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Delegations will find in annex the abovementioned conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, as approved by the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 5 April 2022.

Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States,
meeting within the Council – Fostering engagement among young people as actors of change in
order to protect the environment

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE
MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING THE FOLLOWING:

1. European Youth Goal No. 10 as annexed to the EU Youth Strategy, entitled a 'Sustainable Green Europe', sets out to 'Achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives';
2. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for¹ Sustainable Development recognises that young people are 'critical agents of change' in sustainable development. In addition, the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth² encourages young people to be active in society;
3. The European Union is committed to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in order to build the world of tomorrow in a greener, more peaceful and fairer way³;

¹ Resolution 70/1 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

² United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth, June 2010:
<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

³ Council conclusions, Building a sustainable Europe by 2030 (10 December 2019):
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14835-2019-INIT/en/pdf>
Council conclusions, A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis (22 June 2021) <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9850-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

4. The European Union and its Member States are fully committed to the Paris Agreement adopted during the Paris United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in December 2015. To achieve the purpose and the goals of the Paris Agreement, the European Union underlines the importance of all six elements of Action for Climate Empowerment, recognizes the critical role of young people as actors of change in climate action, and calls for further involvement of the youth in climate change policy, at international, European, national, regional and local level, and in unleashing the potential of Action for Climate Empowerment;
5. Environmental protection is a key goal of the European Union, which will, in particular, ensure 'a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment'⁴ and achieve climate neutrality by 2050⁵;
6. The European Year of Youth 2022⁶, which aims to step up efforts by the European Union, Member States and regional and local authorities to support young people and work with them as we emerge from the pandemic, is also intended to promote the new opportunities and possibilities offered by the green and digital transitions. These transitions should be inclusive and give attention to the integration of young people with fewer opportunities;

⁴ Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union.

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law').

⁶ Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022), OJ L 462, 28.12.2021, p. 1–9.

7. The European Green Deal⁷ is a road map for creating a sustainable society in the European Union, by ensuring a fair and inclusive transition for all. It highlights the need to focus on the outermost regions, which are particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.

AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING:

8. There is a growing awareness and desire among young people to engage in sustainable development issues, particularly environmental and climate issues⁸. Young people have been strongly mobilised at local, regional, national, European and international levels in raising awareness about environmental issues, including climate change, through advocacy, climate marches, online mobilisation campaigns, and other means;
9. Many young people are in favour of strong environmental action and measures aimed at tackling climate change⁹ and biodiversity loss. Some of them are engaged in environmentally friendly practices that can serve as a model for the rest of society. Young delegates from all around the world, including from all Member States of the European Union, presented a Youth4Climate Manifesto at COP26 in Glasgow to call for action from world leaders¹⁰;

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal. COM/2019/640 final.

⁸ European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer 478 (2019), How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people : report
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/99cb705b-fa13-11e9-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁹ Pan-European survey, Main multi-country report, #Climate of change, 2021:
https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IPSOS-Multi-Country-Report-complete.FINAL_.pdf

¹⁰ The Youth4Climate Manifesto is an outcome of the 'Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition' event, convened by the Government of Italy. It contains ideas and concrete proposals on some of the most pressing issues on the climate agenda, including education for sustainable development.

10. The level of mobilisation and engagement varies from one young person to another: high levels of educational¹¹, cultural and social capital usually correspond to higher levels of engagement;
11. The COVID-19 global health crisis and the temporary slowdown in global economic activity, which have had significant economic and social implications, particularly for young people, have brought to light the direct impact of certain human activities on the environment¹². The various national and European stimulus packages and plans for overcoming the crisis are opportunities for driving a sustainable and green transition in which all young people should have the opportunity to engage fully as actors of change.

CONSIDER THAT:

12. It is important to ensure that all young people, irrespective of factors such as gender, disability, level of education, social and economic background, country of origin or place of residence, understand the challenges of sustainable development and are aware of the implications of decisions, actions and lifestyle choices on the environment, the biodiversity and the climate. All generations, including young people, should have the necessary competences to take relevant action;
13. In order to be able to engage fully, young people should have reliable evidence-based information and data so that they can make informed judgements regarding environmental, biodiversity and climate change challenges and solutions, and so that they can develop and strengthen critical thinking skills. Efforts should be made to counter disinformation about the environment and climate change;

¹¹ David E. Campbell, What is the impact of education on civic and social engagement? Measuring the effects of education on health and civic engagement. Proceedings of the Copenhagen symposium, OECD 2006, <https://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/37425694.pdf>

