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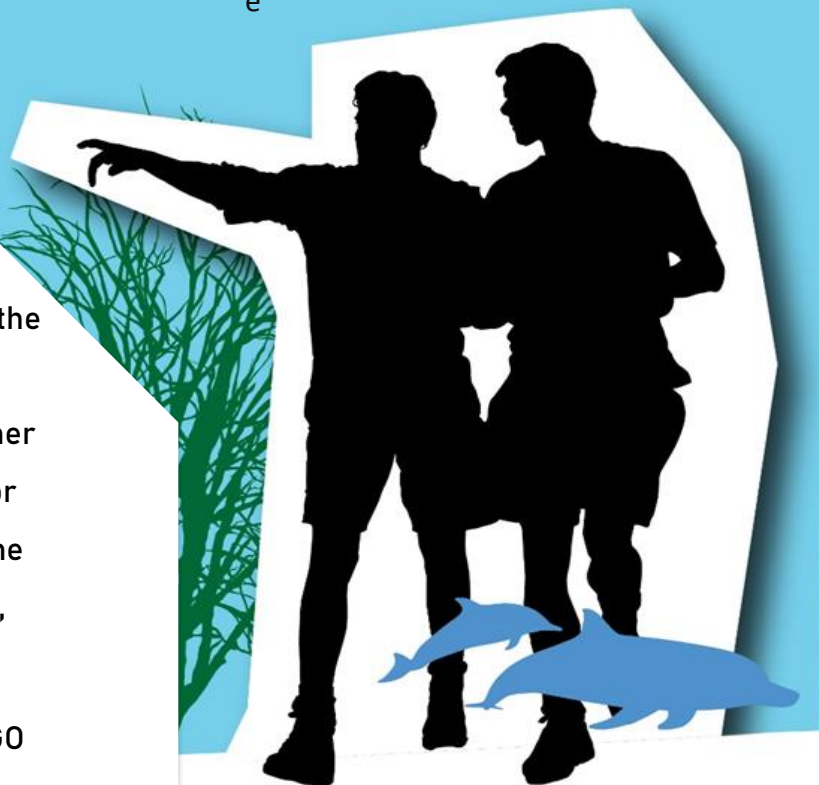


Policy Paper on Climate Action

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Adopted by the participants of the Erasmus+ Support for policy Reform European Youth Together project 'YOU.th RO.und TRIP. For climate action project during the mobility in Vitsa/ Zagorochoia, Greece in July 2021.

Hosting Organization: IASIS NGO





Executive Summary

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States express their commitment to protect the planet from degradation and take urgent action on climate change. At the same time Education and skills, and environmental protection and fighting climate change are considered priority topics by at least half of the respondents to European Youth Eurobarometer survey published in January 2018. President Juncker mentioned that European young people are less engaged in traditional forms of participation despite their interest in politics. The paradox which appears is that Member states must design policies to combat climate change which will affect youth's lives in a couple of years, while the latter do not seem to be very interested in voting and engaging with decision making. YOUROTRIP project (short for "YOU.th RO.und TRIP for climate action") aspires to foster youth participation in democratic procedures of decision making through discussions on the high priority topic of climate change.

Through YOUROTRIP project, young people from Greece, France, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, Denmark, Romania and Austria met, formed 'Local Youth Councils', discussed and came up with ideas which are recommending as solutions to climate change. In the context of YOUROTRIP project young people met in July 2021 in Greece and discussed about the topic of "Improving Recycling and Circular Economy", and in this document, are their policy recommendations on this matter.

Introduction

Climate change is the long-term changes in Earth's climate and weather patterns. It took nearly a century of research and data to convince the majority of the scientific community that human activity can alter the climate of the entire planet. It was only in the early 19th century that ice ages and other natural changes in the paleontological environment were first suspected, and the natural greenhouse effect was first identified. The UN climate summit confirmed that "1.5" is the socially, economically, politically and scientifically safe limit for





global warming by the end of this century and has set a deadline for achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

On that note, humanity is considered to undergo one of the fastest alterations in our everyday life in order to even have a chance to sustain our environment. Climate change unfortunately can not be stopped, but with the proper measures, initiatives and education it can be slowed down enough for the earth to adapt to the temperature changes. Thus, it is imperative to take action concerning Climate change if humanity wants to stand a chance against it.

As both climate change and waste deposition are ever growing problems around the world, it is of great importance to understand how these two major issues are also affecting each other. Recycling is beneficial to the climate crisis in two main ways: by limiting the amount of raw materials being used and limiting the amount of waste going into landfills' (University of Colorado, Boulder, 2021)

'Recycling saves energy and prevents extraction of raw materials, helping to combat climate change. It also helps reduce waste, and therefore pollution. Recycling reduces environmental impact as a whole, contributing to a "green" mentality and more sustainable lifestyles overall.' (UNFCCC, 2021).

