



# ESDN Youth Manifesto 2021

*This document has been drafted by the participants of the ESDN Youth Workshop organised by the German Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU) on October 29<sup>th</sup> and November 13<sup>th</sup> 2021. About 20 youth representatives from all over Europe - named by members of the ESDN took part (see list at the end). The manifesto was presented by Lara Schummer and Daniel Samuelsson as a keynote during the ESDN Conference on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021. The document has been double-checked, formatted and edited with the help of the ESDN Office. This version has been approved by all participants of the ESDN Youth Workshop.*

## Vision

Dear stakeholders, policymakers, representatives, and everyone else willing to listen to young people,

We are 17 youth representatives from various European countries, speaking on behalf of hundreds of millions of young people living in Europe and around the world. We are concerned about our future (and that of future generations), considering the enormous threat climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss pose to our planet and people's quality of life. The current state of affairs is worrying, yet no appropriate action is being taken on a political level. At this point, the question is no longer about if something needs to happen or even what needs to happen, it is about when we will finally put the necessary changes into action. We need systemic change based on sustainable and circular practices, taking into account intergenerational equity and the well-being of everyone.

Our vision follows the following overarching themes:

- I. Climate Justice
- II. Responsible Production and Consumption
- III. Youth Participation in Policy-Making Processes

For us, responsible consumption and production are inextricably linked to climate justice. The production and consumption patterns of developed countries heavily influence climate change and planetary health in general through environmental pollution and through our considerable energy use. When it comes to implementing the systemic changes that are needed to achieve the sustainability of our societies, it is crucial to include the voices of young people in the process, as we will live both with the consequences of current inaction, as well as within the new system that is bound to emerge.

We are worried about our future, and we can imagine that you are, too. Therefore, we urge you to read this manifesto, listen to what we have to say, and help us put our vision into action.

# I. Climate Justice

## General Remarks: The Link between sustainability and future generations/human rights and climate justice

The rights of future generations are a cornerstone of sustainability. Decisions need to account for those who come after us, and the concept of infinite growth or infinite resources must be revised to a circular system. That way, we ensure that ecological and economic capacity will still be there for future generations. Science is telling us what we need to do to have a future for humanity, essentially requiring sustainability. However, in order to achieve sustainability, we need to protect our planet and counteract the negative effects of the climate crisis. The negative consequences from climate change are unjustly and disproportionately centred on those who have contributed the least to climate change, yet will suffer the most. Their human rights are being violated at this very moment and therefore we need climate justice to ensure that people, especially the most vulnerable to a changing climate, are protected and their human rights are safeguarded.

Bringing the world's biggest problem to the world's highest court: the World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ) is seeking an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice to contribute to the progressive development of international law on human rights and the climate crisis. The WYCJ is seeking the support of state and non-state actors in a bid to break the deadlock on climate justice and to secure the rights of present and future generations.

## Need for Climate Justice

Climate injustice has been in the making for centuries. Whereas developed and mostly western countries have started to emit greenhouse gases since the Industrial Revolution, the rest of the world has only recently joined the club. Today, richer countries are accountable for almost 50% of greenhouse gas emissions, despite only accommodating 12% of the world population. Thus, small islands and developing states that have been historically low polluters and continue to pollute at a decreasing level compared to more developed countries, are going to be impacted the most. Yet, developing countries are less resourceful, compared to their richer counterparts when it comes to investing into mitigation and adaptation strategies. This will further amplify inequalities, economic setbacks and eventual casualties in said countries. Climate justice cannot happen without the recognition of the historical responsibility of emissions.<sup>1</sup>

We need that every member of the ESDN and the ESDN as a whole to reflect this in their work, in solidarity with first-hand climate change witnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> The world, since 1751, has emitted over 1.5 trillion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere- to reach the climate goal to reduce the limiting temperature to rise to 2 degrees Celsius, we require change. The countries that have been the greatest contributors to this issue, should take the greatest responsibility, as their actions have been a burden on the environment, the natural world and society. While the Western part of the globe supplements its economy with the capitalism system, the developing world is on the receiving end of the story, suffering in silence.

## [World's Youth for Climate Justice – the ICJAO Campaign and ESDN's support](#)

The demand for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice about the impact of climate change on human rights was initiated by students from the Pacific Islands, one of the regions most affected by the climate catastrophe. This morally justified initiative has received the backing of 139 civil society organizations and Pacific states. It has inspired young people around the world to join efforts and push for global cooperation to achieve climate justice for current and future generations. The WYJ are mobilizing international support for the advisory opinion and will need a majority of UN member states to support the initiative at the next UNGA.

