PEOPLE
& PLANET
A COMMON DESTINY

PEOPLE & PLANET POSITION PAPER

OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY CLIMATE COUNCILS

DEAR
DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND AWARENESS RAISING
supporting global change

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CAMÕES INSTITUTO DA COOPERAÇÃO E DA LÍNGUA PORTUGAL
MINISTÉRIO DOS NEGÓCIOS ESTRANGEIROS

WHO WE ARE

We are the representatives of the Youth Advisory Climate Councils (YACCS), a group of 29 young aspiring activists for climate action and sustainable development that want to promote collective, ambitious and effective change in our eight countries – Cape Verde, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and The Netherlands –, in the European Union and across the globe.

After four years working locally, in each of our schools, neighbourhoods, cities and countries, we've spent three days in a bootcamp in Portugal connecting and exchanging experiences, strengthening our social impact skills and understanding how to escalate our local ideas, with the goal of writing a position paper that effectively delivers the roadmap for projects for climate action and sustainability that can be applied to any of the territories where we've been working and replicated elsewhere.

This position paper was developed as part of the project "People & Planet: a Common Destiny"[1] and proposes the partnership of local authorities and non-governmental organisations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[2], with a focus on Goal 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation and Goal 13 – Climate Action. The lead applicant is the Municipality of Loures in Portugal (Câmara Municipal de Loures)[3] and the project is co-funded by the Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR)[4], initiated by the European Union (EU).

It is our hope that this position paper will become a tool for local, national, European and global authorities in their efforts to promote sustainability and combat climate change, hence, we provide concrete solutions for climate issues based on five areas of action: Civic Action, Communication, Culture, Education and Policy, all thought to simultaneously stimulate critical and innovative thinking among other young people, encouraging them to beco me active agents of change in their communities.

THE EMERGENCY

The Paris Agreement[5], an international treaty on climate change negotiated by 196 parties at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, aims to limit global warming to 1.5°C in comparison to pre-industrial average temperatures. For that, it is stated in the treaty that greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030. Earth was about 1.36ºC warmer in 2023 than in the late 19th-century average, and it was the year with the

[1] https://www.imvf.org/en/project/people-and-planet/

[2] https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

3 https://www.cm-loures.pt/

4 https://dearprogramme.eu/

5 https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement

highest greenhouse gas emissions ever[6]. The 10 most recent years are the warmest on record[7]. Currently, any action by political and economic leaders that increases emissions jeopardises humanity's chances of prosperity and well-being. We believe, supported by decades of work by scientists, academics and social movements, that it is possible to stop this horror while building social justice.

We have realistic proposals for actions that specifically address SDG 13, Climate Action, namely targets 13.2. (Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning) and 13.3. (Improve education, awareness raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning)[8], which will bring benefits for many other, if not all, SDGs.

OUR VISION

We come from very different territories with distinct challenges regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation, but after sharing our local experiences at the People & Planet International Bootcamp, we found several common needs that allowed us to design common solutions.

Despite numerous initiatives and policies in place to combat climate change, existing actions often fall short due to several key issues identified during the programme:

- **Lack of Comprehensive and Engaging Education:** Current climate education programs are often optional, limited in pedagogy, failing to engage and inspire students fully. Many young people lack a deep understanding of climate issues, their relation to human rights, and their role in addressing them.
- **Urban-Rural Divide:** There is a significant gap in access to climate education and participation opportunities between urban and rural populations. This disparity hinders collective action and leaves many communities behind.
- **Ineffective Communication:** Climate communication strategies often do not resonate with younger audiences. Traditional media and communication channels fail to engage young people, who are more influenced by social media and peer networks.
- **Limited Youth Involvement in Decision-Making:** Young people are frequently excluded from formal decision-making processes. This exclusion limits the diversity of ideas and perspectives needed to create effective and innovative solutions.
- **Insufficient Support for Grassroots Initiatives:** Community-led climate initiatives often lack the necessary support and funding. Bureaucratic hurdles and limited resources prevent these projects from scaling up and achieving broader impact.

[6] https://globalcarbonbudget.org/fossil-co2-emissions-at-record-high-in-2023/
[7] https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/?intent=121
[8] https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13

In light of these challenges, we believe that including youngsters like us in the process of designing climate-positive solutions is crucial for several reasons:

- **Innovative Perspectives:** Young people bring fresh, innovative perspectives and ideas to the table. Their creativity and willingness to challenge the status quo are essential for developing effective solutions.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** Engaging youth in climate action fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment that can lead to sustained efforts over the long term. As the generation that will inherit the consequences of yesterday's and today's actions, young people have a vested interest in creating a sustainable future.
- **Increased Engagement:** Young people are powerful influencers within their communities and are, more often than not, at the forefront of social media trends. By involving them in climate action, we can leverage their networks and communication skills to raise awareness and mobilise broader participation.
- **Equitable Solutions:** Including diverse voices, especially those of young people from various backgrounds, ensures that climate solutions are inclusive and equitable. This diversity helps address the unique needs and challenges faced by different communities.
- **Empowerment and Leadership:** Empowering young people and, particularly, young women to take on leadership roles in climate action builds their confidence and capacity. This not only benefits the individuals involved but also strengthens the overall movement for climate and social justice.

