

# Echo-logic Project Young people facing climate change

RESEARCH

*“This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.*

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## Introduction

This international study is the main outcome of the EchoLogic Project, which aims to analyze the causes of inaction and poor follow-up among young people in the face of climate change. It seeks to gather the impressions of institutions, organizations, and young people themselves and identify the barriers that limit their participation. It also seeks to identify the levers that can reverse this situation in order to actively involve young people in the 2030 agenda, specifically regarding environmental sustainability.

Ultimately, the aim is to identify the factors that would facilitate more active youth leadership as the social group objectively interested in a sustainable future. It also seeks to identify the barriers that hinder this.

This document begins with a series of questions that provide context and highlight the difficulties of participation, as well as the organizational situation of the social sectors interested in climate change. It then specifies the focus of the research, the methodology, and the chosen levers for action. It continues with an analysis of the barriers that hinder participation and the ways to activate youth empowerment.

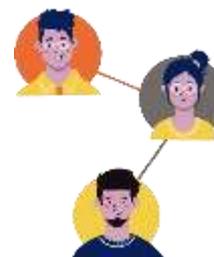
The conclusions of the study, which are presented at the end of this document, form the basis of the Good Practice Guide, which concludes the project.

The first step, however, was to set up the working teams, the Green Team, which would coordinate activities and then define the guidelines for the tasks and schedule the planned activities.

The development of the project, in which the Espacio Público Foundation acted as coordinator, required partners who could contribute their presence in the different areas of work that were to be developed.

The following organizations were chosen as PARTNERS:

- [Generazione Zero \(Italia\)](#)
- [Aps rifai rete italiana facilitatori aree interne \(Italia\)](#)
- [Arte-Via Cooperativa Artística e Editorial, CRL \(Portugal\)](#)
- [Joves D'unió De Pagesos \(Catalunya\)](#)
- [Red Tree Making projects Coop](#)
- Display Connectors S.L. editor of [PÚBLICO](#)



However, given the magnitude of the challenge undertaken, it was decided to expand the map of contributions and seek the collaboration of various associations of young environmentalists, which would enable us to enrich the project's activities

and, in doing so, gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers to youth participation that were the subject of the study.

- [Fridays for future](#)
- [Ecologistas en Acción](#)
- [Futuro Vegetal](#)
- [Fevecta](#)
- [Ideas en Guerra](#)
- [Alianza Verde](#)
- [Ecooo](#)
- [Florida Universitaria](#)
- Escola CiutaDana
- Local committees of emergency and reconstruction.



Young people have a crucial role to play in the fight against climate change. Not only are they the future, but they are also a powerful force for change in the present. Here are some reasons why youth participation is so important:

- They are the most affected: Young people will live longer with the consequences of climate change, including sea level rise, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity.
- They are innovative and creative: Young people have the ability to think innovatively and find creative solutions to the challenges of climate change.
- They are mobilizers: Young people have the ability to mobilize others and raise awareness about the urgency of climate change.

## I. Context 1. Youth and participation

As indicated above, we must begin by asking ourselves what factors establish the perimeter of the barriers that hinder youth participation. Answering these questions is the task that this study attempts to address.

Does the apparent disengagement of young people from the 2030 Agenda respond to a greater critical awareness of its limited scope in the face of the overexploitation of the planet's resources and the accelerated loss of biodiversity? Or, on the contrary, is it due to the preponderance of the culture of immediate consumption promoted by social media, a vector that obscures or overshadows the need for long-term preservation of the planet? Or is it perhaps that the strategies established so far fail to take reality into account and contradict the specific perspectives that define the interests and approaches of young people?

While the project was being designed and finalized, reality imposed its will on the political agenda. Droughts, floods, and wildfires associated with climate change, growing conflicts between rural and urban perspectives on the speed and intensity of the ecological transition, the need to review market-imposed dietary guidelines, desertification, and migratory movements... these and many other symptoms painted a complex picture that requires new impetus, new teaching strategies, and new forms of leadership. Meanwhile, profound ideological changes were giving rise to denialist attitudes that were deceiving and captivating growing numbers of young people.

This context, which on the one hand encouraged participation due to the magnitude of the evidence of the environmental crisis and on the other hand inhibited it amid growing noise that sought to obscure scientific forecasts, is the reality in which the research has been conducted.

These opposing forces forced the participants in the working groups to sharpen the arguments that would serve to activate youth intervention while helping to expose and denounce the barriers that inhibited it.