We are asking the ESDN to promote the initiative launched by the WYJ and to help bringing them into political conversations, thanks to the ESDN's vast network. We need to show solidarity not only with first-hand climate change witnesses, but also with young people from around the world. We need to demand the International Court of Justice to clarify and reiterate the rights of present and future generations. Therefore, this campaign needs to receive support on national and international level. We are thankful to the ESDN for giving a strong message by showing its support for youth-led initiatives.

## [Connection to human rights](#)

We cannot achieve sustainability without taking human rights into account. The UN Human Rights Council recently declared that the human right to a clean, sustainable and healthy environment should ensure a push for transformative economic, social and environmental policies that will protect people and nature. The ESDN must give the right to a clean, sustainable and healthy environment a central role within its own work, as well as demand that states acknowledge, respect, protect and promote this human right. In light of a recent decision of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the ESDN should convey the necessity for states to take responsibility for their adverse impacts on children and future generations. The decision of the Committee is clear on the fact that children today are already the victims of the consequences of climate change.

## II. Sustainable Consumption and Production

When it comes to sustainability, production and consumption patterns play a major role in our transition towards a better and greener future. Unsustainable practices do not only negatively impact our natural environment, but also people's health and their lives, in general. Therefore, transitioning to sustainable consumption and production patterns is crucial in regards to climate action and environmental protection, but also the physical and psychological well-being of everyone.

### General Points

1. We observe that the current economic system, which puts economic growth as its ultimate goal, does not act in the interest of people's well-being, nor in respect of the planet's finite resources. Therefore, we see the necessity of changing our economic system so that the objective of economic activity becomes the well-being of people and the planet. The transition towards a more sustainable economic system must be underpinned through awareness raising and a general re-education of society by explaining the negative impacts of a linear economic system on the environment, society, in general, as well as on individual people.

In this matter we demand that the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are introduced into school curricula, especially regarding responsible consumption and production, to facilitate the transition towards a more sustainable and inclusive economic system.

2. We urge European countries to implement post-Covid-19 recovery plans that are respectful of the environment and use the historic opportunity of the coronavirus pandemic to change the path we have been on until now. We expect European policymakers to support a transition towards a circular economic system through systematic product life-cycle assessments and the promotion of circular economic practices such as "re-use, reduce, recycle" or encouraging local production and consumption over imports.
3. We see the need to further raise awareness on how the transition to sustainability in our every-day lives is not only beneficial to the natural environment, but also to society in general and draw attention to the aspects where this positively impacts people's personal lives. A better understanding of the need of sustainable consumption and production patterns will be conducive to the actual transition.
4. We have to redefine the objective of our consumerism and discuss how we can measure well-being in a more sustainable manner. Can we justify the satisfaction of our personal pleasures through consumption if there is harm done to others in the manufacturing process of the products we consume?
5. We want to highlight the power of national governments in the promotion of a societal mentality change through awareness raising campaigns on responsible production and consumption, as well

as environment related problems on a national or regional level. To promote sustainable behaviour on an individual level, it needs to be clear for people to see how they are personally affected by these global challenges and highlight their individual power. We see the need to distinguish between producer and consumer responsibility in the promotion of sustainable practices, both equally important when it comes to sustainable development.

6. Lastly, we demand that the wealthiest people of the world take responsibility for their, in comparison to the average person, enormous environmental footprint and we encourage them to opt for sustainable choices and simultaneously decrease their consumption. This could be achieved through higher taxation of luxury goods.

### Concrete Proposals

1. **Transportation:** We call for the expansion of improved EU-wide railway systems connecting all European capitals and major cities with high-speed rail as well as night trains in order to make traveling by train easier and more reliable. An expanded railway network will encourage EU citizens to opt for trains instead of airplanes for intra-continental travel, which, in return, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Europe.

2. **Production standards and eco-labels:** We urge the European Union to set environmental restrictions to industries, followed by the introduction of a mandatory EU-wide eco-labelling system.

In order to sell a product on the EU market, certain sustainability requirements, environmental and social standards, are to be met in production processes (for example the amount of chemicals used in production processes is to be minimized, excessive waste production should be penalized, decent working conditions of employees are to be guaranteed).

Transparent and verifiable information on the operation mode is to be provided by producers and to be thoroughly investigated by an independent institution. In return for meeting said standards, products shall be awarded an eco-label designed with traffic light type of scale and a QR code to enable the consumer to get further information on a product's environmental impact. This labelling process must be mandatory for all companies wishing to sell their products on the EU market in order for EU citizens to be able to make informed choices on the environmental impact of their desired product, making the transition towards a sustainable consumption easier.

