



YouCare
Youth Creating Action
Research on Eco-anxiety

Nothing about the Planet's Future without youth

Recommendations for reclaiming
our right to environ(mental) health



Considering that :

🌐 A generation is coming of age under the shadow of an ecological crisis we did not create. Indeed, [children born in 2020 will experience a two - to sevenfold increase in extreme weather events compared to those born in 1960.](#)¹

🌀 [Eco-anxiety](#) is a widespread and legitimate response to this tangible threat; a set of complex and intense emotions triggered by environmental destruction that mostly affects young people. Indeed, our care for the world tends to face feelings of powerlessness, we are exposed to different information sources, and for some of us, also in the front line of socio-environmental struggles.²

- 🇮🇹 [Eco-anxiety can simultaneously be dismissed as youthful weakness or used as a distraction from what is truly behind the ecological catastrophe.](#)
- 🇧🇬 [In Bulgaria, eco-anxiety is still somewhat niche, but young people's mental health linked to the ecological crisis is gradually gaining traction in the media.](#)

🌀 Eco-anxieties can also be a driving force for change, capable of catalysing powerful, beneficial individual and collective actions.³

🌀 Eco-anxieties can be addressed first and foremost through [mitigation](#) of environmental change at its source, through [active youth participation, storytelling, and knowledge exchange](#), and by [restoring hope](#).⁴

- 🇪🇺 [Involving people in decision-making about their environment can have a positive effect on ecological anxiety.](#)

¹ Wim Thiery et al. (2021), "Intergenerational inequities in exposure to climate extremes", *Science*, 374, 158-160.

² Léger Goodes, et al. (2022), "Eco-anxiety in children: A scoping review of the mental health impacts of the awareness of climate change," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 ; Buchanan et al. (2021), "Naturally enough?: Children, climate anxiety and the importance of hope", *Social Educator*, 39(3), 17–31 ; Wu et al. (2020), "Climate anxiety in young people: a call to action", *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 4(10), 435 - 436.

³ López-García et al. (2025), "What Drives Pro-Environmental Behavior? Investigating the Role of Eco-Worry and Eco-Anxiety in Young Adults", *Sustainability*, 17(10), 4543 ; Popescu (2022), "Eco-anxiety and solastalgia: Keeping hope alive", *Rhizome* 82(1) ; Pihkala (2020), "Ecoanxiety and Environmental Education", *Sustainability*, 12(23).

⁴ Hurley et al. (2022), "Supporting young people with climate anxiety: mitigation, adaptation, and resilience", *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 6(3), 190 ; Hua Wang et al. (2023), "Coping with eco-anxiety: An interdisciplinary perspective for collective learning and strategic communication", *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 9.

-  [52% of young Irish want opportunities to be involved in climate action projects, and 93% want climate action to become a bigger part of school life.](#)

 [Over 1 in 2 young Europeans \(15-24 y.o.\)](#) see climate change as the main global challenge for the future of the EU, and [9 out of 10 \(91%\)](#) agree that tackling it would improve their mental health and well-being.⁵

 On a global scale, [83% of young people aged 16-25](#) think adults in charge have failed to take care of the planet, and [more than half](#) reported being sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty.⁶

-  [60% young people in Ireland](#) feel anxious about climate change.
-  [3 out of 4 young Lithuanians](#) think climate change is a threat.
-  [20% of young people \(16-24\) in the US](#) are afraid to have children and bringing a new generation into a steadily warming world (30% for those having directly experienced a severe-weather event).

 The main expectation of [72% of young Europeans](#) surveyed ahead of the 2022 European Year of Youth was for decision-makers to listen more to their demands and act on them.⁷

 [80% of people globally](#) want stronger climate action from their governments, and  [85% of Europeans](#) consider climate change a serious problem for the world.⁸

 Fostering youth engagement in EU and national decision-making, protecting the environment, and embedding education on democracy and mental health are [crucial interrelated demands formulated by EU citizens](#).⁹

 Extreme weather events caused by climate breakdown have cost Europe [16.500 lives and 43 billion euros](#) between June and August 2025.¹⁰

⁵ European Union (2021), “**Special Eurobarometer 513 Climate Change**” ; European Union (2021), “**Special Eurobarometer 517 Report Future of Europe**”.

⁶ Hickman et al. (2021), “**Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey**”, *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), 863-873.

⁷ European Commission (2022), “**Flash Eurobarometer 502 Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth**”.

⁸ University of Oxford & UNDP (2024), “**People’s Climate Vote 2024 Results**” ; European Commission (2025), “**Special Eurobarometer 565 Climate Change**”.

