



**SDG7 YOUTH
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YOUTH IN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY



UN Major Group for
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the space for children and youth in the United Nations

Youth shaping the Climate Pact: “Gaps and ideas for youth engagement”

Position paper to the European Commission

Executive Summary

In the framework of the Launch of the European Climate Pact on the 16th of December and in the series of youth engagement events organised by the European Commission, the “Youth shaping the Climate Pact” event stems from the collaboration between the SDG7 Youth Constituency and the European Youth Energy Network (EYEN)¹ - two engagement mechanisms for young people on energy topics at the global and European level, respectively.

The goal of the event was to showcase the fundamental role of youth organisations in engaging citizens and promoting concrete climate actions. The first part of the event was an informative session on the Climate Pact provided by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), followed by a panel discussion between representatives from relevant local, European and global youth energy-focused organisations. The panel was followed by moderated dialogues in breakout rooms to discuss challenges for youth engagement in the energy sector as well as to collect successful youth initiatives and possible ideas for improvement. The event attracted around 100 participants from more than 30 countries.

The outcomes of these discussions were gathered in harvesting documents by the moderators and presented to Director-General of the European Commission- Directorate for Energy (DG ENER) Ditte Juul Jørgensen.

Key Messages to the European Commission

This position paper collects those inputs and translates them into four main challenges and respective Calls to Action (CTA) identified by the participants and directed at DG ENER and DG CLIMA:

¹The [European Youth Energy Network](#) (EYEN) is an initiative to connect youth organizations with governmental, industry and third sector bodies, promoting cooperation and exchange of opportunities on both international and local levels. As of February 2021, it is not a legally established entity.



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- **Key Message #1: Inefficient information and knowledge sharing about climate and energy issues leads to lack of awareness in the young generations**
 - CTA: Promote cooperation between schools and local authorities to educate young people on climate change and energy issues in schools, in particular those most relevant in their local context;
 - CTA: Allocate resources for intergenerational training and reverse education opportunities (e.g. gamified workshops run by young experts for decision makers).

- **Key Message #2: Lack of skills and resources is a barrier to effective engagement with official entities in the Energy sector (governments, international organizations, multinational companies, etc.)**
 - CTA: Promote trainings on how to best 'lobby' energy policy at the local, national and EU levels;
 - CTA: Create more upskilling opportunities for youth to gain professional experience in the energy sector, from local training opportunities to international exchange ones;
 - CTA: Allocate a budget for youth organizations to set up local initiatives to engage with citizens on energy and sustainability topics;
 - CTA: Allocate a budget to train members of youth organizations on how to organise and lead local discussions with civil society and political representatives (e.g. workshops to learn how to contribute to drafting local and national energy and climate plans)

- **Key Message #3: Tokenism and non-inclusive youth representation in non-youth spaces/dialogues prevent youth climate action to get the right recognition**
 - CTA: Include youth in the co-creation process of youth-dedicated and non-youth-dedicated events and webinars, in particular in the context of the European Climate Pact
 - CTA: Refine selection process of the youth/youth organizations invited to actively participate or speak, according to the adequacy of their experience, instead of just for being young
 - CTA: Consider strategies to reach youth in underrepresented countries and regions, as well as those who suffer from linguistic exclusion and digital divide
 - CTA: Establish KPIs to measure and evaluate youth representation in decision-making processes



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- **Key Message #4: International cooperation will be key to an effective mobilisation of youth and the available resources to them (within and across European borders)**
 - CTA: Provide guidance on how to catalyse youth efforts towards more practical solutions (e.g. propose a framework for follow-up on youth initiatives, in particular those where proposals were made by the participants);
 - CTA: Ensure youth dedicated funding opportunities, for example by engaging large organizations;
 - CTA: Consider including youth activism as a good practice in dialogues with neighboring countries (e.g. EU-AU cooperation and EU South/East Neighbourhood programs) concerning the energy transition, to help accelerate the engagement of youth outside of Europe
 - CTA: Continue cooperation with and support of EYEN's efforts;

EYEN Pledges

Finally, the EYEN committed to pursue the following pledges under the Climate Pact:

- Gather and coordinate 50 European youth-energy related organizations by end 2021
- Send a delegation of EYEN Ambassadors to COP26
- Establish national youth energy representatives in 27 EU member states
- Deliver minimum 10 training or skills development opportunities
- Co-create the Climate Pact youth engagement strategy with Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA)



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Signatures

- Beatriz Ildefonso, Portugal, EYEN & YES-Europe
- Marco Costa, Italy, Energy Policy Programme - CommUnity by InnoEnergy
- Livia Kalossaka, Belgium, YES-Europe
- Sofie Ryan-Øye, Norway
- Manoj Kumar Singh, ISOBARS Energy- India
- Federico Barbieri, Italy, EYEN
- María Luisa Scarano Pereira, Spain, EYEN & Unite2030
- Evi Makri, Greece, YES-Europe, EYEN
- Monica Troilo, Italy, YES-Europe
- Silvia Carolina Chacón Serrano, El Salvador
- Varyam Gupta, India, Youth Policy Collective
- Beniamin Strzelecki, Poland, Science Policy Circle
- Carlotta Ferri, Italy, YES-DC
- Gansukh Zolboo, Yanshan University
- Emmanuel Opiyo, Policy & Governance Hub, Kenya
- Linette Knudsen, Denmark, Student Energy
- Miguel Mósca, Portugal, EYEN
- Jacopo Sala, Italy, EYEN, YES-Europe, CommUnity by InnoEnergy
- Luciana Miu, Romania, EYEN
- Maria Inês Mendes, Portugal, EYEN
- Cristiana Marchitelli, EYEN
- Adriana Bascone, Austria, EYEN
- Lekwa Hope, Nigeria, REES AFRICA
- Kate Power, Canada, YES-Germany
- Elena Bassan, Italy, EYEN
- Ngagoum Ndalloka Zita, PCCGC Algeria, SE Chapter PAUWES Algeria
- Giulia Persico, Italy
- Alberto Claudio Alvisi, Italy, ELIES
- Hubert Put, Poland, CommUnity by InnoEnergy, EYEN, Erasmus Student Network
- Christian Galletta, Italy, Climate KIC
- Andrea Mili, Italy, EYEN
- Fons Janssen, Netherlands, EYEN
- Alejandro Vas Corrales, Spain, EYEN
- Rocio Garcia Gomez, Spain, EYEN
- Juan Sebastián Álvarez, The Netherlands, YES-DC - EYEN

Supporters





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Harvesting document outcomes

We welcome the Commission's proposal to engage in regular dialogues with young people and to give them a prominent space in the Climate Pact. We hope that this position paper can become a first step to a co-creation process, or serve at least as guidance for upcoming engagement initiatives.

#1 - Inefficient information and knowledge sharing about climate and energy issues leads to lack of awareness in the young generations

The lack of formal European youth engagement mechanisms in different sectors is one of the biggest hurdles to advancing Europe's ambitions, preventing direct youth participation in decision-making. One excellent example is the European energy transition, marked by progressive goals to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, and invest significantly in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Here, youth have a key role to play in enhancing ambitions and catalysing action, by generating new ideas and meaningful discussions that will affect the speed and outlook of the transition.

The "awareness gap" was often referred to as a barrier to broader youth engagement in the energy transition. Not only is it an education problem, translated into lack of energy literacy and of knowledge on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also a dissemination gap. It was mentioned for example the importance of being informed about existent opportunities for youth participation in energy initiatives and projects, but also being able to keep track of the follow-ups and results upon implementation. Additionally, it was pointed out that information sharing is more effective when using platforms that youth actually use. Using the podcast format was one of the examples mentioned by the participants to tackle this.

Formal education spaces (schools, universities, etc.) were consistently mentioned as powerful platforms to engage and educate young people in a more inclusive way. In this sense, we support the Climate Pact's message to leverage "available support for higher education institutions to develop and teach programmes on life-cycle environmental and climate impacts and footprints as well as to flexible formats of education, including short courses on environmental sustainability"². The participants also see a role for local youth organizations and local authorities in this process. However, formal academic education is not the only solution proposed to approach this challenge:

² [European Climate Pact communication, \(European Commission, 2020\)](#)



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awareness can be increased by involving students in energy-themed creative projects, in debates, or through “reverse education” (youth educating older generations). In addition, involving young people outside of the usual Energy-focused activities or events can also be a way to further promote awareness in harder-to-reach population segments. (e.g. through sustainable energy activities on festivals, challenges and e-rally).