Our recommendations aim to foster a culture of active and collective participation, innovative thinking, and community engagement, ensuring that the voices of the younger generation are heard and acted upon, in order to create a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable approach to combating climate change.

METHODOLOGY NOTES

The People & Planet International Bootcamp was designed to support and increase self-efficacy in the participants. Through the use of design thinking tools – the "How Might We" framework, the "Theory of Change" exercise and the "Impact Hypothesis" – practical application and real-world impact was emphasised. The "Duct Tape Challenge" highlighted the importance of active listening and diverse perspectives in problem-solving and the "Origin Story" and "Re-Imagining" exercises inspired bold creativity for transformative solutions. Key methodological points:

- Zero-hierarchy, mutual learning environment.
- Collective intelligence and collective problem-solving.
- Focus on empathy and diversity.
- Emphasis on real-world impact and impact measurement strategies.
- Nature-based sessions and microadventures to promote a deeper connection with nature, boosting creativity and maintaining motivation.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

While we are already active in promoting sustainable individual behaviours in our communities, during the People & Planet International Bootcamp, we recognized that collective action is more impactful and, thus, more urgent.

We focused on the interconnectedness of the proposed initiatives across various categories and worked on an holistic approach that recognises that education, communication, community involvement, and youth engagement in politics do not exist in isolation; instead, they are deeply interwoven, influencing and reinforcing one another. For example, educational initiatives on climate issues enhance community involvement by raising awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility, which in turn bolsters support for grassroots climate projects. Similarly, effective communication strategies amplify the impact of community actions and policy advocacy, while engaging young people in political processes ensures that their voices are heard and considered in decision-making. By addressing these areas collectively, we aim to create a comprehensive framework for climate action that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

Our recommendations seek to reinforce or correct existing actions, ensuring they create safe, inclusive, and accessible spaces for collective participation in tackling the climate crisis across our regions. These points stem from our perception that current actions are either not sufficiently implemented or ineffective, and thus need enhancement.

INCLUSIVE AND INNOVATIVE EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION METHODS

1. **Nature Play:** Create the space and time for students to spend time in nature to increase their connection to the environment, their awareness of human impact on climate and, thus, their interest in sustainable practices. Nature play nurtures a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the natural world and offers immersive experiences that highlight the beauty and fragility of the ecosystems, making the impact of climate change tangible and personal. It not only educates but also galvanises communities to take meaningful action towards a sustainable and climate-resilient future.

2. **Local Ecosystem Education:** Fund sustainable practices in schools – waste management, energy efficiency, green transportation for students, etc. – and implement school programs that focus on local eco system services to raise awareness and promote engagement with environmental issues. These programs can include hands-on projects like water quality testing, studying local flora and fauna, and understanding the services provided by wetlands, forests, and other eco-

systems. By learning about the benefits and functions of their local ecosystems, students can grasp the importance of preserving these areas. This knowledge not only cultivates responsible future citizens but also empowers students to become advocates for protecting and enhancing their local environments. Such education lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of ecological principles and the interconnectedness of all life forms.

3. **Agricultural Knowledge:** Introduce lessons on agriculture in school curricula to educate children about sustainable food practices and influence community support for local farmers, as well as extra-curricular cooking classes. These lessons can cover topics such as permaculture, organic farming, soil health, local sustainable diets, animal welfare, the impacts of intensive agriculture on the environment, reading food labels and food waste management. By understanding the journey of food from farm to table, students can develop an appreciation for sustainable agricultural practices that minimise environmental damage. This knowledge encourages communities to support local food systems, reducing carbon footprints associated with food transportation and promoting healthier, more sustainable diets. Additionally, agricultural education can foster a sense of community and connection to the land, furthering environmental stewardship.

4. **Interactive Learning:** Implement formal and non-formal education methodologies, such as games, contests, shows, and festivals to provide dynamic and engaging ways for young people to learn about sustainability and engage in sustainable practices. These activities can be designed to simulate real-world environmental challenges and solutions, offering students practical experience in problem-solving. For example, eco-themed games can teach resource management, while contests can encourage innovative thinking for waste reduction or energy conservation. Such approaches make learning about climate issues fun and memorable, increasing awareness and understanding of environmental responsibilities. By involving students in these creative and participatory activities, we can foster a culture of sustainability and inspire a generation of environmentally conscious individuals.

