



Climate Pact Ambassadors' Recommendations for the new EU Agenda 2024-2029

Why this document?

Six Belgium Climate Pact Ambassadors have gathered their thoughts and recommendations in this document to inspire the EU Commission's next 2024-2029 agenda, in the hope to see it reflect citizens' needs, the reduction of inequalities as well as the preservation of natural resources and planetary boundaries as an utmost priority. To this effect, we aim to bring our expertise to the service of ambitious and equitable climate and environmental policies.

What is the Climate Pact?

The European Climate Pact is a movement of people united around a common cause, each taking steps in their own worlds to build a more sustainable Europe. Launched by the European Commission, the Pact is part of the European Green Deal and is helping the EU to meet its goal to become climate-neutral by 2050. European Climate Pact Ambassadors and Partners are selected by the European Commission to inform, inspire and support climate policy and action in their own communities and networks.

International commitments

- **An ambitious climate pledge on the international stage**

The EU should submit an updated **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** before 2025 that includes enhanced emission reduction 2030 targets as well as 2035 targets compatible with 1.5°C pathways. The NDC update should be formulated on the basis of previous EU-wide assessments **identifying multidimensional inequalities and their interlinked effects with climate change** to propose effective actions fit for all. The updated NDC, for instance, should be child-sensitive¹.

¹ [UNICEF NDCs for Every Child Data Platform](#)

Climate, Biodiversity & Pollution

- **Tackling Climate Change, Biodiversity loss and Pollution as priorities in the Commission's 2024-2029 agenda**

As a primary threat to living beings on earth, action to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution must remain **a priority in the next 5 years**, and be inscribed as such in the Commission's agenda. The European Green Deal must be prolonged and strengthened.

- **Ambitions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution must be streamlined throughout all sectors of EU and national actions.**

Climate change, biodiversity and pollution lenses must be taken in the design of all EU policies and actions, to ensure that multilevel initiatives are taken at EU and national levels to reach the climate goals set with the European Green Deal. For each sector, they must be monitored, evaluated and updated to guarantee utmost results while being **calibrated on the needs of all european citizens**, through the direct participation of the concerned population, including minorities and disadvantaged groups, in the collection and analysis of data, the design, implementation and evaluation of EU actions and policies.

- **Every policy/action on climate, biodiversity & pollution must be inclusively designed, implemented and evaluated.**

This means giving **systematic and equitable opportunities for consultation and participation** to a diversity of social groups - indiscriminately of age, gender, real or presupposed origin, disability, socioeconomic background (...). This also means guaranteeing **equitable access to the means and information** allowing every individual to participate (inc. Child and disability-friendly information/actions). In that regard, EU policies should start from the point of view that much relevant knowledge concerning the needs and solutions **comes from the local level**.

- **Inequalities of access to nature and natural resources must be recognised and addressed in the EU.**

Some social groups in the EU face inequalities in terms of natural resources access and environmental hazard exposure², their needs must therefore be addressed **transversally right from the start of EU financed actions** (inc. projects).

² [European Environment Agency](#)

Human Rights

- **EU actions and policies respectful of human rights**

All EU-level and national level actions and policies should be based on a previous analysis of how these **might affect the rights of all humans, including minorities and individuals outside the EU**. This also includes climate/environment-related policies and actions. To do so, an in-depth understanding of the intersectionality of climate inequalities with other social inequalities is essential, which necessitates consultation and active participation of the concerned populations.

- **Children’s and Youth’s voice and participation must be fostered to reach the green transition.**

Children represent 18% of the EU population³, yet only 7% of EU children actually feel heard, **⅔ of european children are unhappy with the way local decision makers engage with them**⁴ and only 16% consider that their opinions are systematically listened to at school⁵. The right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, as defined by article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be systematically taken into account when shaping or updating EU policies, notably with climate or environmental ambitions. This goes in line with the EU strategy on the rights of the child aiming to support children in developing “their potential as engaged, responsible citizens”⁶. By participating in researching, analysing, implementing sustainable solutions to environmental problems and voicing their needs, they can develop the skills needed to guarantee their current and future involvement as adults in the safeguard of natural resources and the green transition.

In that regard, the EU should :

1. Provide training programmes given to EU project calls applicants on how to include a safe and healthy children participation within their projects
2. Guarantee dedicated spaces with child-friendly documentation where children and youth can voice their ideas, needs and concerns at the design stage of a policy. Noting that these perspectives should be included in the design of the subsequent policies.
3. Fund and organise awareness raising campaigns on the importance of investing in children and youth’s active participation in democratic life as a means for them to develop the life skills they will need to contribute to the green transition and adapt to a changing world.
4. Increase funding opportunities for research and data collection on children’s perceptions and needs linked to climate change, the environment, education for sustainability (especially children/youth-led research), to name a few.