¹² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf

14. It is also important to promote dialogue, both among young people and between generations, on the ethical issues surrounding sustainable development, environmental protection and respect for living beings, by opening up space for discussions so that young people and society at large can reflect on the values and controversies that these issues involve;
15. Efforts to mobilise young people on environmental issues and measures to tackle climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss should be reflected in local, regional, national and European public policies. These should not only meet young people's expectations as far as possible, but should also give them an opportunity to participate actively and meaningfully in the development and implementation of those policies;
16. Engaging young people in environmental action requires awareness-raising and learning, whether formal, non-formal or informal, about environmental issues, from a very young age;
17. In order to be fully able to put forward and develop practical solutions to tackle environmental issues, young people, including those with fewer opportunities, should be supported in implementing their voluntary or entrepreneurial projects and benefit from practical support and technical assistance, as well as from public grants or private investment.

HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING:

18. It is important to encourage all young people to get involved in shaping the lives of their local communities, including, where possible, education and training institutions, youth and youth work organisations, as well as local and regional authorities, so that they can be actors and drivers of change that improves environmental protection and helps to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss;
19. Collaboration between decision-makers, education and training institutions, youth and youth work organisations and others stakeholders in the field of the environment is key to supporting the engagement of young people and enabling them to take action. Mutual trust and collaboration in decision-making processes concerning the environment should be encouraged;
20. Inter-generational solidarity and justice should be addressed in decision-making processes on protecting the environment so that the benefits for present generations do not stand in conflict with the rights of future generations.

NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

21. The ideas and opinions of young people that were shared at the EU Youth Conference in January 2022, at the beginning of the 9th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, related to the following:

- a) *Five fields of actions were identified. Throughout the 9th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, young people and decision makers will need to think and work according to these specific fields to establish concrete proposals.*
- b) *First of all, in the field of information and education, skills gained through non-formal education must be recognised as a full learning process. Both local authorities and youth organisations have the responsibility to work jointly in order to give young people the opportunity to learn more about the environment and to find solutions. Education is the most valuable investment in democracy.*
- c) *In the field of action and empowerment, young people must be given the opportunity to play an active role in the decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of future generations. Young people need to be part of the decision-making process at all levels. They are very often overlooked and under-represented even though they have expressed ideas and concerns that should be of interest to senior decision-makers.*

- d) *In the field of governance, young people under the age of 30 represent less than 2.6% of the members of national parliaments. It is necessary to ensure that the presence of youth is not used as youthwashing mechanisms. Existing structures, such as the EU Youth Dialogue and the European Youth Parliament, need to be given effective tools to act as decision-making structures. During the 9th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, it is necessary to work in a sustainable and inclusive way for the participation of young people in decision-making. It is also fundamental that young people have enough support, funding, and information to get involved in a meaningful way. There is a need to examine participatory processes at national level to ensure that they are as sustainable and inclusive as possible.*
- e) *In the field of mobility and solidarity, it has been observed that mobility is not equally accessible or possible for all young people. Research allows us to better identify those young people who do not participate in mobility programmes. It is necessary to move towards more virtuous practices that will help society to better understand solidarity programmes and to reach all of its members.*
- f) *Last but not least, access to infrastructure may seem to be a less important field, but there is a close link between infrastructure and the quality of life and education of young people. Depending on whether they come from a rural or an urban area, there is an impact on how young people make decisions. In rural areas, public transportation is a real issue. Transportation problems can result in the isolation of young people. Therefore, the exclusion of certain groups of young people cannot lead to the achievement of an inclusive society. There is a need to ensure sustainable and affordable choices for everyone.*

INVITE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY,
AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

22. Support youth work, youth and environmental organisations and other relevant experts and stakeholders in their role as providers of information to young people and enable them to disseminate reliable, accurate and quality information and data on climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and other environmental issues, based on science, suitable for audiences of different ages and backgrounds, and adapted to each geographical environment, including island or tropical environments;
23. Provide actors in formal education and training and in non-formal and informal learning, including youth workers, with training and professional learning opportunities in interactive, practical, solution-oriented learning methods and approaches, in order to better inform, educate and support young people with regard to environmental and social issues as well as climate change;
24. Better equip young people, through formal education and training and non-formal and informal learning, with the necessary competences to understand and act on environmental issues;
25. Encourage and enable children and young people, where needed, to come into contact with nature through specific activities and develop green initiatives, with the support of relevant stakeholders in environmental issues. Such contact is key to raising awareness about climate and biodiversity issues;