Calls to action:

- Promote cooperation between schools, local authorities and youth organizations to educate young people on climate change and energy issues in schools, in particular those most relevant in their local context;
- Allocate resources for intragenerational trainings and reverse education opportunities (e.g. gamified workshops ran by young experts for adult decision makers)

#2 - Lack of skills and resources is a barrier to effective engagement with official entities in the Energy sector (governments, international organizations, multinational companies, etc.)

Beyond energy and sustainability literacy, skills and preparation have also been identified by the participants as an important part of effectively reaching governments and regulatory institutions.

Some participants feel like lack of experience and knowledge, aggravated by limited resources (capacity and finance) available to youth organizations/representatives, makes it more difficult to identify the right channels and procedures to send a message across or build up a project idea in a meaningful way.

This can be explained by the fact that youth groups and citizens are not inherently involved in the making and implementation of relevant decisions in the energy sector. Even those with a clearer understanding of the scientific or technical side, often have little clarity on how policies and regulations affect this sector. This could be addressed by ensuring a more active participation of youth in projects related to reformation of the energy sector. In fact, many participants identified participation in “real world projects” as a relevant way to up-skill and understand the sector. This could take shape through internships (e.g., Erasmus for Green Energy) or job programs.

Additionally, it was pointed that real-life experience on a local level could be beneficial, for instance by engaging youth in local energy initiatives (e.g., energy cooperatives) or by leading local



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initiatives themselves (e.g. youth led energy info points, to share information with fellow citizens, and to support and advise on the implementation of national measures for the energy transition).

The participants believe that there is a need for educational programs teaching them how to impact or influence decision-making processes and how to critically understand them. Schools and universities, together with any other institutions related to education, are well positioned to offer such opportunities, as they are a safer learning environment than an actual professional experience. In this context, educational institutions can help youth grow their capacities by for instance making available short courses about the functioning of regulatory bodies for the energy sector. They could also work with local youth organizations to include presentations on the existent possibilities of contribution from the youth side.

Such institutions can also make available more opportunities for youth to get a say and influence the decision-making process. One possible way to ensure this would be to invite youth delegates to attend and give inputs on meetings where the long term plan on sustainability and energy transition of their university is discussed, from the curriculum to the actual sustainability planning of the physical spaces (e.g. energy efficiency restructuring, etc.).

Calls to action:

We praise the Climate Pact's initiative to involve organizations (and sectors) important for the transition in the Pact for Skills. We equally support the idea of opening partnership opportunities for youth organizations for up-skilling and getting competences for environment and climate, in the context of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027³.

We echo the idea of leveraging the Youth Guarantee to offer opportunities in the green sectors to unemployed or inactive young people, and using the European Social Fund, as well as Recovery and Resilience Facility to finance training for green jobs and the green recovery, as well as a new platform to support innovation. Equally important to use the Just Transition Fund and Mechanism to promote re-skilling, professional inclusion in targeted regions, particularly those more affected by the Energy transition.

We further propose :

- Promote trainings on how to best 'lobby' energy policy at the local, national and EU levels;

³ [European Climate Pact communication, \(European Commission, 2020\)](#)



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- Create more upskilling opportunities for youth to gain professional experience in the energy sector, from local training opportunities to international exchange ones;
- Allocate a budget for youth organizations to set up local initiatives to engage with citizens on energy and sustainability topics;
- Allocate a budget to train members of youth organizations on how to organise and lead local discussions with civil society and political representatives (e.g. workshops to learn how to contribute to drafting local and national energy and climate plans).

#3 - Tokenism and non-inclusive youth representation in non-youth spaces and dialogues prevent youth climate action to get the right recognition

At the moment, organized youth initiatives in the energy sector are essentially volunteer. This may explain why their efforts and messages are praised, but somehow not valued by big organizations. For instance when it comes to youth representation in events, while spaces for young people to take active part are becoming more frequent, they are often kept as a side-show, without the opportunity to streamline the outcomes to decision-makers. It was suggested during the dialogue sessions that it would be a step forward to have youth representatives in official events, such as those organized by Ministries. In an example mentioned by one of the participants, in Finland a youth representative from the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi had a spot in a seminar on energy and climate organized by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. This kind of opportunity can really help establish and bring forth youth climate ambition, outside of purely mediatic scope.