If the labelling system is to remain on a voluntary basis, we encourage the EU to incentivize businesses to adhere to the sustainability standards by financially rewarding sustainable production practices through tax reliefs and penalizing environmentally unfriendly production through higher taxation rates.

### III. Youth Participation and Empowerment

#### General points:

We demand that youth should be actively included in the creation and drafting of policies and decisions. Young people may act as main stakeholders and can provide valuable information and solutions to the problems we are facing. Youth inclusion and participation is a democratic and fundamental right. We recognise that there are great inequalities locally, nationally and internationally with regards to youth participation. On the three levels identified, there are significant gaps in how youth can raise their voices. In all cases, the ones most affected by inequalities are often the ones who are not being heard.

#### Concrete ideas and points:

##### **Consultation and collaboration**

- Systems should be created in order to ensure that information sharing, consultation and decision-making include a diversity of youth perspectives. A first step would be the creation of an ESDN Youth Network. Through this network, youth would be able to have a dialogue with European policymakers.
- Governments should provide means that ensure that information sharing, consultations and decision-making increases over time and include youth from all parts of society.
- Decision makers need to listen, value, and take into account the views from young people. The views being expressed by the youth shall be reflected in policies. Youth should also be justly compensated for their work.
- ESDN states should create an institutional framework for youth participation in working and solution-oriented groups, and be integrated in policy-making processes, acting as advisors for politicians when it comes to the topics related to youth.
- Each ESDN state should have youth delegates and the ESDN should promote the participation of youth delegates outside of the region. Each youth delegate should be able to participate meaningfully. Countries that have YD should revise and improve their current structures.
- Political parties should include youth topics and issues in their political programmes and to increase collaboration with the young civil society.
- Decision-makers should learn how to communicate with youth. This could be done through workshops and trainings.

##### **Empowerment**

- Following the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2250 (2015) 'Youth, Peace & Security Agenda', the youth must have a seat at the table of negotiations and be included in 'decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including institutions and mechanisms to counter violent extremism [...] to consider establishing integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution'.
- The ESDN should work against language barriers, economic barriers and digital gaps. The ESDN and member states should ensure a diversity of youth who can meaningfully participate.

- The ESDN should create meaningful inclusion and avoid youth tokenism. In order to avoid youth tokenism, the ESDN and member states should work for more stable and direct influence, systematic platforms of influence binding. ESDN states who have not done so yet, should lower the voting age to 16.
- The ESDN should work in attracting more young people to participate in sustainability.
- The ESDN should ensure that youth from diverse backgrounds are systematically included in information sharing, consultation and decision-making processes.
- The ESDN should, together with the ESDN Youth Network, create a list of best practices, which can be used as inspiration for improvement locally, nationally and internationally.

## IV. Conclusion

Everything we –young people– have learned, we have learned from you, our previous generations, and we are grateful for all you have taught us. Nevertheless, as we are becoming adults, we recognize that the way older generations have built our system is no longer viable. We are facing serious challenges, and our life depends on whether we will be able to overcome them and adapt. We are in a state of emergency and since young people only have limited power; we need your help.

All the previously mentioned points are of great importance to us. We hope that you, too, recognize the urgency of the situation and see the necessity of implementing systemic change. So, please prove to us that we can put our trust in you, that previous generations are not abandoning us, but that you are ready to fight on our side for a future on a livable planet.



## V. Participants of the ESDN Youth Workshop

- Balazs Kelemen, UN Youth Delegate from Hungary
- Daniel Samuelsson, UN Youth Delegate to the High Level Political Forum from Sweden
- Dorotea Strelec, Croatian Youth Council
- Dumitrița Rogoșinaru, UN youth Delegate from Romania
- Gabriel Zvîncă, UN Youth Delegate from Romania
- Ema Mehic, UN Youth Delegate from Luxembourg
- Lara Schummer, UN Youth Delegate from Luxembourg
- Emma Merikanto, Member of the Finnish 2030 Youth Group
- Fabian Gacon, UN Youth Delegate for Sustainable Development from Germany
- Freja Ellefsen, UN Youth Delegate for Sustainable Development from Norway
- Georgiana Teslaru, ECO-UNESCO, Ireland
- Johanna Ekebon, Member of the Board of Regeneration2030, Finland
- Jóna Þórey Pétursdóttir, UN Youth Delegate for Human Rights from Iceland
- Linda Luts, UN Youth Delegate from Estonia
- Miriam Egger, UN Youth Delegate from Austria
- Simon Babjak, UN Youth Delegate from Slovakia
- Yasemin Amorim-Esenli, UN Youth Delegate from Switzerland