⁹ European Union (2022), “**Conference on the Future of Europe - Report on the Final Outcome**”.

¹⁰ Usman, Parker & Vallat (2025), “**Dry-roasted NUTS: early estimates of the regional impact of 2025 extreme weather**”, *European Central Bank*.

We, 29 young people (14-27 years old) from Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, and Lithuania, taking part in the [YouCare Project](#), call on the Members of the European Parliament, European Commission Representatives, and people in power in the EU to ...

1) Invite a plurality of youth groups to the EU Parliament and EU Commission to voice their opinions

Level of implementation: European (but we strongly encourage national mirroring)

Considering European policies and actions:

- The [EU Youth Strategy \(2019-2027\)](#) promotes [youth participation in decision-making](#), and **this is a direct implementation of it.**
- Moreover, the [European Year of Youth \(2022\)](#) established as an objective to bring a youth perspective into policymaking at all levels → Need of **follow-up initiatives to maintain this youth engagement**, in issues that matter most to young people.
- The [Aarhus Convention](#) (the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention)

We recommend :

💡 Formalise a **regular and inclusive** youth consultation mechanism in the Commission on **Eco-Anxieties**, feeding directly into the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) process, and supporting in particular its [sub-goals 3 and 6 of general goal #5 Mental Health & Wellbeing](#) and [sub-goals 3,4, and 6 of general goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe](#).

💡 Advocate for the **inclusion of children and youth from outside the European Union** – who are also living the impacts of Environmental change most directly – starting in the Commissioners' Youth Policy Dialogues and in the framework of the [Youth Action Plan](#).

💡 Formally integrate a **Youth Advisory Panel** into relevant European Parliament committees (ENVI, ITRE, CULT), that should be consulted on all files pertaining to the Green Deal, education, and mental health.

2) Create a digital platform for young people focused on climate change anxiety and deep emotions

Level of implementation: European level, with European, national, and local impact.

Considering European policies and actions :

- The 3 pillars of action of the [Youth Action Plan](#): partnership to engage, empower, and connect.
- The [EU Youth Strategy \(2019-2027\)](#), which emphasizes the recognition of young people as active actors in society, capable of facing specific challenges. It also highlights the need to encourage and support them in becoming active citizens. This includes the declared [Youth Goals](#), particularly [#4 Information & Constructive Dialogue](#), [#5 Mental Health & Wellbeing](#), and [#10 Sustainable Green Europe](#).
- The [European Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#), aimed at guaranteeing the protection, inclusion, and participation of all children in society, including by empowering their safe participation in the digital environment.
- The [European Climate Pact](#),’s mission to collectively fight against climate change and adapt to its consequences.
- The European Commission’s support of the “[AWorld](#)” application as a tool to promote new sustainable habits among citizens, in connection with the European Climate Pact. The application is also supported by the United Nations’ Act Now campaign to promote the 2030 Agenda.

We recommend :

The creation, by the European Commission, of a digital platform focused on climate change anxiety and deep emotions.

The aim of the platform will be to promote among young people the recognition and validation of deep emotions associated with climate change, as well as to encourage them to take individual and collective action in this regard.

The platform will be managed and overseen by a committee composed of national youth agencies, youth and climate associations, and young volunteers. The committee will be responsible for supervising the correct use of the platform, removing discriminatory comments or information, evaluating youth proposals on policy recommendation/decision making process and approving the updates on the “open guidelines about emotion validation and sustainable lifestyles”.

The main language of the platform will be English, with the option of instant translation into the different languages of the EU.

The platform will include several sections:

1. **Chat and video chat safe space to provide remote psychological support :** Available 24/7. This section will be the core of the platform, offering professional assistance to young people dealing with eco-anxiety and other climate change-related emotions. It will promote the achievement of sub-goals 1 and 5 of the general goal #5 Mental Health & Wellbeing of the Youth Goals.
2. **Networking and coordination for collective actions :** A space where young people can propose collective actions to be implemented at local/national/European levels, coordinate accordingly, and exchange advice. This section will also showcase the actions already carried out by young participants at different levels. It will include both group and individual chat options with the possibility of sharing images, videos, and texts. This section will foster active youth participation, becoming a central part of the platform. It directly relates to sub-goals 2 and 5 of the general goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe of the Youth Goals. Furthermore, it will also promote sub-goals 1 and 4 of the general goal #4 Information & Constructive Dialogue.
3. **Scheduled online meetings on the following topics:**
 - o Recognition and validation of emotions, facilitated by psychologists and youth workers (e.g. art-therapy activities, gamification activities, challenges etc.). These activities may take place both online and in person. They will directly support the achievement of sub-goals 1 and 6 of the general goal #5 Mental Health & Wellbeing of the Youth Goals.
 - o Individual and collective actions to address eco-anxiety and climate change, involving European and international scientific experts and activists. These will contribute to achieving sub-goal 1 of the general goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe of the Youth Goals.
 - o Youth proposals on policy recommendations and decision-making processes related to climate change, mental health, and youth at European, national and local level. Proposals with more than “x” votes/like could be evaluated by the committee. These will be directly linked to sub-goal 3 of the general goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe of the Youth Goals.
4. **Stay informed :** A section where scientific articles and peer-reviewed studies, as well as European, national, and local actions and policies, will be published regarding emotions related to climate change and ongoing progress in combating and adapting to