## II. Context 2. The social sector in the environmental debate

The environment is a central issue and one of growing importance in today's societies. Although the battle against CO2 emissions and for the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere began as an academic and social aspiration shared by a minority, phenomena related to climate change and the need for a green transition have increased its political, economic, and social impact, turning it into a sector studied from multiple perspectives.

Reports from Eurostat and all the statistical agencies of the various countries have standardized environmental data[1], which they break down and group into five main sections: solid waste management, wastewater management, air, climate, and soil protection, environmental R&D, and biodiversity and landscape protection.

The gross value added generated by economic activities related to the environment reached **2.51% of the EU's GDP in 2023**. In Spain,[2] this contribution was slightly higher, reaching 2.65%, while Italy and Portugal were below average. Changes in taxation and the introduction of green taxes are also part of the information available. Revenue from green taxes on transport and the environment already accounts for 2% of GDP in the EU. Among the southern countries, which are the main focus of this study, Italy (4%) and Portugal (3.2%) are above this average, while Spain remains in line with the European average.



These data are an example of the contribution of the economic fabric to the environment. Among these contributors, the large energy companies that already dominate green energy are accompanied by a multitude of regional and local SMEs and micro-enterprises dedicated to recycling or biodiversity protection. These include a multitude of cooperatives and other social economy actors, in which the presence of young people is significant, although difficult to quantify as they are spread across a wide range of subsectors and geographical areas.

The same is true of the presence of associations, foundations, and other environmental institutions in which young people participate. Although large NGOs (Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and WWF) act as spokespersons in global forums and in negotiating laws with public administrations and governments, the social movement for the environment is much larger. The institutions registered with MITECO (Ministry for Ecological Transition) [4] as collaborators in education and dissemination of the effects of climate change include more than 100 entities: 35 companies, 31 foundations, and 35 NGOs.

Nor do these figures serve to describe the strength of youth participation, which responds to the dialectic “think globally, act locally,” the guideline that characterizes and describes their mobilization. While in Spain the National Register of Associations includes just over 100 national environmental organizations [5], regional registers reveal the true magnitude of the environmental movement and show precisely how the uniqueness of each territory's problems makes the local space the first organizational option for young people.

Regional records that can be consulted online provide very telling figures: Murcia reports 1,218 associations dedicated to the environment, Madrid 1,140, Asturias 400, and Andalusia more than 5,000. From this data, it is easy to infer that in Spain, around 15,000 associations are dedicated to combating the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in Italy, where the Single National Register of the Third Sector (RUNTS), managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, is dedicated to non-profit organizations. There are around 100 active national associations (71 in 2018), while the equivalent entities in the 20 regions, which also include local associations, number 6,341 in total, with Lombardy standing out with 1,047.

The data available for Portugal refers exclusively to national associations that are part of the Portuguese Confederation of Environmental Protection Associations, which has 112 registered entities.

The conclusion is clear. The uniqueness of each community's environmental problems makes the local area the first organizational choice for young people. Large organizations and NGOs serve to give them visibility and facilitate dialogue with public authorities and large private corporations.

### III. Purpose and focus of the study

This organizational dispersion, which is consistent with how ecological crises affect societies in southern Europe, the regions most severely affected by climate change, made it advisable to narrow the focus of the study in order to better assess the participation of younger generations, facilitate the implementation of actions to be carried out, and organize events and working groups.

The aim is to develop a methodology that will facilitate the maximum number of conclusions and recommendations, which is the ultimate goal of the project.

The chosen focus areas were grouped around the expression “Young people and the rural-urban dialogue in the environmental transition,” which we believe adequately summarizes the concerns identified that are most likely to be of interest to young people in Spain, Italy, and Portugal.

We believe that this perspective allows us to identify those areas in which young people express their distancing and disagreement with the 2030 agenda. These are as follows:

**1. Urban youth and eating habits.** The complexity of the moment and the change in lifestyle and consumption habits that it brings with it requires the ongoing re-education of young consumers. On the one hand, genetic modification is now common practice in agribusiness and results in products that are very appealing in terms of shape and colour. Globalization also allows these products to be permanently available on the market, “out of season” according to local approaches. At the same time, organic agricultural products are varied and heterogeneous, and not very attractive from an aesthetic point of view. The aim is to ascertain to what extent educating young people in ecological and local consumption patterns can counteract the uniform aesthetics and the presence of “out-of-season” products that characterize the global logic of agri-food markets.