Recycling and the promotion of Circular Economy may be recognized as necessary and beneficial, but there is still too much room for improvement. The young people that participated in the YOUROTRIP Mobility in Greece in July 2021, have thought of some ideas and solutions that they would wish to see become a reality both on local and national level as well as European and International Level.

Analysis

Recycling is a great solution, that is recommended and implemented by many countries as the most effective method in order to achieve the reduction of the strain on the environment from the deposition of waste in landfills. However, recycling is a method that has also many problems. As described in Forbes (2021), some of the most serious obstacles of this method are the following:

1. Underinvestment: The climate and environmental benefits of recycling are not reflected in its economics. "Recycling can reduce costs to society through reducing pollution and climate change, but these benefits are not



reflected in the economic signals that industry and local governments are responding to,” Allaway said, “and this leads to an under investment in recycling.” Consumers and governments are collecting materials for producers who pay much less for them than the cost of collection.

2. Under-Participation: Since producers are excluded from recycling's economics, they have less incentive to reconsider packaging or product design. “There is a significant gap in the responsibility involving consumer brands,” Allaway said. “These producers have the unique power to influence changes in packaging and product design and create market demand for recycled materials and reduced price volatility, but they are largely absent from our current policy framework.”

‘In Europe, energy recovery is the most used way to dispose of plastic waste, followed by recycling. Some 25% of all the generated plastic waste is landfilled. Half of the plastic collected for recycling is exported to be treated in countries outside the EU. Reasons for export include the lack of capacity, technology or financial resources to treat the waste locally.

Previously, a significant share of the exported plastic waste was shipped to China, but recent restrictions on imports of plastic waste in China is likely to further decrease EU exports. This poses the risk of increased incineration and landfilling of plastic waste in Europe. Meanwhile, the EU is trying to find circular and climate-friendly ways of managing its plastic waste. The low share of plastic recycling in the EU means significant losses for the economy as well as for the environment. It is estimated that 95% of the value of plastic packaging material is lost to the economy after a short first-use cycle.

Globally, researchers estimate that the production and incineration of plastic pumped more than 850 million tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere in 2019. By 2050, those emissions could rise to 2.8 billion tonnes, a part of which could be avoided through better recycling.’ (European Parliament, 2021)





Good practices

Good practices concerning Climate Action and Circular economy were presented during workshops. Also, the participants presented good practices that exist in their home countries. The exchange of ideas occurred on an intercultural level where the participants used some EU countries as an example (e.g. Denmark) concerning recycling practices in relation to the other present countries. Some of the good practices that were presented and discussed were the following:

- Fabric Republic

It's an innovative and integrated clothing management system that focuses on today's social needs, environmental protection, sustainability and sustainable development. Through Fabric Republic, the steps are collecting and sorting of clothes. Those that are in good condition are being washed, dried, ironed, packed and given to social vulnerable groups such as homeless people, asylum seekers etc. The clothes that are not in a good shape, are either being recycling, or used to produce upcycled products. The program was funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. The Fabric Republic program is based on Directive 2008/98 / EC, of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste, according to which the transition to a European Recycling Society with a high level of resource efficiency should be set goals for the reuse and recycling of waste. By promoting the recycling and/or upcycling of those garments that are not in good condition, we contribute to the reduction of the waste system and the reduction of the burden on natural resources. An important objective is also to optimize and modernize the circular management of redundant clothing, the collective development of social and ecological consciousness for a Zero Waste reality. The service annually offers 30 tones to social services and 15 tones to recycling. Every year 40,000 beneficiaries have access to clean clothing, and the service works with 55 public services (penitentiary institutions, child protection agencies, refugee and migrant services, mental health facilities, services for users of toxic substances, with Municipalities, Social Grocery and Poverty Reduction Services). Finally, through its work the service achieves 171,344 kg lower CO2 emissions per year.





• “BOROUME”

BOROUME is an Non-Profit Organization with the aim of reducing food waste and combating malnutrition throughout Greece. In order to achieve that, BOROUME has created a specific program called “Food Rescue and Donation” through which, every day, food is collected from all the possible donors, and is offered through community services to people in need. In this way, BOROUME contributes to the reduction of the environmental burden, while at the same time supporting people from vulnerable social groups with food. The phenomenon of food waste is tackled on a holistic level, throughout:

1. The informational program "No Portion of Food Lost"
2. The educational program "We can at School"
3. The program for saving surplus agricultural production "We can in the Field"
4. The program for rescuing products from street markets "We can in the Street Markets"
5. The voluntary informational program for potential food donors "We can in Neighborhood"

Food Rescue and Donation

The goal is the reduction of food waste and the offering of food supplies to people of vulnerability.

In order to achieve that, BOROUME Organisation uses the following procedure:

1. Mapping of the food needs of community services
2. Receiving of information regarding food offerings from all kinds of donors
3. Coordination of the receiving of the donations
4. Distribution of the food supplies to people in need.

-The program for rescuing products from street markets "We can in the Street Markets"

Members and volunteers of the BOROUME Organization go daily to the local street markets in order to collect the surplus food that is left on the stalls and then, they distribute it to people who are in need.