26. Encourage the development of partnerships between the education, youth, sport¹³ and culture sectors as well as all relevant sectors, in order to develop cross-cutting, coordinated and complementary awareness-raising and education-based approaches to environmental, biodiversity loss and climate change issues;
27. Encourage and support the establishment of inclusive and youth-focused peer learning activities and the exchange of best practices on environmental and climate change issues, such as the Young Ambassadors' programmes and mentoring programmes or Training and cooperation activities (TCA, Erasmus+) and Networking activities (NET, European Solidarity Corps) in order to raise awareness among all young people, including those with fewer opportunities, and encourage them to take action to protect the environment and tackle climate change;
28. Promote appropriate education and training for youth workers to ensure that the youth activities set up for and with young people are environmentally friendly and sustainable. Further develop appropriate youth work initiatives focused on the engagement of young people in environmental issues, particularly in tackling climate change and preserving biodiversity;
29. Encourage and support the recognition and harnessing by public authorities, the private sector and civil society of young people's engagement to protect the environment and of the transversal competences, particularly social skills, that they have thus acquired;

¹³ [Council conclusions on sport as a lever to transform behaviour for sustainable development, of 4 April 2022.]

30. Safeguard and create sustainable¹⁴ long-term, secure, accessible and inclusive civic spaces for cooperation with local, regional, national, European and international political decision-makers, where the voices of young people are heard, whatever their age, their concerns or their proposals for actions to protect the environment and tackle climate change, so that they are not only consulted but are also in a position to actively participate in decisions relating to these issues;
31. Promote young researchers and their work on sustainable development to address environmental challenges, partly to act as role models for young people and partly to encourage and promote the sharing of research results with young people more directly to empower them to take action;
32. Support the establishment of training references for climate, environmental and sustainability issues, for all age groups and for any level or type of learning, education and training.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, ADHERING TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

33. Take into account the specific needs and opinions of all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, in local, regional, national and European environmental policies and programmes, particularly those tackling climate change and preserving biodiversity, by promoting their participation in the construction and implementation of those policies and programmes;

¹⁴ Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on safeguarding and creating civic spaces for young people that facilitate meaningful youth participation, OJ C 501I, 13.12.2021, p. 19–23.

34. Support and learn from initiatives taken by young people and youth organisations to set up and conduct awareness-raising activities and campaigns, including digital ones, on climate, pollution, biodiversity and other environmental issues;
35. Encourage, acknowledge and, where appropriate, financially support actions and programmes initiated and led by young people in the environmental field, particularly those combating climate change and preserving biodiversity, so that they can be agents of change within society as a whole, as well as in their education and training institutions, higher education institutions, youth and youth work organisations, local communities and among their peers;
36. Promote youth volunteer activities addressing environmental issues, particularly those tackling climate change and aiming to preserve biodiversity, and facilitate access to these activities by specifically ensuring that these offers are widely available and communicated on appropriate national and EU level portals, such as the European Youth Portal and other relevant channels. Promote volunteering experiences combining local or national volunteering with transnational volunteering by encouraging, where appropriate, synergies and complementarities between national schemes and activities, including national volunteering or civic service schemes and activities where they exist, and EU volunteering schemes, in order to deepen young volunteers' engagement, enhance their competences and strengthen their sense of belonging to the European Union;

37. Where appropriate, invest in the green economy and support young people in acquiring the necessary competences and facilitate their access to training that prepares them for the green jobs of tomorrow;
38. Where applicable, support young entrepreneurs seeking to develop projects with a focus on practical solutions to environmental issues, particularly tackling climate change and preserving biodiversity; devote particular attention to projects developed by young people with fewer opportunities who face additional difficulties in starting a business;
39. Where applicable, develop mentorship programmes led by professionals and entrepreneurs actively involved in the search for environmental solutions, especially those preserving biodiversity and tackling climate change, in order to provide support and guidance for young people seeking to play an active role in this sector;
40. Increase young Europeans' awareness of and participation in UN environmental policies and initiatives by strengthening cooperation with appropriate UN bodies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

41. Ensure that all young people are able to understand and take ownership of the European Green Deal, and the initiatives stemming from it (such as the New European Bauhaus¹⁵) and the various European environmental programmes. Actively promote all aspects of the European Climate Pact to all young people;
42. Ensure that public consultations on European environmental policies are accessible to young people and to youth and youth work organisations and that, through these consultations, the European Commission gives both citizens and stakeholders the opportunity to express their viewpoints before finalising its legislative proposals. By the same token, encourage the meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations in citizen engagement initiatives falling within the missions of the European Union¹⁶;
43. Promote and encourage European opportunities for mobility and initiatives in the environmental sector in the context of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, to ensure that all young people who so wish can actively engage in environmental matters, including young people with fewer opportunities, in particular those from the outermost regions as well as from island regions and rural and remote areas. Ensure that environmentally-friendly modes of transport are given priority in these initiatives, in order to reduce the carbon footprint of youth mobility projects while also ensuring that they are suited to the needs of the outermost regions, which face constraints due to their remoteness;

¹⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, New European Bauhaus, COM(2021) 573 final.