5. **Rural Events:** Organise festivals and other accessible events in rural areas to boost local young people's social involvement and participation in local and national climate actions and exchange experiences with urban youth. These events can provide a platform for rural and urban youth to interact, share experiences, and collaborate on environmental projects. Activities like workshops on renewable energy, local wildlife conservation, or sustainable agriculture, can highlight the unique environmental challenges and opportunities in rural areas. By facilitating these exchanges, we can bridge the urban-rural divide, promote mutual understanding, and foster a sense of solidarity in addressing climate change.

6. **Bicycle Programs:** Offer free access to bikes and promote their use as a mode of transportation as a simple yet impactful way to encourage sustainable practices. This can include bike-sharing systems, safe cycling infrastructure, community biking events and impact measuring activities. These initiatives not only reduce carbon emissions by decreasing reliance on fossil fuel-powered vehicles but also promote physical health and well-being. Additionally, measuring the positive impact of increased bicycle use – such as reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality – can serve as a tangible example of how to contribute to solving larger environmental goals.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

7. **Green Urban Spaces:** Sponsor community-led initiatives that make cities greener and help mitigate the impact of global warming. These projects can include planting mini-forests, developing community gardens that grow food, and installing green roofs. Such initiatives help cool urban areas, reduce the urban heat island effect, and increase biodiversity. They also provide residents with access to green spaces, improving mental and physical health. By involving the community in these projects, we foster a sense of ownership and pride in the local environment. Additionally, these green spaces can serve as educational sites where residents learn about climate change, ecosystems' services, sustainable gardening practices, and the benefits of urban greenery.

8. **Active Citizenship:** Reduce school hours to provide youngsters with more time for active citizenship and community engagement outside of classes. This extra time can be allocated for students to participate in environmental projects, volunteer with local organisations, and engage in civic discussions. By integrating active citizenship into the educational experience, we encourage students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings. This hands-on involvement helps students understand the importance of civic engagement and the impact of their actions on the community and the world. It also provides valuable opportunities for leadership development and empowers young people to advocate for change.

9. **Urban Agriculture:** Grant public spaces and encourage the concession of privately owned spaces for urban agriculture, as well as spread awareness and information on urban agriculture to encourage its practice to create greener cities. These projects enhance community resilience, provide residents with access to fresh, locally grown produce, promote food security, reduce the carbon footprint associated with food transportation, and support local economies. Urban agriculture

also fosters social cohesion by bringing together diverse groups to work towards a common goal.

10. Climate Project Support: Simplify applications' processes and increase funding for climate positive projects to empower citizens in policy and project design. By removing bureaucratic barriers and providing adequate resources, we can encourage more individuals and community groups to propose and implement innovative climate solutions. This support can include grants, technical assistance, and training in project management and environmental sustainability. By enabling community members to take an active role in addressing climate issues, we foster a sense of agency and accountability. Moreover, these projects can serve as models for scalable solutions, demonstrating the potential for grassroots initiatives to make a significant impact.

11. Urban-Rural Exchange: Create and fund exchange programs between urban and rural areas focused on climate. These programs can involve exchanges of students, activists, and community leaders, allowing participants to experience and learn about the unique environmental challenges and solutions in different regions. These exchanges promote cross-cultural dialogue and the sharing of best practices, helping to build a cohesive and inclusive approach to climate action. By bridging the gap between urban and rural communities, we can tackle the polarisation around climate issues and cooperate to address climate issues more effectively.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

12. Democracy Education: Teach participatory democracy tools in schools and young-led spaces. These tools can include workshops on how to organise community meetings, navigate local government systems, advocate for policy changes, raise funding, or plan a successful protest. By providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in democracy, we encourage them to take an active role in shaping their communities. This education also fosters critical thinking and informed decision-making, equipping young people to challenge existing structures and advocate for justice.

13. Policy Presentations: Create platforms for youngsters to present policy ideas at school, and at neighbourhood, municipal, and national levels, fostering youth involvement in policy making. These projects can involve youth councils, youth parliaments, and public forums where young people can propose and debate

policies with professional experts and elected officials. By giving them a seat at the table, we validate their perspectives and encourage intergenerational dialogue. This inclusion not only enhances the quality of policy discussions but also helps young people develop a deeper understanding of governance and civic responsibility. Engaging youth in policy presentations cultivates future leaders who are knowledgeable and passionate about creating a sustainable and equitable society.

