on climate change and sustainability in schools and colleges for young people to benefit from, using non-formal education methodology.
- **Implementation of Commissions for future generations** to raise public understanding of the idea of intergenerational justice.

d) DECARBONISATION

The world is completely off track when it comes to limiting global warming to 1.5°C. In this context, the large discrepancy between governments' planned fossil fuel production³ and global production levels consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C or 2°C, and the observed inadequacy of recently-submitted NDCs⁴ clearly show that governments have a primary role in closing such gaps and that the biggest global emitters keep avoiding or delaying their responsibility by making false promises and designing poor climate policies.

Against this background, and to support the achievement of real zero emissions, YEE calls for:

- Phasing out coal is a completely insufficient commitment to achieve neither real zero, nor net zero emissions by 2050. YEE demands ***an immediate stop to the approval of any fossil fuel project, public or private subsidising of the fossil industry or investments***, climate laws to include legal loopholes and/or exemptions of carbon-intensive industry sectors (such as agriculture and shipping) from emissions reduction requirements;
- ***Ensuring accessibility of vulnerable and marginalised groups, including indigenous people, to clean and safe energy sources*** is a key necessity to ensure a just transition to a zero emission economy. Since the climate crisis is also a social and racial justice crisis, and the two feed off each other, ending energy poverty of the most vulnerable groups is to be achieved by ensuring safe access to clean energy sources;
- ***Ambitious NDCs that include evidence-based commitments and is grounded in scientific predictions of emission reduction impact*** on people and the planet - ultimately rejecting false solutions which justify delays in climate action;
- ***Unlocking massive climate finance towards mitigation, adaptation and loss and finance in LDCs***, with finance measures being transparent, co-designed and implemented in close collaboration with global South voices;
- ***Unlocking the mitigation potential of NbS*** that are rights- and ecosystem-based and locally managed, beyond forest restoration which is almost the only NbS that is featured in NDCs.

YEE's key demands for COP26 decision-making

a) FINANCE

³ According to the latest UNEP-sponsored *Production Gap Report*, governments would still produce more than double the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 compared to what is needed to limit global warming to 1.5 °C.

⁴ The UNEP Emissions Gap Report takes into analysis nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) submitted to the UNFCCC by 120 Governments, turning out to be completely inadequate to meet the 1.5°C global temperature rise target, which is rather consistent with a 2.7°C temperatures rise scenario by 2100.

Urging global North leaders to deliver on their commitment to invest \$100 billion in climate finance to support mitigation, adaptation and resilience measures for Small Island Developing States [SIDS] and Least Developed Countries [LDC]. Up until now, developed countries have decisively failed to meet this annual commitment since 2020, which means that much larger funds will need to be unlocked in the coming years to be able to meet adaptation and mitigation challenges in most LDCs. Every year developed countries - and especially big polluters - fail in meeting this commitment and raising ambitions on climate finance, more and more human lives are put under climate-induced stress and risks and the more it will be difficult to build trust which should be at the core of global North-South collaborative efforts towards climate action.

- Listening to LDCs representatives and engaging them in co-creation of finance plans and keeping the highest level of transparency of financing mechanisms and targets. YEE asks for the majority of finance plans being delivered through grants rather than loans - so as to promote the implementation of not only national programmes, independent, locally-managed adaptation and mitigation projects.
- Introduce provisions aimed at drastically improving access to grants for mitigation and adaptation projects, by means of increased transparency of such processes as well as simplified application mechanisms.
- Improve visibility and massively build capacity of environmental defenders, NGOs and civil society organisations to implement Nature-based Solutions and sustainable land use.
- Provide solid safeguards in climate finance mechanisms allowing youth to be massively mobilised as a result of climate investments and projects on the national and local level

b) ENERGY

Achieving real progress in decarbonization of the energy sector is key to the achievement of *real* zero carbon emissions by mid-century. This are our demands on how to boost this progress:

- ***Immediately curtailing government subsidies and big banks' investments into the fossil fuel energy projects*** is a key condition to start acting concretely for GHG emissions reduction and achieve climate justice.
- ***Increasing investments in the area of renewable energy technologies*** improvement and research.
- ***Enforcing big companies by strict laws and repercussions*** to choose renewable energy technologies, optimize workers' transportation, choose greener infrastructure and equipment (ISO50001).

