Report:

Youth Participation in the Cypriot updated NECP draft



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This report aims to raise awareness among the Cypriot general public on the shortcomings of the implementation of the Governance Regulation in Cyprus, particularly regarding the updating of National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) in the 2022/2023 period. It further aims to encourage Cypriot youth to advocate for more inclusive NECP processes, at least in line with the requirements of the 2018 Governance Regulation.

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This report has been prepared by Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), following interviews with youth civil society representatives from Cyprus: ***Avli, Terra Cypria, Friends of the Earth Cyprus***

Introduction

What are NECPs and why should you(th) participate in them?

NECPs are national plans integrating environmental and energy policies, key to achieving the EU 2030 target of 55% GHG emissions reduction (compared to 1990 levels). They are the key plans in achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, a target that has been decided to prevent dangerous climate change (but controversial as to whether it is sufficient to do so). NECPs should therefore outline and explain policies relating to renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy poverty, agriculture, etc. These policies can have massive socioeconomic impact, on which the secure livelihoods of future generations will depend. The first NECP (draft NECP) was called to be submitted by 31 December 2018, and the final NECP by 31 December 2019. The draft and final updated NECPs then were/are called to be submitted by 30 June 2023 and 30 June 2024 respectively.

Youth participation in the drafting and implementation of NECPs is essential for several reasons:

1. The content of the NECPs will have long-lasting effects on the lives of the youngest generations. Young people will be most affected by the consequences of climate change and the energy choices made now. Involving youth ensures that their perspectives and interests are taken into account, promoting **intergenerational equity**.

2. Young people can contribute to a **long-term commitment** to climate and energy goals. By involving them in the planning process, it is possible to then encourage them to take an active role in sustainability and climate action throughout their lives

3. Youth participation can help hold **governments and decision-makers accountable** for meeting their climate and energy targets. Their involvement can ensure transparency and foster a culture of accountability in the implementation of NECPs.

4. Youth participation ensures a **more diverse set of perspectives** at the decision-making table, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups. This diversity can lead to more comprehensive and equitable climate and energy policies.

5. Involving young people in the drafting and implementation of NECPs provides them with valuable **educational and capacity-building opportunities**. They can learn about the complexities of energy and climate issues and gain skills that are crucial for the future of the EU.

6. Youth can provide insights into how to **make NECPs more adaptable and resilient** to future challenges, as they will be dealing with the long-term consequences of today's decisions.

7. Many countries have committed to international climate agreements such as the **Paris Agreement**, which emphasise the importance of public participation. Involving young people aligns with these global commitments.

In conclusion, youth participation in the drafting and implementation of NECPs is essential to ensure that these plans are not only effective but also inclusive, innovative, and future-oriented. By involving young people, governments can better address the challenges of climate change and energy transition while creating a sense of ownership and commitment among the generation that will bear the brunt of these challenges.

Legal Basis for Youth Participation

The Governance Regulation

The legal basis for National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) is the 2018 Governance Regulation. This regulation outlines the rules and requirements for how countries should plan and manage their energy and climate policies within NECPs.

When it comes to involving the public, there are **two key provisions**:

1 Public Consultations

Article 10 states that there must be public consultations, which means that the public should have the opportunity to give their opinions and feedback. For public consultations, the NECPs must include a summary of what the public thinks based on the consultations. The processes used for these consultations should follow the guidelines of the Aarhus Convention. This Convention ensures that the public is given early and effective opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes related to the environment, as well as access to environmental information. In simpler terms, it's about making sure that the public has a say in the decisions that affect energy and climate policies, and these processes should be fair and transparent.

2 MCEDs

Article 11 emphasises the need for **multi-level stakeholder energy and climate dialogues** (MCEDs). This means that different groups and stakeholders should have discussions about energy and climate issues at various levels. **Article 17(2) (b)** obliges Member States to report on the progress made in establishing MCEDs “where applicable”.

Commission Guidance

In December 2022, the Commission provided Guidance on how to apply the Governance Regulation. This is, nevertheless, not legally binding but a guiding instrument on how the Governance Regulation should be implemented.