**2. Urban environmentalists versus young farmers.** We believe it is essential for Echo-Logic to promote dialogue between young urban environmentalists who live in consumer areas (students, workers) and young farmers who are committed to the new logic of organic production and the economic sustainability of their farms. To facilitate a positive exchange of requirements between the two groups, we will

organize a dialogue between young people working on small or medium-sized farms and livestock operations, as well as with agricultural production cooperatives, and young people involved in consumer cooperatives and environmental organizations.



**3. Connecting the present and future of agricultural production.** What land management can be carried out without a rural population? More than two-thirds of farmers will retire in the coming years. How can we educate young farmers to take over? We will try to connect this education with the need to promote and guarantee the sustainability of agricultural and livestock farms that are far removed from the most intensive models of agribusiness, new forms of cooperation, and the expansion of existing ones, favouring local solutions and advances in the food value chain. We will also incorporate the appropriate speed of the ecological transition into the debates.

**4. Assessment of critical areas.** We aim to hold debates among young environmental experts that will allow us to learn from experiences in critical areas, where the most severe deterioration of ecosystem biodiversity is evident. Initially, we planned to focus on the Mar Menor in eastern Spain, but unfortunately, the catastrophe caused by the DANA in Valencia in October 2024, with more than 224 official deaths, forced us to shift the focus of our analysis. These are the areas we have focused on. However, we have always been aware that the interaction of disastrous events linked to climate change and the breadth of reflection this provokes among young people meant it was advisable to be open to other questions and messages that arose from the debates and actions undertaken.

## IV. Methodology and main drivers of the study

These more specific areas of focus should include tools for understanding the analyses of youth leaders in the various fields in which social deterioration due to climate change is evident, as well as capturing the feelings and positions of young people on issues covering the most diverse aspects of environmental crises and alternatives for overcoming them. The most specific local issues should be addressed in specific events in order to explore them in greater depth.

These tools have been the effective levers of the study, which took the form of three types of action:

a) **An ONLINE DEBATE** in which young people from different fields freely and thoroughly expressed their opinions on the chosen central issues. If the aim was to assess the leadership capacity of young people, it was essential to know the analyses of those who were already acting as leaders in different fields. The written debate promoted by the Espacio Público Foundation on its website has made it possible to disseminate and give a voice to young people on the energy transition and climate change.

For this lever, 15 activists were selected and contacted who had sufficient knowledge to expose problems and offer alternatives in their respective areas, while also contributing their experience in environmental battles in various territories. The main issues addressed were foreign dumping as a key factor in eco-social deterioration; territorial inequality and the need to recover the rural world; the conflict over resources and the transformation of water from a common good to a commodity; food sovereignty and the sustainable city; and cooperativism as an example of sustainability.

Their contributions have been essential in drawing up the conclusions of this study.

**A SURVEY** in which we were able to capture a representative sample of the most environmentally conscious young people and present them with a set of questions on all aspects of the study. The survey was disseminated on social media and has made it possible to assess young people's knowledge of the ecological transition, its impact on their lives and their opinion on the solutions being offered to this phenomenon, which are transforming the fundamental pillars of today's society,

such as food sovereignty, sustainable cities and cooperativism as examples of sustainability.

A total of 386 people responded, with diverse socio-demographic profiles in terms of both gender and background, with a significant proportion from rural areas and small towns. The purpose of the questions was to address all the conflicts of the environmental transition: the origin of climate change and its consequences on their lives; concerns and attitudes towards its challenges; the meaning of being an environmentalist; assessment of the European Green Deal; how to imagine agricultural activity in the future; how to address ageing and rural depopulation; the connection between the social economy and sustainability; water as a critical factor; confidence in technological change; perspectives attributed to the circular economy; and, finally, how to activate ecological awareness.

The inclusion of multiple-choice options has provided a wide range of responses to the questions addressed.

b) **ACTIVITIES** to directly address a relevant issue. As mentioned above, the DANA in Valencia, where the spontaneous solidarity of young people was the driving force behind providing real first aid to those affected, became the main focus of the work.

The debate, held at La Florida University in Catarroja, one of the cities most affected by the DANA, was broadcast live via streaming and focused on the need to move beyond the concept of reconstruction, as this would mean reproducing the spatial flaws that caused the 237 deaths caused by the DANA, and instead focus on the need to transform the existing urban model.