³ [UNICEF](#)

⁴ [The Europe Kids Want Report 2019](#)

⁵ [The Europe Kids Want Report 2024](#)

⁶ [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#)

- **EU and national policies and actions must consider children’s physical, emotional and cognitive needs in their design, implementation and evaluation processes.** Children have unique physical, emotional and cognitive needs, differing from adults, which must be considered when shaping policies - especially when noting that worldly children remain the **first victims of environmental challenges**⁷ - to ensure that no action promoted by the EU, nor its member states, affects the life quality of children. To do so, children must be consulted, given a space to voice their concerns and contribute to finding innovative solutions.

Education

- **A EU-wide participative education to fit children’s present and future needs**
Today, only **14% of children in the EU are absolutely certain that what they are learning in school is useful for their future**, while 70% are worried about the impacts of climate change.⁸ Passive learning, and the consequent feeling of lacking agency, contributes to 45%⁹ of young people in the EU saying that eco-anxiety already has a significant impact on their daily life. Cutting-edge pedagogies, such as **democratic education and outdoor education**¹⁰ can help, by promoting children’s sense of belonging and agency in their community and natural spaces.

In that regard, the EU should:

1. Lead awareness raising actions to promote the idea of children as positive agents of change, in accordance with their rights and well-being.
 2. Enact an EU recommendation on education for healthy democracies with participative education as central
 3. Provide funding and training for teachers on how to promote environmental awareness and connection to nature at school, while also responding to their related emotions at school (inc. ecoanxiety), with tools such as self-directed and project-based learning, democratic education and outdoor learning
- **Promoting an education in the world, to experience society and its fragility.**
Schools today remain closed units, where children learn mostly indoors, disconnected from broader realities. By learning from a range of actors (communities, experts, parents, local stakeholders) and within diverse learning landscapes (inc. nature), children can healthily strengthen their understanding of environmental processes and otherness while developing a sense of belonging and the skills to foster social cohesion in the EU.

⁷ [UNICEF](#)

⁸ [The Europe The Kids Want Report 2024](#)

⁹ [Headway - A new roadmap in Mental health](#)

¹⁰ [Position Paper on Outdoor Education, QUEST, 2023.](#)

In that regards, the EU should:

1. Promote the adoption of the **Open-schooling philosophy**¹¹ throughout the EU, through training, funding, peer exchanges
2. Enact an EU recommendation on how to promote open schooling, pushing for national and local strategies between schools and a variety of social actors.

- **Cross-generational learning and awareness raising**

Lifelong learning in the EU should be promoted as an education tool to raise awareness on environmental challenges, good practices, coping mechanisms proposed by the EU and national governments to answer problems such as climate hazards and the latent effects of environmental issues on well-being (including physical, emotional and mental health), infrastructure, the economy and culture, to cite a few. Lifelong learning should however be **learner-centred** and as often as possible **student-led**.

In that regard, the EU should:

1. Promote climate-related knowledge and green skills for individuals of all ages, using tools such as peer-learning, multi-generational learning, awareness raising campaigns and EU projects on sustainability in education.

- **An education fostering children's access to nature and natural resources in the EU.**

Children have faced a reduced access to nature, with $\frac{2}{3}$ of teachers reporting that students in their schools receive less than an hour of outdoor playtime a day, with 12% actually indicating that children get **less than 30 minutes**.¹² Yet for this particular group, continuous exposure to nature has been linked to higher long-term mental and physical health outcomes.¹³ More **training opportunities and awareness raising actions** are needed from the EU to promote children's access to natural spaces through education but also in their wider families and communities. The EU should additionally promote a greater **flexibility of curriculums** across national programmes, allowing space for outdoor learning.

Health

- **A 2024-2029 Agenda considering individual, societal and environmental health as a priority**

Human health is closely linked to natural ecosystems' functioning and preservation. To ensure the safeguard of human beings' well-being, **ecosystem preservation needs to remain on top of the new EU mandate**.

¹¹ [Position Paper on Open Schooling, QUEST, 2023.](#)

¹² [Mathew P. White et al., "Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing." Scientific Reports 9, no. 7730 \(2019\)](#)

¹³ [DEN Project Research Report and Brochure, 2023](#)

- **EU research and establishment of coping/protection mechanisms**

With rising eco-anxiety levels in the EU, and the remaining possibility of falling short from stabilising climate change to the committed 1.5°C, increased EU research should be led on the present & future environmental changes, on how they already affect the EU population in diverse ways (following intersections of inequalities) and defining which coping & protection mechanisms can already be established to support the EU population's mental, emotional and physical resilience.