● EPANNEKINISIS

Electronic waste is a growing concern around the world. With technological advancements, industries have moved towards greater automation, which has increased the electrical and electronic equipment usage. Electrical and





electronics products have become common in the daily life of the average consumer, frequently used in manufacturing and other industries. At the same time, the development of advanced, faster and more reliable computing and processing technologies has led to a decreased product life cycle driving consumers to purchase newer and more current in terms of technology products while discarding older products. All these developments have in turn led to an exponential increase in e-waste generation. EPANNEKINISIS is a non-profit organization which aims to reduce the electronic waste that are thrown away. More specifically, based on the idea of crowdsourcing, their goal is to collect old laptops and similar electronic devices and with the aid of their volunteers, to fix them, in order to be distributed to elementary and high-school students. In order to achieve that, they gather all the non-used electronic devices from several donors, either from companies or from private initiative, and they distribute them. This way, they promote the transmission of technology to students, while at the same time, they inform them about all the advantages provided by modern knowledge of this and the internet (in addition to social networking, games and videos).

Conclusion

The importance of combating the climate change phenomenon has been realized quite late. Recycling is a great method of dealing with the waste disposal, but it can be also very problematic. It is essential that all the EU Member States recognize the importance of recycling and circular economy, in order to reduce the impacts of climate change. Many EU countries have already taken actions towards that direction and they have also provided us with many good practices from which we can exemplify and which we can implement. However, in order to deal with this threatening phenomenon, a unified strategy and common practices among all EU Member States are mandatory. In order to find an effective solution, the EU Member States need to undertake both diplomatic and legal actions.





Recommendations

A Unified Recycling System across Europe

Our proposal is the creation of a base color code and recycling bins applicable to all EU countries, including special waste (e.g. oil, e-waste, textiles etc.). We also need to make sure that those disposal sites are easily accessible to anyone and that the disposal and recycling process is implemented correctly in each country.

Creation of a European Deposit System

We propose the creation of a European Deposit System for bottles and cans made from metal and glass. The aim of this deposit system is to promote the reuse and the recycling of bottles and cans and also, to reduce the amount of waste thrown in the landfills. Some Member States have a great local deposit system, from which other Member States could benefit greatly. Specifically, all the Member States would benefit from a collection system, promoting trade of goods between the European Union countries. Furthermore, we propose the standardization of glass bottles in order to promote a large-scale reuse of bottles.

Rule of Law

Our proposal is the incorporation of Social corporate responsibility in all companies and businesses, by transforming the current regulations which are not mandatory into being obligatory, in terms of inventing a reference rating system that measures the social and environmental impact of each company/business. Therefore, consumers, can make informed decisions about which products to purchase and which services to use, with either the minimum environmental footprint and negative impact, and/or to support businesses that invest in the research and application of environmentally friendly practices.



Incentives for clean Energy Production

In order to avoid the waste, and especially plastic waste to end up being burned in order to produce energy, we propose that the EU gives incentives for clean Energy production from renewable resources and impose sanctions when plastic is being burned. One major incentive could be a tax-reduction for energy producers in the EU that makes a transition from fossil fuels to green and renewable sources. This tax reduction could smooth this transition. Moreover, we propose the creation of a fund to support the research and to raise awareness regarding the transition from fossil fuels to green and renewable sources. The specific proposal is in accordance with the goals that are set in the EU Green Deal. Furthermore, in order to finance the proposal, a possible solution could be the so-called eco-tax that some Member States have experience with.

Plastic Tax

Another proposal is the enforcement of a tax on plastics in Europe. The aim of this tax is the reduction of the amount of the plastic used in Europe, since it has a huge impact on the climate. At the same time, the money collected from this taxation could be used for the following:

- Research in plastic alternatives
- Education and knowledge-sharing regarding the transitioning from plastics to alternatives
- Creation, expansion and improvement of plastic recycling.

Biofuel

We propose that each country should make periodical research regarding the amount of waste that is produced and that can become biofuel. Our main goal is to understand the bio-fuel possibility production of the EU.

Food waste

We propose the implementation of policies concerning EU food industry (from restaurants to grocery stores). We also propose the redistribution of remaining food products to vulnerable groups, as well as provision of non-consumable food for other uses (such as animal fed, biofuel etc.) Moreover, we believe that





another great proposal would be the creation of the possibility for EU citizens to buy unsold products at a lower price. Afterwards, this food could be redirected to animal feed, agricultural activities (such as composting), biofuel etc.

Education

Climate change education should be present in all levels of education as a mandatory course, in the core basis of the educational mentality and system, and it should be able to be adapted and adjusted to all the cultures and differences of the EU countries and systems.

Physical & Mental Health

We propose that policy makers set as a priority the training of health professionals and especially mental health professionals, on climate change and its consequences on the human's physical health, and also, the benefits of combining the natural environment with related natural physical and mental treatments.

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