



Outcome document

Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table

IV

**The sustainable economy we need for a successful
implementation of the European Green and Social Deal**

With Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans

18 July 2023



Summary

The document outlines the policy demands on sustainable economy developed during the fourth Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table. The policy demands were discussed with Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans on 18 July 2023.

Participants

Youth representatives

- Letizia Bombardieri, Fridays for Future Italy
- Theo Cullen-Mouze, Fridays for Future Ireland
- Phoebe Hanson, Mock COP
- Szymon Kacprzak, Fridays for Future Poland
- Michaela Karamperi, Generation Climate Europe
- Alba Mullen, Longevity Partners
- Josh Oxby, The Royal Scottish Geographical Society Youth Council
- Maria Magdalena Szczerbowska, AEGEE Europe
- Ivo Wakounig, World Energy Council
- Julien Wald, Youth for Climate Luxembourg
- Giacomo Zattini, Fridays for Future Italy

European Commission

- Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal

European Economic and Social Committee

- Sandra Parthie, Employers' Group
- Nicoletta Merlo, Workers' Group
- Katrīna Leitāne, Civil Society Organisations' Group

1. Introduction

We, youth representatives from all across Europe, are calling for systemic changes to our current economic system. The tragedies of the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate and biodiversity crisis have starkly exposed the inherent vulnerabilities of our prevailing systems. The Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal demand a radical reimagining of our relationship with nature, urging us to undertake a transition toward a sustainable economy that prioritises the well-being of both humanity and the environment. We need systemic change that transcends the mere pursuit of economic growth and instead champions intergenerational justice and sustainability. As the younger generation, we have been and will be at the forefront of bearing the repercussions of these diverse crises. Hence, it is of utmost importance that our voices are not only heard but also actively included in crucial decision-making processes to formulate sustainable, long-term solutions to the challenges of our time.

The pursuit of infinite economic growth on a finite planet is a delusion that ignores environmental costs such as habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution. Since the industrial revolution, the global material footprint has grown in lockstep with the exponentially rising global economy (GDP). This can be primarily attributed to egregious consumption by the super-affluent in a socioeconomic system built on the premise of unlimited growth. According to the Living Planet Report 2022, humanity's ecological footprint has exceeded the Earth's biocapacity by 75% as of 2022. This means that we are consuming natural resources and generating waste at a rate that is 1.75 times the Earth's capacity to regenerate them. The endless pursuit of economic growth is pushing the planet beyond its natural limits. It is only when we recognise the finite planetary boundaries and switch the focus of the economy to the well-being of people and the health of the planet, rather than unchecked economic expansion, that we will get off the road to disaster we are currently on. Continued exponential economic growth has the potential to exacerbate ecological degradation, accelerate climate change and deepen social inequalities, leaving a burden of consequences on the shoulders of future generations. We therefore urge you, the European Commission, to adopt a comprehensive approach in reforming our economy — one that respects planetary boundaries and prioritises well-being and welfare as the core principles of the European Green Deal.

2. Policy demands

We are calling on the European Commission to implement the following:

Ensuring youth inclusion in policy-making

The continued exclusion of young people in policy-making processes does not only harm the future of the European project, but also the future of our planet. We want to acknowledge the efforts that the European Commission have made to date to ensure that young people are given a seat at the table. Unfortunately, there remains much work to be done. The European Commission is mandated by EU law to consult citizens when drafting legislation. Currently, stakeholders primarily provide feedback vis-a-vis public consultations. Although this system is an essential part of European lawmaking, in its current form it is inappropriate, inaccessible and excludes the voices of young people. Therefore, we are asking you to introduce the following specific measures to increase youth representation in crucial decision-making processes:

(1) A dedicated and accessible portal through which young people can engage with public consultations and directly comment on matters that affect them. This should provide clear explanations of legislative text, simplified methods of providing feedback and create active links with organisations and institutions where young people congregate. This portal should be an extension of the Have Your Say portal, and should operate in the same fashion as public consultations. This will be achieved by centralising feedback through one mainstream channel so that there is no difference between responses submitted through either the legacy or youth portals.

(2) A European YOUTH Committee within the European Commission that is responsible for the active inclusion of young people in public policy. Building on the EESC's experience in structurally involving young people and similar to national youth committees that already exist in some Member States, the Committee should consist of both European Commission representatives as well as young people representing all European countries, backgrounds and social sects. The Committee should meet quarterly to establish the agenda and work programme, and ensure accountability of delivery. A key responsibility of the Committee would be to conduct mandatory, semi-annual public hearings in which representatives of the European Commission and other EU institutions are presented with concrete interventions from youth delegates. This should be followed by a reverse-hearing in which representatives answer calls made by delegates and provide clear explanations for why demands were, or were not, incorporated into policy decisions. The YOUTH Committee would also be central to developing a plan for how youth engagement will be concretely prioritised in the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2024-2028.