Section 3.2 refers to public participation provisions. It suggests ensuring adequate time for meaningful and easily accessible consultations. It emphasises the significance of "Social dialogue and a whole-of-society approach" in crafting and implementing effective energy and climate policies.

According to the Guidance, member states (MS) are required to clarify how the views of the public were taken into account ahead of submitting the NECPs. Additionally, MS should detail how the process allowed the public to participate transparently and fairly.



How has youth participation in the NECPs been so far in Cyprus?

Interviews we have conducted clearly demonstrate that young voices in Cyprus feel **severely neglected** in the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). The communication channels have been lacklustre, while transparency seems to be playing hide and seek. The overall organisation of participation in NECPs has been a letdown, falling short of the Republic of Cyprus' obligations under the Governance Regulation.

The survey below indicates the average response of youth civil society members who have been interviewed:

Between 1-10, how satisfied are you with the level of youth participation in your country?



Between 1-10, how impactful do you feel your comments have been in consultations relating to NECPs?



Between 1-10, how accessible do you think the NECP participation process in your country has been?



The issues met in terms of public participation are further elaborated here:



When it comes to **public consultations**, there have been quite a few problems. The document that the Cypriot government provided to the public to comment on in December 2022, was the final NECP that had been submitted in 2019, rather than an update of that. The public would then comment on an obsolete document.



The content of the NECP document has been notably technical, rendering it inaccessible to a broader audience. It is understood that not everyone may engage in intricate technical discussions; hence, the focus of NECP participation should shift towards fostering a dialogue about the envisioned future for the island, accessible to the broader public.



Moreover, the NECP draft was exclusively presented in the English language, thereby restricting access for individuals proficient in the other two official languages of Cyprus, namely Greek and Turkish (Greek being the most relevant language in this context). The draft updated NECP, however, that has been public since July, has been provided only in Greek.



Regrettably, a dedicated platform for public input was not established until the submission of the draft updated NECP. Despite outreach from youth civil society, which twice approached the Ministry of Environment requesting access to the updated NECP draft and a consultation platform, no response was received whatsoever.



In July 2023, while the government had already missed the June 30 draft updated NECP deadline, it opened access to the commenting platform for half a day. This feels like a tokenistic step to be used for indicating that there was participation in the process.



Subsequent to this, a series of meetings with young stakeholders were organised to review the draft NECPs. However, these meetings were conducted during working hours and exclusively in-person, neglecting the option for online participation. The absence of a comprehensive platform outlining the government's plan for youth and general public participation further compounds the situation, introducing an element of arbitrariness to the proceedings.



As for **MCEDs**, the governance structure in the initial NECP (2019) included committees for each NECP sub-topic, in which governmental departments and some technical organisations participated. In the revision process in 2022-2023, this process was either fast-tracked or omitted. Civil society has not been included in MCEDs at any stage. Research from the Climate Action Network indicates that the MCED process has indeed been not well known.

In general, public participation in NECPs **has failed to resonate with a broader audience**. This comes as no surprise, given the participation options (not) provided by the government. Cypriot youth believes that even organisations dedicated to youth engagement in environmental issues, which play a crucial role as invaluable stakeholders in the NECP process, have not been informed about the NECP content or participation options. It is noteworthy that the only youth involvement in NECPs has been championed by committed young members of civil society.

Timeline of (youth) participation in the NECP process

From December 2022, when the revision of NECPs started, until Novmber 2023

December 2022

Call to participate in NECPs comes in December 2022 with no NECP draft provided.

January 2023

Youth civil society contacted the department of transport asking how relevant NECP provisions from the 2018-2022 period have been implemented so far. A reply came 3 months later

March 2023

Consultation period ends.

Statement by *Terra Cypria*

"Despite the delay (the letter was sent in January, and we only received an answer in May), the reply was indeed answering almost all of our questions (except the measures the ministry of transport will take to increase the share of RES in the transport sector). Some points could have been a bit more exhaustive, but overall, the letter provided a clear picture of the state of progress (or the lack thereof) of the NECP measures for transportation."