In that regard, the EU should :

1. Increase funding for projects and research on eco-anxiety and resilience in the EU
2. Promote peer-to-peer networks supporting local action and social cohesion in the case of environmental hazards
3. Accompany inclusive local adaptation strategies and action plans in the EU
4. Create an EU platform with key information on health relating to environmental change (with disability and child-friendly content)
5. Promote psychological assistance in the EU and public awareness on human health's link to natural spaces

Research

- **Strengthening cooperation between researchers and local stakeholders**

The EU should expand its efforts to **create networking and collaboration opportunities between research** (both scientific and artistic) **and local stakeholders**, including residents, housing corporations, schools, civil servants, youth-led organisations, local entrepreneurs, and sustainability professionals. Local action and community processes should be especially fostered in neighbourhoods or with social groups harder to reach, to avoid similar programmes to run alongside each other.

- **Children & Youth-led research**

To better understand the complexities, develop a feeling of agency and valuable life skills, Young Europeans should be given the opportunity to **participate in research** (design, implementation, evaluation) **from early ages on**.

In that regard, the EU should :

1. Grant more funding and training on participatory research methods & projects to schools, youth organisations and individual initiatives to foster local research projects on sustainability, while reducing administrative costs for small-scale projects.
2. EU funded projects and policies should also include in their selection criteria the active participation of children & youth in researching, communicating about and contributing to the green transition.

Community transition

- **A fair and green transition starting from the local level**

The EU should ensure that a multi-scale approach is taken to address the triple crisis, engaging stakeholders and social groups from a bottom-up perspective. For instance, there is a need for the **development of work programmes** providing a generic approach with tools (training programmes, manuals) **to co-design** equitable, climate, neutral and climate resilient **neighbourhood transitions** with local stakeholders, communities, researchers, youth, sustainability experts...

Digitalisation

- **Ethical reflections on the use of digitalisation and its environmental impact**

The EU should foster ethical reflections in schools, communities, and the general public around the use of digital technologies, the construction of new digital infrastructures and their potential climate/biodiversity/pollution impact. The debate should be inclusive and promote digitalisation where relevant for the respect of human rights and promotion of well-being of individuals, while remaining respectful of planetary boundaries and resources.

- **Only building informed digital infrastructures respectful of human rights and ecosystems**

The building of digital infrastructure, as for any other type of infrastructures, should always be defined following **holistic assessments** on the repercussions these infrastructures will have on **natural ecosystems and their interactions with communities, as well as local, national and international inequalities**. These assessments should consider all possible social groups potentially affected, not only in the short but also in the long term, taking into account the divergences of impacts linked to age, gender, geographical position, disability, socio-economic status, legal recognition and other criterias potentially leading to increased perceived consequences.

Energy

- **An NDC setting ambitious clear fossil energy reduction targets.**

The EU NDC, updated before 2025, should set a 2035 emissions reduction target compatible with a 1.5°C scenario (at least 73%¹⁴) and confirm the European Commission's ambitious proposal to lower emissions by 90% by 2040. The NDC should include clear timelines to phase out coal, oil and gas, to keep good on the historical COP28 agreement

¹⁴ [EU Climate Action Tracker](#)

to 'transition away from fossil fuels'¹⁵, without relying on CCS except in hard-to-abate sectors. The EU should also pledge to immediately halt approval of new fossil fuel exploration and infrastructure project, in line with the IEA's *Net Zero by 2050*¹⁶ scenario.

- **A renewable energy respecting human rights**

The EU should play its part to achieve the global goal of **tripling renewable energy capacity** and **doubling energy efficiency by 2030**. Policies should include **safeguards** to ensure that renewable energy projects respect human and nature rights.

- **An EU-wide commitment to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies by 2025**

The EU should comply with its pledge to phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2025. Fossil fuel subsidies still amounted to **123 billion EUR in 2022**¹⁷. Not only are they environmentally and economically harmful, but they also fail to serve the purported objective of benefiting poor households: in fact, reports from the World Bank¹⁸ and the IMF¹⁹ show that fossil fuel subsidies disproportionately benefit higher-income groups which consume more energy. This financial support should be directly targeted at poor households and workers in impacted sectors to ensure a just transition.