But there are more examples of inefficient representation of youth in events. For example, not including youth in the organization process of youth-dedicated events, or choosing arbitrarily young speakers to 'represent' the youth voice. Formalising European youth representation can change this.

Having a clear overview of how youth organizations are established across Europe, their size and reach, and what their expertise is, would facilitate the process of reaching youth in a more targeted way, and hence more productively.

Another issue identified by the participants was the non-inclusive representation of youth. This can refer to under-represented nationalities/regions, or even language and internet barriers. It was mentioned for instance that the choice of topics addressed could make a difference here: tackling issues that may not be relevant for all layers of society but very much so for under-developed



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communities (learning about electrification of under-developed communities in suburban areas was one of the suggestions). It was also mentioned the importance of addressing the specific challenges of coal-intensive regions, for instance by having youth contact points in each just transition region and facilitating dialogues between them.

It was suggested that the organising entities should ensure a diverse and representative line-up of speakers, where not only gender, but demographic factors should be taken into consideration. In that regard, young speakers should be invited to engage as experts on equal footing with all other speakers based on their merit, rather than the virtue of being “youth”.

In parallel, and in the context of the European Climate Pact, upcoming events and initiatives could benefit from having more citizen representation, including young citizens. This would reinforce the case for a citizen-centered energy transition.

Calls to action:

We welcome the Commission’s suggestion for “local, regional and national authorities to organise regular ‘town hall’ type meetings on climate and environment”⁴. If well implemented, this would be a good opportunity for citizens to get more involved in the process of the energy transition on a local level.

We also propose to:

- Include youth in the co-creation process of youth-dedicated and non-youth-dedicated events and webinars, in particular in the context of the European Climate Pact
- Refine selection process of the youth/youth organizations invited to actively participate or speak, according to the adequacy of their experience, instead of just for being young
- Consider strategies to reach youth in underrepresented countries and regions, as well as those who suffer from linguistic exclusion and digital divide
- Establish KPIs to measure and evaluate youth representation in decision-making processes

#4 - International cooperation will be key to an effective mobilisation of youth and resources (within and across European borders)

⁴ [European Climate Pact communication, \(European Commission, 2020\)](#)



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Considering the growing number of youth initiatives focusing on the energy and sustainability sectors, concerns were raised over the high chance of duplication of efforts. While there is a case here for simply raising awareness through repetition, over time attention is shifting from reducing the noise and getting to action.

Some participants mention international cooperation as a big part of the solution: sharing good practices of youth activism in areas where it is lacking; interconnecting initiatives/organizations to foster sectoral cooperation (e.g. cross-industrial and cross-service collaboration); permanent platforms for youth movements in the sector to share knowledge and skills. These were some of the proposed solutions.

The ambitions of EYEN to represent the European youth scene were very well received, however concerns over the heterogeneity of the continent were raised. For example, it was mentioned that there are specific challenges faced by the Just Transition regions, and different conditions on non-EU countries that should be under the EYEN's radar. Participants expect EYEN to be able to combine and bring forth the differing issues and views, in an inclusive way.

The concern of over-pushing the same stakeholders repeatedly was also raised, as it can lead to saturation and loss of credibility. EYEN is positioning itself to address this, by mapping and connecting european youth organizations active in the energy sector. Being an umbrella organization that intends to represent and empower the voices of young climate activists in Europe, **EYEN will become an intermediary point between the key stakeholders in the sector and the youth organizations**, from a local to international level.

Calls to action:

- Provide guidance on how to catalyse youth efforts towards more practical solutions (e.g. propose a framework for follow-up on youth initiatives, in particular those where proposals were made by the participants);
- Ensure youth dedicated funding opportunities, for example by engaging large organizations;
- Consider including youth activism as a good practice in dialogues with neighboring countries (e.g. EU-AU cooperation and EU South/East Neighbourhood programs) concerning the energy transition, to help accelerate the engagement of youth outside of Europe
- Continue cooperation with and support of EYEN's efforts;