climate change. This section is directly connected to sub-goal 5 of the general goal #4 Information & Constructive Dialogue.

5. **Open practical guide** : Create an open guide about individual and collective actions concerning the validation of emotions and sustainable lifestyles. This section will contribute to achieving sub-goals 1, 2, and 7 of the general goal #10 Sustainable Green Europe of the Youth Goals.

3) Addressing the difficulty to talk about deep emotions and mental health, and recognising the role of schools and education

Level of implementation : National (implementation), European (guidelines, funding)

This recommendation is about the need to equip young people with the skills to understand their inner world and navigate the external one, as well as the role of education in achieving this.

Considering European policies and actions :

- The EU Commission includes in its [overarching strategy](#) (2023) the mental health of young people as a priority and promotes a whole-school approach as one of the most effective tools to improve mental well-being. It also highlights the interlings between nature's health and mental health (p. 4).
- In 2022, [the Council recommends the integration of “sustainability” into all levels of education](#), which include collaboration, critical thinking and systems thinking, and the subsequent [results of the European Education Area \(EEA\) Working sub-group on Learning for Sustainability](#).
- [European training initiatives](#) that can inspire education frameworks able to prepare young people for a desirable future.

We recommend :

 That Member States adopt a holistic **educational framework that links well-being with environmental stewardship**. We need to move beyond a curriculum-focused approach and instead foster school cultures where the well-being of learners and educators is prioritised as

the foundation for learning, by integrating practices that build emotional resilience and a connection to the outdoor environment, and by **empowering young people to engage with ecological challenges from a position of agency and hope**, rather than anxiety.

 That Member States, together with local authorities and schools, **prioritise the establishment and strengthening of psycho-social support services** for both young people and adults, with a dual objective :

1. to assist individuals already affected by eco-anxiety
2. to help citizens of all ages understand, express, and process complex emotions — including feelings of powerlessness and climate anxiety — linked to environmental and social challenges, fostering emotional literacy and resilience.

These services should be integrated not only into schools and youth centres, but also into universities, workplaces, community centres, and health services, making them accessible at different stages.

By adopting a lifelong and community-based approach, the EU will not only reduce the mental health burden linked to eco-anxiety, but also **empower citizens of all ages to engage constructively in climate action and democratic life**.

*Because eco-anxieties in youth can only effectively be addressed through **mitigation of environmental change at its source**, we urge EU leaders to :*

4) **Protect the frameworks that protect our forests and their biodiversity**

#PROTECT OUR FORESTS

Forests are essential for life on Earth. They clean our air, store carbon, regulate water, and provide calm, beautiful spaces for people to enjoy and explore, and **improve mental health by connecting with the world around us**. They [are home to countless species of creatures](#) and [approximately 350 million people residing inside or within 5km from dense forests](#), and [they support jobs](#) in rural communities.  [Forests cover only 11% of Ireland's land](#), amongst one of the lowest rates in the EU.

Endangering trees takes a toll on young people's mental health, leaving us vulnerable, anxious and scared of the future that lies ahead of us.

Considering European policies and actions¹¹ :

 [EU Forest Strategy 2030](#) : improve forest quality, quantity and resilience

 [EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030](#): protect 30% of land, strictly protect 10% including old-growth forests

 [89 Nature Restoration Law](#) : targets to restore 20% of land by 2030, including forests

 [EU Deforestation and Degradation Regulation](#) (EUDR): bans products linked to deforestation from the EU market

We recommend:

-  To legally protect all primary and old-growth forests immediately
-  To make protection, restoration, and sustainable management of forests a non-negotiable priority across EU and national policies, budgets, and enforcement.
-  To increase legally protected forest areas to meet the EU 30% protection goal
-  To prioritise native woodland creation and restoration, and stop monocultures
-  End harmful clear-cutting in sensitive habitats
-  Create a public forest monitoring system using satellite and field data
-  Strict deforestation enforcement, funds tied to real results

FOR IRELAND: Annual forest scorecards, more grants for native/community forests, expanded woodland conservation, and a national Forest Data Hub

Simply put, protecting forests is protecting our future and our children's future. We need forests to live well. They lock up carbon, clean our air and water, cool heatwaves, and reduce floods and fires especially now with climate change trees are vital in our ecosystems.