¹⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on European Missions, COM/2021/609 final.

44. Implement peer learning activities, in cooperation with youth organisations and young people, on youth engagement as regards environmental issues, preserving and restoring biodiversity and tackling climate change and pollution, in order to identify existing best practices within Member States and to facilitate the exchange of these practices between Member States.

INVITE ALL STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATING IN EUROPEAN COOPERATION
INITIATIVES IN THE FIELDS OF YOUTH AFFAIRS, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE
CHANGE TO:

45. Develop volunteering activities addressing environmental issues for the beneficiaries of the European Solidarity Corps and other national or international volunteer programmes; raise awareness among all volunteers, regardless of the fields they are involved in, of environmental issues and the environmental impact of their missions so that they can be particularly vigilant of their carbon footprint during these activities;
46. Strengthen European cooperation by sharing tools and best practices in the field of youth engagement and participation in environmental action, particularly in tackling climate change and pollution and preserving biodiversity, at European level, including by taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and other relevant EU financial instruments.

a) REFERENCES

In adopting these conclusions, the Council and the government representatives of Member States present at the Council meeting have taken note of the following documents:

- European Parliament, 2021 Youth Ideas Report For The Conference On The Future Of Europe, https://european-youth-event.europarl.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021_EYE_Report-Booklet_A5_20-10-Accessible.pdf
- United Nations, Resolution 70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal, COM/2019/640 final.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, COM(2020) 380 final.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Climate Pact, COM(2020) 788 final.
- United Nations, 2015, Paris Agreement: [ADOPTION OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT - Paris Agreement text English \(unfccc.int\)](https://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/text/english)
- Council conclusions, Building a sustainable Europe by 2030 – Progress thus far and next steps <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14835-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

- Council conclusions, A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9850-2021-INIT/en/pdf>
- European Commission, State of the Union address 2021: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/soteu_2021_address_en_0.pdf
- Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field, The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 1–22.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020) 625 final.
- Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021.
- Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on safeguarding and creating civic spaces for young people that facilitate meaningful youth participation, OJ C 501 I, 13.12.2021, p. 19–23.
- Council conclusions on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2021), OJ C 504I, 14.12.2021, p. 10–11.
- Youth4Climate Manifesto [Youth4Climate Manifesto \(unfccc.int\)](https://unfccc.int/youth4climate), November 2021.

b) DEFINITIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF THESE CONCLUSIONS

'Biodiversity': the variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

'Climate change': changes to the climate that are attributed directly or indirectly to human activity altering the composition of the world's atmosphere and exacerbating the natural variations in climate patterns observed over comparable time periods.

'Engagement': any action in the general interest undertaken on a voluntary basis or in the form of a volunteer mission. Engagement refers to voluntary and selfless civic actions in the service of others.

'Environment': the combination of natural and socio-economic elements that constitute the framework of living conditions of an individual, a population or a community at various spatial scales. As such, environmental protection involves taking measures to limit or undo the negative impact of human activity on the environment.

'Mentorship': a voluntary interpersonal relationship over the medium to long term between a young person and a mentor, structured within a professional framework.

'Peer learning activities': activities which, at EU level, enable Member States facing similar policy challenges to work in clusters and share good practices, focus on country-specific challenges or support a particular national reform agenda with help from peer countries, stakeholder organisations and independent experts, as appropriate¹⁷.

¹⁷ Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (2021/C 497/01), paragraph 11.

'Sustainable development': meeting the needs of current generations in a way that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own. It promotes a dynamic economy, full employment, high standards of education, healthcare and social and regional cohesion, as well as environmental protection, in a safe and peaceful world that respects cultural diversity.

'Young people with fewer opportunities': young people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, due to their migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reason, including a reason that could give rise to discrimination under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities¹⁸.

¹⁸ Definition in Regulation (EU) 2021/888, Art. 2 (4).