In addition, the following activities were carried out:

In Italy, Generazione Zero and ReteRifai held an online event on urban-rural dialogue and sustainable and environmental best practices, entitled “Dal campo a la città – gioventù, territorio e scelte sostenibili” (From the countryside to the city – youth, territory and sustainable choices).

In Portugal, the organisation Arte-via held two international literary festivals: the seventh and eighth editions of the International Literary Festival of the Interior (FLII Palavras de Fogo), in tribute to the victims of forest fires, is an inter-municipal event, hence its innovative nature, which was held in municipalities in the region affected by the fires, with the aim of bringing books and writers to the most unusual and

unpredictable places, such as factories, fields, beaches, churches, markets, pilgrimages, places where people work and live together.

## V. Barriers that hinder participation

When the spotlight is turned on young people as social actors, it seems as if they have a degree of autonomy that, for the most part, they lack. Today's young people are the children and grandchildren of adults on whom they largely depend. They are part of society subject to multiple tensions and with a horizon fraught with uncertainties that delay their emancipation and the possibility of a stable future.

The myth of the “knowledge society” that led them to believe that education would lead to decent work has collapsed. Job insecurity and the impossibility of accessing housing are the problems to which they devote most of their energy, and the difficulty of solving them limits their emotional and life prospects. In this context, it is normal for their horizons to be limited in time, measured in years or even months, in which survival is the main task. Short-termism, encouraged by social media, immediate consumption of leisure and personal communication, distances them and distracts them from distant goals.

This outlook does not necessarily cloud their awareness of the importance of the effects of climate change, but it does limit their organizational energies to deal with its consequences. In the survey conducted as part of this project, their responses on how it will affect their lives are overwhelming. Ninety-two per cent of participants cite the proliferation of droughts and floods as the main manifestation. Seventy-six per cent cited its effects on agriculture and food, and 34% believed it would lead to global pandemics. Forty-one per cent believed that, ultimately, it would affect their entire lives. It can therefore be said that environmental awareness coexists with their difficulties in achieving emancipation and accentuates the precariousness of their lives. Although the signs of the planet's deterioration are accelerating, the timescales involved are always far removed from their immediate horizon.

**It can therefore be concluded that the main barrier to participation in the environmental struggle arises from a question of priorities.** Their main purpose is the immediate need to build a future as adults and earn a living.

**The second barrier to participation identified is the global scale of the environmental crisis,** which overwhelms them when they realize that they cannot make a difference in the short term. The existence of supranational actors who dominate, on the one hand, the essential inputs in food production (energy, seeds,

fertilizers, treatments) and, on the other, the distribution channels, distances them as citizens from the centres of decision-making. The prevailing feeling is that social action can combat its effects in each territory, but it is not enough to bring down the supranational actors that cause them. Ecological and social dumping, i.e. the transfer by large corporations of their activities to territories with more lax legislation on ecological impacts and social rights, is another expression of this contradiction between global causes and local effects. The task is complex and long-term, requiring patience and converging and persistent energies.

This gives a new systemic and political dimension to the environmental debate and points to the need for radical changes in the logic of the capitalist model itself, a much more difficult task to achieve.

The third barrier to participation undoubtedly stems from **the perception that the institutions that decide on the future are distant**, which hinders collaboration and prevents fruitful dialogue. This reality extends to regional and local governments. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that ‘governments are doing nothing to solve the problem’. And that leads, according to our survey, to 48% believing that young people are discouraged and sceptical about solutions. This causes a predisposition to seek vital solutions outside the normal channels: 40% assume the need to seek alternative ways of life.

The fourth barrier has to do with a **certain disenchantment with the way in which the energy transition and the promotion of renewables are developing**, a disenchantment that also extends to the effects of the technological revolution on people's lives. Colonised territories have historically been considered sources of resources and dumping grounds for the waste of industrial development in wealthy countries, and now that reality is being transferred to the logic of environmental transition. While environmentalists had been the pioneers of renewable energy implementation, there is a growing feeling that its accelerated implementation is being used as an excuse to impose eco-fascism with global ramifications, encouraging a new extractivist neo-colonialism obsessed with dominating territories with rare earth deposits.

These changes are driving defensive environmental strategies that mistrust and confront the implementation of large-scale solar and wind farms on fertile land. A new perspective that places the defence of the rural world at the heart of the

sociological system that sustains urban life: food, water, energy and climate balance depend on the health of rural ecosystems.

Finally, **the new logics of power that emphasise the law of the strongest and the use of coercion and war as a way of dealing with conflicts are having a major impact on the environmental movement**, forcing it to broaden its focus towards pacifism. Everything is under review.