¹¹ At Irish level, dedication to planting more native trees and managing forests sustainably is truly making a positive impact. Ireland's Forest Strategy 2023–2030 and the Forestry Programme expand grants for native species, continuous cover forestry, and community forests. The Scale Native Woodland Conservation (2023–2027) prioritise riparian corridors, urban edges, and school-adjacent woods. We've also seen the creation of an Irish Forest Data Hub aligned with EU monitoring rules, and the creation of courses in college and workshops in Primary and Secondary Education to educate youths on forestry damage.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "*The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not enough for everyone's greed.*" And as environmentalist Wangari Maathai reminded us, "*We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own.*"

We urge policymakers to act now: protect, restore, and manage our forests using existing frameworks like the EUDR.

5) Strengthen accountability and rules to end over-fishing in Europe

Level of implementation : European

[The ocean is our planet's largest carbon sink and its protection represents the single greatest potential for climate change mitigation.](#)

However [91% of assessed fish stocks were overfished in the Mediterranean in 2014](#), and [only 28% of assessed stocks are fished sustainably across the EU](#).

And, according to [the 9th issue of the EU Copernicus Ocean State Report](#), every part of the Ocean is now affected by the triple planetary crisis.

Considering European policies and actions :

 [The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund](#) (the EU's financial instrument for fisheries... so far)

 [The recent open consultation on the common fisheries policy regulation](#)

 The [Council's provisional agreement to help combat overfishing](#), including “administrative financial penalties for serious infringements of the CFP” (common fisheries policy).

We recommend :

 Follow [the recommendations provided by NGO's expert on the matter for imagining EU fishing opportunities](#) and a **livable future for young people**.

 To protect large marine areas (“no take zones)

💡 To end harmful subsidies and redirect funding to sustainability. Indeed, it is crucial to **make sure that subsidies do not benefit destructive fishing** methods or lead to an increase in fleet capacity (This includes continuing in the positive direction of not financing deep-sea mining!). All the while **supporting fisheries with low environmental impact**, lower energy consumption and high social value (small-scale artisanal fishing), as well as **dedicating funds to scientific research and the restoration and protection of marine ecosystems**.

💡 To increase transparency and traceability : This includes [further reinforcing control systems like REM \(Remote Electronic Monitoring\), VMS, and the IT tool CATCH](#), because despite progress achieved fish discard is still a major problem in Europe and [the Landing Obligation is not systematically respected](#).

6) Food waste and food sustainability (and the crucial role of agriculture and agroecology)

🥕 This recommendation echoes one of the demands formulated by a group of children from all across Europe, that were presented during the “Rising Voices: Children Lead on Climate” event, organised by Save the Children on 30/09/2025 at the EU Parliament.

.Level of implementation : National (implementation), European (funding, guidelines)

Considering European policies and actions:

🍴 The [EU Farm to Fork Strategy](#) (a core part of the Green Deal) aims to make food systems fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly, and set a target to [reduce by half the per capita food waste and the use of pesticides by 2030](#)

🛒 The CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) of 2023-2027 → major funding mechanism.

🌱 The [EU Soil Strategy for 2030](#) talks about the critical role of healthy soils in sustainable food production and climate mitigation, crucial in agroecology.

We recommend :

💡 That Member States and the European Commission adopt and enforce a legally-binding food waste reduction policy (for producers and consumers) to prevent large food businesses to waste food

💡 That the European Commission and Member States use the CAP to support [agroecology](#) and small and medium scale farmers [all across Europe](#). This is also the best way to maintain vibrant rural areas for young people living there.

💡 Fund education programs that allow young people to learn about and be in contact to the food they eat.

💡 To give access to land to young people ! This ensures land is kept for social, environmental, agricultural projects rather than polluting industries.

7) End Plastics and Micro-Plastics Pollution

Plastics are widespread across EU environments (land, rivers, coasts); plastic packaging is the single largest source of [plastic waste in the EU \(packaging = ~19% of total waste\)](#), and [they pose a threat to our health as young people](#).