Tourism

- **Encouraging sustainable tourism and the adoption of climate-sensitive risk identification approaches for tourism businesses of all sizes and destinations.**

Tourism should systematically consider the current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts of its activities, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and local communities. Indeed, the competitiveness of the EU tourism ecosystem will largely depend on its capacity to meet those challenges, as well as the customer demand, by becoming **more sustainable**. **Building resilience through a systemic approach** would support the tourism sector to endure the shocks and build back by adapting to the new normal, which is often unknown. It touches upon the EU's responsibility to ensure that the tourism and travel industries, reduce their strong ecological footprint worldwide, which highlights the need to devise sustainable and flexible solutions for multimodal transport and to develop policies for preserving natural heritage and biodiversity, respecting the sociocultural authenticity of host communities, ensuring sustainability, and delivering socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders.

¹⁵ [The UAE Consensus Forward](#)

¹⁶ [IEA Report Net Zero by 2050](#)

¹⁷ [2023 Report on Energy Subsidies in the EU](#)

¹⁸ [Energy Subsidy Reform Facility: Generates Knowledge to Support Governments to Design and Implement Sustainable Energy Subsidy Reforms while Safeguarding the Welfare of the Poor \(worldbank.org\)](#)

¹⁹ [IMF Working Paper The Unequal Benefits of Fuel Subsidies Revisited: Evidence for Developing Countries](#)

In that regard, the EU should :

1. Promote awareness around international and EU political priorities on green transition, changing legislation (e.g. climate law) and technology (e.g. renewable energy solutions, smart metres, zero waste solutions)
2. Provide better access to skills (e.g. long-term planning, digital skills, practical skills for repair and repurpose)
3. Implement financing and funding to undertake green action

- **Enhancing the protection of climate resorts is protecting europeans' health and well-being.**

Climate resorts across Europe are **valuable therapeutic resources for communities**, sometimes even possessing a strong cultural and symbolic value. Therefore their preservation should be considered as a priority for the EU. For instance, the low mountain climate, also usually a forest climate, is most commonly used therapeutically in Central Europe. The higher low mountain ranges and the sea ("thalassotherapy") stimulate breathing, circulation (heart, blood vessels and circulation), metabolism and the neuro-endocrinium as well as the Immune system. Climate resorts can therefore have a positive effect on the reduction of respiratory diseases; vascular, heart-related and circulatory diseases; and skin diseases.

In this regard, the EU should :

1. Map the climate resorts across Europe
2. Support climate resorts by establishing and EU-wide legislation to protect these natural areas and include them within existing EU policies related to climate change and social and environmental issues
3. Increasingly support, both financially and technically, EU support given to scientific research on climate resorts and sustainable tourism,
4. Promote and support public and private partnerships at the local level around climate resorts and sustainable tourism
5. Promote and support the work of the European networks and organisations involved in the sector

Transport

- **Decarbonising transport in the EU**

Modal **shift to cleaner transport modes must be the cornerstone of the EU policies** to decarbonise transport and the economy as a whole, to proceed swiftly towards the green and digital transition, and to create ever greener value chains and economic eco-systems. In line with the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy shifting passenger and freight traffic to rail is of paramount importance to allow the European

Union to achieve its climate objectives, strengthening its energy security, supporting social and economic cohesion, and fostering its leadership on the global stage.

- **Ensuring fair competition between transport modes**

Some progress has been achieved thanks to the reform of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) for imposing a carbon price to the transport sector but yet the **regulatory framework is not fair**. Energy taxation rules are **uneven and favours aviation in particular; the conditions and pricing to access infrastructure differ from rail to road**. EU policies are needed to fully internalise external costs and enable clean modes to compete with others in equal terms.

- **Ensuring adequate financing to clean mobility**

Fair, long-term, comprehensive financing is required to achieve net-zero transport infrastructure. Infrastructure investments, such as implementation of a major plan to connect the European capitals with high-speed rail are prescribed in the Letta Report on Single European Market and to deliver massive greenhouse gas reduction in the next decades. Such infrastructure projects will need a bigger budget under the Connecting Europe Facility in a scaled-up MFF, where ETS revenues should be earmarked and EU Green Bonds made standard for supplementary sustainable projects if new European debt is issued to finance the next MFF. At a broader level, European Semester recommendations will have to affirmatively promote the green transition, coupling macroeconomic stability with the prioritisation of sustainable investments.

- **Digitalising of the transport sector**

The digital transition must speed up in the transport sector to complement new infrastructure. The **deployment of rail's key digital enablers** such as the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC), and Digital Capacity Management (DCM) is paramount to improve efficiency in the transport system and contribute to net-zero transport.

Signatures

Below are the signatures and expertise of the contributors to these recommendations. One contributor has preferred to remain anonymous. Views and opinions expressed in this email are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or those of the other EU Climate Pact Ambassadors or Partners. The European Union cannot be held responsible for them.

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