April/June 2023

The Ministry of Environment was asked by an NGO with young members twice to provide the draft updated NECP, but there was no draft or platform provided.

July 2023

Public presentation of the NECP and draft made public. The public was provided with only half a day to read a 300 page document. Going to the public presentation, it was found the draft had been submitted. It was only then that it was revealed that there was a platform for the consultation.

27 July

NECP Draft submitted to the EU Commission

October/November 2023

The Ministry reaches out to civil society organisations asking for advice on the public participation methods for the NECP. They express that they want to have meetings with youth organisations but there is no further information.

Statement by *Terra Cypria*

"The meeting was basically an invite for us to share our thoughts and perspectives on how NGOs view the whole process of revising the NECP. We all got together and voiced our concerns about what we're not happy with in the current NECP process and what changes we'd like to see before the final submission in June 2024. They also wanted to know our take on how the Cypriot government can get more people involved and do it more effectively. The thing is, we're not really sure if any of our suggestions were taken into consideration, and honestly, we're in the dark about whether they've had similar discussions with others. Communication has always been a challenge, so we're left without a clear picture on where things stand."

Recommendations
to the Cypriot government



Specify as soon as possible when the final updated NECP draft will be available. Currently, what is available for participation online is the draft updated NECP that was submitted to the Commission in July 2023. Since then, Cyprus has received feedback from the Commission on how to improve its NECP. An upcoming draft for the final updated NECP should therefore be provided no later than a date which still allows for early and effective public participation.



Set a clear and permanent MCED with sufficient youth and civil society representatives. The MCED should be accessible, containing flexible participation options (hybrid meetings, outside working hours). Per Article 17(2(b)), progress reports should also indicate how the MCEDs are progressing. As the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) has recommended: "Citizen participation should emulate "best practice" (Commission Guidance, section 4.3) which, following OECD guidance, should be based on principles of inclusive deliberation where diverse groups of citizens are facilitated to learn, exchange ideas and perspectives and develop collective recommendations."



Create a dedicated NECP platform to promote transparency by adequately communicating participation opportunities in consultations and MCED developments. Follow the feedback of civil society in setting up this platform.

Per the Commission Guidance, release a statement demonstrating how the views of the public were considered and how the NECP process followed has been transparent, at a time that allows for further participation.

Adopt good practices from other MS' NECPs: The Lithuanian NECP has included an "alternative policy measures" section based on the proposals made in the public consultations. "The alternative policy measures presented in a separate list for each sector were additionally included in the National Plan, taking into account the proposals made in the public consultation. These measures will be considered as an alternative to the elements of the PPM scenario in order to achieve the national targets prior to approval thereof in the legislation."

Host accessible presentations in educational institutions to build capacity on NECP content and gather the views of more young people. Echoing again the words of the EEB above: "diverse groups of citizens are facilitated to learn, exchange ideas and perspectives and develop collective recommendations."

Conclusion

Public participation is not there solely for the sake of participating - it is there to increase the acceptability of divisive policies and unite the Cypriot public to run together the climate marathon to carbon neutrality. Or, rather than a marathon, a relay race, in which the youth is fighting to pass the baton forward. We therefore want to tell Cypriot youth: join the forces of *Avli*, *Terra Cypria*, *Bird Life* and *Friends of the Earth Cyprus*, and call for the Republic of Cyprus to fulfil its obligations under the Governance Regulation and involve the youth meaningfully and effectively in shaping the future of the island!

This report is part of a larger mapping of youth involvement in the drafting of the NECPs. We are also in the process of publishing reports from Italy, Bulgaria and Greece.

You can find the rest of the reports at yeenet.eu



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Written by Legal Seeds, a project part of Youth and Environment Europe

Legal Seeds aims to empower young people to engage in climate- and environmental litigation through legal education, peer support, and capacity building. It also seeks to ensure youth participation in environmental decision-making processes, and advocate for the inclusion of youth perspectives in National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs)



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