Additionally, micro plastics are originating from several resources :

- A) intentionally added microbeads (cosmetics, abrasives)
- B) unintentional releases (pellets/nurdles during handling, tyre wear, textile fibres, paint)
 - a) [Up to 35% of global microplastics released into the aquatic, terrestrial and marine ecosystems are from synthetic textiles.](#)
- C) [fragmentation of larger plastics](#)

Level of implementation: European

Considering European policies and actions:

- [Single-Use of plastic directive \(Directive \(EU\) 2019/904\)](#): bans or restricts certain single-use items (cutlery, plates, some food containers) and requires national measures, for example: separate collection , labelling which is crucial for reducing litter that fragments into microplastic .[European strategy for plastics in a circular economy-2018](#)-The plastics strategy is part of the Commission's circular economy package , it contains a strong response on microplastic.

- [The European Commission regulation \(EU\) 2023/2055 - Restriction of microplastics intentionally added to products](#)- The commission adapted the REACH restriction , addressing microplastics internationally added to the products.[Marine Strategy Framework Directive \(MSFD\)](#) This strategy requires that the Member states regularly monitor marine litter and microplastics, but the implementation of the strategy is still uneven across the Member states.

We recommend :

💡 To [reduce demand](#) & increase investment in non-plastic based, reuse materials + support investment in high-quality recycling.

💡 To Prevent releases at source: this recommendation requires to tighten and enforce plastic-based production across the value chain (including in textiles). Also , it requires mandatory best practices, independent audits, and penalties for non-compliance. Additionally, it is crucial to phase out intentionally added microplastics (REACH).

💡 To ensure Wastewater & urban infrastructure measures: we see that it is significant to have a tertiary wastewater treatment upgrades in key catchments (e.g., filtration, tertiary polishing) for WWTPs serving dense urban/industrial areas to reduce microfibres and small fragments. Combine with stormwater capture and sediment traps near high-risk discharges (industrial sites, roads).

💡 To [Support SME transition in plastics industry](#) with targeted green investment and incentives for circular feedstock to avoid job losses and encourage technology uptake.

SUMMARY

1 Invite a plurality of youth groups to the EU Parliament and EU Commission to voice their opinions	- Formalise youth consultation on eco-anxieties → Create a permanent channel for youth input in the EU Youth Dialogue process. - Include global youth voices → Expand EU youth dialogues to include young people from outside the EU. - Establish a Youth Advisory Panel in the EU Parliament → Integrate a formal youth panel into key committees (ENVI, ITRE, CULT)...
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2 Create a digital platform for young people focused on climate change anxiety and deep emotions	- Create a safe digital platform → Launch an EU platform for 24/7 psychological support and peer connection on eco-anxieties - Fund and empower youth-led action → Provide a dedicated space to network, coordinate, and showcase local and EU-wide climate initiatives. - Host expert-facilitated online meetings → Organise regular sessions on emotional resilience and collective action with psychologists and scientists. - Develop open-access practical guides → Co-create and constantly update a living library of resources on sustainable living and emotional well-being.
3 Addressing the difficulty to talk about deep emotions and mental health, and recognising the role of schools and education	- Strengthen psychosocial support services → Address eco-anxiety in schools, universities, and communities. - Integrate well-being into education → Link environmental stewardship with mental health in school curricula and culture - Prioritise outdoor and experiential learning → Build emotional resilience and agency through direct connection to nature. - Foster emotional literacy for all ages → Equip citizens to understand and process climate-related emotions.
4 Protect the frameworks that protect our forests and their biodiversity	- Legally protect forests → also as vital carbon sinks and spaces for youth mental health - Expand and connect protected areas → Ensure every young person has access to protected nature for well-being, meeting the EU's 30% target. - End destructive practices → End clear-cutting and monocultures - Protect frameworks that protect our forests here and everywhere → like the EUDR.
5 Strengthen accountability and rules to end overfishing in Europe	- Protect large marine areas → Establish genuine no-take zones. - End harmful subsidies → Redirect funding to small-scale fishers and ocean restoration. - Increase transparency and traceability → systems like REM and CATCH to stop illegal practices - Follow expert NGO advice → Base fishing quotas on scientific recommendations for a livable future.

6 Food waste and food sustainability (and the crucial role of agriculture and agroecology)	- Mandatory food waste reduction → EU-wide cuts for large businesses. - CAP support for agroecology → Redirect subsidies to human sized farms. - Food education for Youth → Fund programs to reconnect young people with their food. - Land access for young farmers → Prioritize agricultural land for new generations of farmers
7 End plastics and micro-plastics pollution	- Prevent releases at source → Tighten EU rules to end intentionally added microplastics and plastic-based production - Upgrade urban water infrastructure → Mandate advanced wastewater treatment in cities and industrial areas to filter microplastics. - Support a just transition for industry → Provide green investment and incentives for SMEs to adopt circular practices and new technologies. - Reduce demand → and invest in reusable alternatives to cut plastic use and in true recycling.



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