(3) The implementation of the EU Youth Test by all European institutions, as a central part of all policy-making decisions, by 2024. The pilot project recently introduced by the EESC, the first EU institution to actually start implementing the EU Youth Test, could provide useful lessons.

These provisions are essential to cement our role on the agenda and allow young people to bring their values and provide critical insight into the policies that will define the rest of their lives. This is a key way to achieve the realisation of green and well-being economies.

The imperative of a post-growth economy

The EU should move from an extractivist, growth-oriented economy to a well-being, post-growth economy. In direct contravention of scientific consensus and the need to stay within planetary boundaries, the EU and its Member States continue to subsidise extractivism in numerous forms in order to sustain the Global North's ever-increasing resource consumption. We call on you to:

(1) Propose a legislation that immediately abolishes all forms of subsidies for fossil fuel projects and so-called "renewable" biomass by the EU and its Member States. According to the European Commission, between 2008 and 2019, EU Member States provided €55 to 58 billion per year of explicit subsidies for fossil fuels. Additionally, between 2015 and 2019, the total amount of fossil fuel subsidies grew by 4% in the EU, and fifteen Member States were still spending more on fossil-fuel subsidies than on renewable energy subsidies in 2019. Furthermore, we demand that the European Commission publishes a binding plan, outlining specific deadlines to achieve the complete phasing out of fossil fuel infrastructure by 2034, in accordance with the EU's remaining CO₂eq-budget aligned with the 1.5 °C goal. Lastly, the European Commission must support the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which aims to halt all new fossil fuel extraction and production globally.

(2) Not only change the types of materials we extract, but to actively address overconsumption. We cannot rely on green material to bring us within planetary boundaries. On the contrary, there is a risk of transitioning from exceeding one planetary boundary to surpassing another (burden-shift). In addition, extractivism, including green resources, negatively impacts the environment and the livelihoods of local people, especially in the Global South. Therefore, we demand that sufficiency be established as the primary criterion guiding decisions on green extractivism, including the Critical Raw Material Act. In order to do that, the European Commission should propose consumption and demand reduction scenarios and targets by 2024. In particular, we call on the European Commission to set a 2030 goal for the reduction of critical materials.

(3) Allocate existing and new funds towards financing a just transition, including loss and damage finance and climate reparations for the Global South. We call on you to shift funds from fossil fuels to finance climate reparations for the most affected people and areas (MAPA). In addition, by 2024, the European Commission should design and propose a new EU fiscal landscape that considers historical responsibilities by coordinating green and progressive taxation, shifting the tax burden from labour to the wealthiest actors and activities that harm the environment. Part of this revenue should be conveyed towards the Global South in order to allow a global just transition, in addition to technological disclosure and land restitution.

Placing well-being, sufficiency and welfare at the core of the European Green Deal

The European Green Deal provides a holistic approach to decarbonise the EU. While its goals and laws may have an impact on the sustainable transition, its current policies fail to deliver the systemic change that the EU requires to fully meet our climate and social needs. The European Green Deal does not sufficiently tackle structural inequalities and lack of inclusion, which belong to the key drivers of climate and social injustices. The Green Deal should thus be strengthened by transforming its goals from pursuing (green) growth to building on concepts such as well-being, sufficiency, intergenerational justice, and socio-ecological welfare as its foundational pillars. We therefore, demand that the European Commission reframe the fundamental vision of the European Green Deal by systemically transitioning towards a post-growth economy and society, aiming to enhance well-being and foster social justice. This includes implementing an EU-wide assurance of high-quality services, investing in the maintenance and expansion of well-being infrastructure, which encompasses health facilities and community centres, and, most importantly, incorporating well-being indicators as a primary measure of the effectiveness of EU policies.

3. Next steps

As agreed, the youth representatives have submitted the outcome document by end-July 2023. The European Commission is to provide a written response by the end of October 2023. Both documents will then be published on the [website](#) of the event.

The response of the European Commission should provide clear feedback (yes/no) on the policy demands presented above. It should define detailed steps and a timeline for implementation in the case of a positive answer or concrete reasons for rejection in the case of a negative answer.

A follow-up meeting can be organised between the representatives of the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, Generation Climate Europe and the European Youth Forum to further discuss the response and the next steps.