## VI. Pathways to youth empowerment

Identifying the barriers described above also provides an opportunity for young environmentalists to refine their objectives and rethink their participatory strategies. The profound changes the world is undergoing are forcing all social movements to redefine their approaches.

Refining analyses, redefining objectives and broadening the convergence of movements is essential in order to adapt to the reality of demographic and environmental transitions.

The management of spaces and the new economic geography, which updates and highlights the centre-periphery relationships with megacities driving the economic system and depopulated territories as victims of imbalances, are essential perspectives for analysing current inequalities.

Megacities are extractive centres that monopolise investment and technological infrastructure and draw talent away from the peripheries of medium-sized cities. They represent extractive neocolonialism as a model that is unsustainable both for human beings and for the planet as a whole.

**Urban planning, waste management, water cycles, flooding and the abandonment of forests are all problems related to land management.** Water has gone from being a vital common good to an object of dispute between the conflicting interests of coastal and inland areas, where high agricultural, urban and tourist demand converge.

Establishing a new rural-urban dialectic is essential to raising awareness of the causes of territorial inequality that truly exists at all levels. Faced with the historical tendency to view the rural world as merely a supplier of resources, it is essential to recognise it as a source of social balance and biodiversity without which it is impossible to move towards more sustainable models of life. Food, water, energy and climate balance depend on the health of rural ecosystems. The new rurality can be articulated as the backbone of an eco-social transformation.

Disasters are becoming increasingly frequent and inevitable. But they are an opportunity to focus attention on their causes and feasible solutions appropriate to each environment. Politicising crises, not in a partisan sense, but as an opportunity

to denounce irregularities, control institutions and influence public affairs, is essential. It is also essential to take legal action so that bad decisions have consequences and send a warning to architects, businesspeople, politicians and public administrators.



## Conclusions

Both the Espacio Público Foundation and its collaborating partners are convinced that all the project's objectives have been met.

The causes that hinder young people's participation in climate change issues have been analysed and the impressions of institutions, organisations and young people themselves have been sufficiently gathered. Both the focus of the analysis and the tools used have allowed us to delve deeper into the opinions of activists and leaders of existing organisations, as well as a sample of young people that is sufficiently representative of the whole.

During the course of the project, the environmental situation has been cruel, with dramatic floods and a new wave of high-intensity fires that have devastated millions of hectares in Spain, Portugal and Italy. The logic of global power has undergone a radical transformation with Trump's arrival to the US presidency: the law of the strongest has prevailed over multilateral logic, and the wars in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza have boosted the arms industry, distorted international cooperation and displaced the ecological transition from the hegemonic role it had acquired in the EU and in the policies of the US administration headed by President Biden to a secondary, if not irrelevant, position.

At the same time, profound ideological changes have emerged, fuelling the resurgence of climate change denialism, which is exerting a growing influence on more groups of young people, mainly men.

This complex reality, coupled with the persistent precariousness that clouds the future of young people, has accentuated the barriers that hinder participation and has highlighted that, despite the harshness of the manifestations of climate change, new impetus, new teaching strategies and new forms of leadership are needed.

The analyses carried out by the participants in the debates have provided guidelines for the new organisational needs and the ideas that inspire them.

For the entities promoting the project, the collaboration established has been extremely enriching in every way. It has offered a unique opportunity to make the most of networking and the value of the synergies that European projects allow.

## Notes

[1] Eurostat <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/dashboard/environmental-accounts/>

[2] INE. National Institute of Statistics.

<https://www.ine.es/dyngs/Prensa/es/CBYSA2023.htm>

[3] Carolina Skarupa, environmental analyst

<https://www.manglai.io/blog/comparativa-impuestos-verdes-europa>

[4] Miteco <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/cambio-climatico/temas/educacion-formacion-sensibilizacion-del-publico/acciones-de-divulgacion-y-sensibilizacion.html>

[5] National Register of Associations

<https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/es/servicios-al-ciudadano/tramites-y-gestiones/asociaciones/consulta-del-fichero-de-denominaciones/>

[6] CARM Registers

[https://www.carm.es/web/pagina?IDCONTENIDO=234&IDTIPO=140&RASTRO=c52\\$m](https://www.carm.es/web/pagina?IDCONTENIDO=234&IDTIPO=140&RASTRO=c52$m)

[7] RUNTS- National Third Sector Register, Services  
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