- **Ensuring a regionally-specific approach** in choosing green and transitory low-carbon technologies that respond best to the population's needs at local, regional and national level;
- **Securing a just energy transition** that does not put all the burden on individual taxpayers and households, in Global North and in Global South alike;
- **Guaranteeing the continuity of energy** supply through nationally-fit energy mix to support sustainable social and economic development without undermining people's welfare.

c) NATURE AND LAND-USE + OCEAN

YEE asks governments and international institutions to promote and support the implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NbS), supported by legal safeguards that ensure NbS national strategies are laid down as a set of actions contributing not only to mitigate the climate, but also increasing biodiversity, supporting human health and socio-economic wellbeing, ensuring a more sustainable land and sea use - relying on Ecosystem-based Approaches (EbA). EbAs allow for a proactive role of environmental defenders, such as indigenous peoples and local communities and youth. - ensuring mutual benefits for the health of people and the planet. It is crucial that EbA practices and investments go well beyond the agroforestry sector, to include solutions to protect marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

We strongly support and promote the acknowledgment of the climate risks associated with Oceans and the inestimable importance of protecting and restoring marine ecosystems with immediate action. We advocate for world leaders, NGOs and civil societies to publicly recognise the fundamental role of Oceans in Earth systems. On the basis of this recognition we ask governments to:

- **Seriously evaluate the inclusion of Ocean NbS** in NDCs for climate mitigation and adaptation by means of protection and restoration of ocean and coastal ecosystems;
- **Boosting investments in developing a real zero-carbon blue economy** whilst researching solutions that help decarbonise AND protects marine and coastal biodiversity;
- **Promote a decolonised approach to the protection of marine ecosystems**, whose health is extremely beneficial to climate mitigation, by averting human-induced stressors such as pollution, eutrophication, unsustainable use of aquatic living resources. A bigger push towards **capacity building measures towards coastal communities** for the protection and sustainable use of Ocean living resources.

Such solutions - emissions reduction and Ocean NbS and MPAs - are drastically interdependent and cannot be truly effective alone: it is impossible to set up fair and effective Ocean-based climate mitigation and adaptation solutions without relying on healthy and resilient Ocean systems, and vice-versa.

d) ADAPTATION AND LOSS AND DAMAGE

Young people are at the forefront of immediate loss and damage caused by climate change; however, this fact is hardly recognised by the international community. COP26 a fundamental occasion to tackle this disparity.

Adaptation is an imperative course of action to reduce the dire consequences of climate change which are already impacting millions of lives. Without adaptation, climate change is expected to push more than 100 million people from developing countries below the poverty line by 2030. Similarly, the rising of seas could force millions of people residing in coastal cities away from their homes, leading to internal displacement of many civilians across several continents.

- In the process of agreeing on what are the priorities and the practical meaning of climate finance, the Parties will need to pay particular attention to ensuring that adaptation solutions and investments are channelled in a way **that enhances women, children and youth's resilience**.
- Adaptation measures should be implemented on a local and national level, with national governments providing devolved powers to local governments in order to take appropriate courses of action on the basis of their realities. Young advisors from local youth councils and NGOs must be granted access to those meetings and benefit from equal negotiation powers.
- There is a need for **a centralised coordination effort** from the international community to make sure that developing countries benefit from support [material and expertise] to equally contribute to the efforts being made.

As Loss and Damage is a present problem rather than an issue to be tackled potentially in the future. We demand immediate action to compensate for present and future losses - since the estimate of loss and damage is of 210 billion dollars in 2020 alone, it does not account for intangible losses, and this value is expected to rise considerably as temperatures and sea levels rise in the years to come, governments should pledge to compensate at least a trillion dollars on loss and damage in the global South. At the same time, polluting companies and industries should not be excluded from this responsibility - we therefore encourage UN policy-makers and the Parties to ensure big polluters pay their share to compensate for loss and damage, by means of taxations on carbon-intensive corporations.

e) GENDER

Climate solutions presented in technological and scientific advancements or the promotion of a low-carbon energy future through the energy transition are only half of the answer. The other half lies in ensuring climate justice through social justice. A significant number of environmental policies are gender-blind and lack a deeper analysis of environmental issues as complex socio-political challenges. As policies do not operate in a vacuum, they risk reproducing existing inequalities and discrimination in our society.

YEE therefore, demands:

- Research widely shows that environmental impacts are gendered; this calls for ***gender equality being integrated into the objectives of environmental policies***. This is a precondition for policy coherence, given the cross-cutting character of both environment and gender equality and the provisions on gender mainstreaming under the European treaties.
- There is a need to ***apply an intersectional frameworks in environmental policies and challenge prevailing systems of oppression*** and redefine social, economic and political norms that work for all people and the planet. The environmental and social crisis, including the staggering gender inequalities that we are facing in Europe and worldwide, are rooted in unfettered capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.
- ***Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) should integrate gender on environmental policies*** to explore unintended impacts on gender equality and develop gender-responsive policies. The method used should be robust and harmonised and include the consultation of various gender experts.
- ***Gender-just representation*** on the political, business, activism, and institutional levels should be ensured. Parity measures, policies and best practices can contribute to creating gender-just environments.

f) SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

We strongly support the role of science and of the scientific community in informing climate policy on the UN, national, and local levels. In order to enhance the positive and constructive role of scientific knowledge and actors in the climate change policy framework, we:

- Urge all UN agencies and UNFCCC Parties to ***publicly endorse scientific findings and recommendations*** as key stakeholders to the Convention in their own right, with their findings being vital to keeping the UNFCCC and the Treaties relevant, effective and alive;
- Demand international institutions and governments to ***communicate the importance of science*** to raise public awareness in the civil society at large.
- ***Acknowledge the validity and relevance of other forms of dynamic knowledge, based on respect, experience and careful observation of nature.***

We celebrate youth-led innovative solution-making and we therefore ask governments to promote it and boosting it by:

- ***Including youth representatives, committees and advisory councils with youth experts*** when making decisions guided by science that concern their future.
- ***Including knowledge from indigenous and/ or marginalized youth*** to ensure said knowledge is amplified, remembered and given its rightful place in searching for innovative ways to impact climate and environmental policy.
- ***Promote youth-led startups*** and in an effort to help young people navigate an economy working against them, and in order to allow them to become powerful actors in shaping climate and environmental policy.

g) TRANSPORT

Road transport accounts for 10% of global emissions; transport emissions are rising faster than those of any other sector.

- While substantial changes, such as the introduction of zero-emissions vehicles, are already underway in many countries and cities, **car ownership costs need to go down at a much faster rate** than they are right now and expand to all road transport vehicles. The first and fundamental step in this direction is the immediate implementation of public policy solutions and serious investments need to be directed towards creating incentives to purchase and use of EVs on the one hand, while also boosting research and innovation into the electrification of public transport vehicles and increasing efficiency on the other hand. This top-down approach is a key precondition to decarbonise the transport sector.

Keeping in mind area specificities and inequalities between urban areas and rural areas :

- Member states must enforce laws that ensure and **hold major companies accountable for their freight efficiency within supply chains**. This can be done through limiting the multiple types of vehicles that companies use in order to organise their transportation of goods as well as keeping into account their consumption level.
- To **configure the cities within the frames of smart growth format** in the cities that are not designed that way by emphasizing putting homes near shops, jobs and public transportation and curtailing the distance of travel of individuals within their communities in order to make the transportation more accessible and to reduce the level of carbon footprint.
- To **promote green highways by using permeable construction materials** in order to hamper toxic environmental runoff and loss of native plant species.
- **Travel methods to COPs and any United Nation meetings must have the least possible carbon footprint**, with the possibility of hosting nations providing more environmental transport options, including cheaper train connections in a frequent setting.

h) CITIES, REGIONS AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Cities can be huge vehicles of change at a national and global level - they can inspire from small level change powerful worldwide movements. Furthermore, decentralization has the power to tackle issues specific to each and every society - rather than trying to use a one-size-fits-all approach. For this reason, investing in cities is necessary. Giving them the tools and funds to empower local leadership in finding innovative solutions to the climate crisis is one of the most important decisions to make.

- To **integrate 'Land Use' strategic planning** in order to enhance communities, protect the environment and support local economies.
- To **build greenways in cities** by creating walkable paths through crowded cities in order to improve pedestrian transportation, protecting local ecosystems and promoting healthy lifestyle.
- To **support bike-friendly communities** in the cities/countries that are not designed to integrate cycling traffic with vehicle traffic in order to reduce carbon footprint caused by transportation.

- To **support the green construction industry that is based on using recycled materials and alternative design strategies**, such as green concrete in order to reduce energy usage and environmental impact in transportation.
- To **create affordable and efficient public transportation that supports the needs of workers and students who commute** - to allow them to live their life in the city to the fullest in a sustainable and just way.
- To **create spaces for young people in their regions and cities to be politically aware, develop skills for green jobs and complement their school and university education with non-formal education programs.**

Conclusion:

- **#YouthAtTheFrontline**: Young people play a forefront role in shaping climate crisis strategies and in preventing future catastrophe in their generation. Youth empowering decision making processes play a key platform for young people to play their role - youth need to be at the frontline of climate action.
- **#PhaseOutFossilFuels**: Decarbonisation of carbon-intensive economic sectors needs to start now, big polluters need to take full responsibility. Legal loopholes, subsidies, carbon offsets and CCS-CUS technology cannot be used as excuses or greenwashing tools to avoid or delay true decarbonisation.
- **#ServeClimateJusticeat1Point5**: Climate justice and social justice are two sides of the same coin - we need systemic change that values both humans and nature, with careful consideration to human and nature rights, well-being, health and the needs of the most vulnerable to climate change - justice is best served cold, and we demand it at 1.5°C!
- **#United4Nature**: Promote and support the implementation of rights-based Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and EbAs in NDCs, by harnessing the mitigation and adaptation power of Nature at its full potential, taking into consideration indigenous rights and the rights of nature.
- **#ClimateActionNOW**: The climate crisis is already happening! The global North needs to provide meaningful space and substantial financial support to swiftly improve resilience of the most vulnerable, from those who are already suffering loss and damage and those who are at serious risk in the coming years.

Contributors

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