14. **Youth Groups:** Finance and support local youth groups focused on climate and sustainability to serve as informative resources for the population and to measure and manage local environmental impacts. These groups can serve as hubs for education, advocacy, and action, for engaging in community outreach, and influencing local policy.

15. **Rural-based Initiatives:** Mobilise, fund and support young people in rural areas to create, manage and measure the impact of local climate initiatives to foster community involvement and environmental stewardship. These initiatives can include renewable energy projects, conservation efforts, sustainable agriculture practices, or rewilding projects. By empowering rural youth to take the lead on climate projects, we ensure that their unique perspectives and needs are represented in broader environmental discussions. Providing resources and support helps these initiatives succeed and demonstrates the potential of grassroots actions to affect meaningful change. Rural-based initiatives also strengthen community bonds and encourage a collective commitment to sustainability.

16. **Communication Adaptation:** Adapt to new communication mediums to reach and increase young voter engagement and turnout. This includes utilising social media platforms, digital campaigns, and interactive content to disseminate information about political issues and encourage participation. By meeting young people where they are, we can make political engagement more accessible and relevant to their daily lives. Innovative communication strategies can include live streams, Q&A sessions, and gamified voting information. These methods not only inform young voters but also motivate them to participate in elections and other democratic processes.

17. **Promote Young Politicians:** Promote younger politicians to generate ideas that resonate with young people and increase voter turnout. By supporting young candidates and highlighting their campaigns, we can encourage a new generation of political leaders who are more attuned to the concerns and aspirations of younger demographics. These politicians can bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the table, addressing issues like climate change, education, and technology in ways that resonate with their peers. Promoting young politicians also helps break down barriers to political participation, inspiring more young people to

get involved in politics and advocate for their communities. By championing young leaders, we can ensure that political institutions reflect the diversity and dynamism of society.

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE FOR ACTION

18. **Support Influencers:** Support entertainment influencers in raising climate awareness through paid-content, reputation-building acti vities that align with the influencers' personal brand and audience interests. By collaborating with influencers who have large followings, we can leverage their platforms to disseminate information about climate risks and solutions and reach a broader and more diverse audience, particularly younger generations who may be more influenced by social media than traditional media.

19. **Local Content Creation:** Sponsor local opinion leaders and social media influencers for content creation about the local climate risks and solutions. These individuals can highlight specific environmental issues in their local contexts, making the content more relatable and actionable for their audiences. This localised approach helps raise awareness about the immediate impacts of climate change and the importance of community-based solutions. It also fosters a sense of agency among viewers, motivating them to participate in local climate actions and advocacy efforts.

20. **Media Platforms:** Create dedicated spaces in the media, such as local newspapers and radios, and municipality social media profiles, for young voices to share their ideas about climate change mitigation and adaptation, building their confidence and encouraging participation. By providing a platform for young people to express their views and propose solutions, we empower them to become active participants in the climate dialogue. This exposure not only validates their contributions but also inspires other young people to get involved. Additionally, featuring youth perspectives in the media can help bridge generational gaps in understanding and action, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to climate issues.

CONCLUSIONS

In addressing climate issues, it is crucial to recognize the intersectionality of climate action with social justice, economic equity, and cultural diversity.

Climate change does not affect all communities equally; marginalised groups often bear the brunt of environmental degradation due to systemic inequalities. Effective climate action must therefore go hand-in-hand with efforts to promote social justice, ensuring that policies and initiatives address the needs and rights of vulnerable populations. Additionally, economic equity is integral to sustainable development, as equitable access to resources and opportunities enables communities to build resilience against climate impacts. Embracing cultural diversity enriches our collective response to climate challenges by incorporating a wide range of perspectives, traditional knowledge, and innovative solutions. By integrating these elements into climate strategies, we can create a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future for all. Our recommendations increase the quality of life of all involved and encourage initiative and citizen involvement, as well as community building.

We believe working and playing in nature has positive and transformative effects in urban populations, that knowledge about ecosystem services and how they connect to the fulfilment of human rights is the way forward on cultural change around environmental issues, and that collective and politicised participation is the most effective way to a democratic, prosperous and green future.

We also recognize that the urgency of the climate crisis requires immediate and bold action. The engagement of young people in this endeavour is not just beneficial but essential. As the generation that will face the brunt of climate change impacts, young people must be empowered to take leadership roles in developing and implementing solutions. Our recommendations are designed to harness the energy, creativity, and resilience of youth to drive the necessary changes at all levels of society. We believe that by fostering a culture of active participation and inclusivity, we can ensure that the transition to a sustainable future is just and equitable for all.

Local, national, and European institutions and authorities play a crucial role in supporting these initiatives. We urge you to include our ideas in your budgets and mitigation and adaptation plans, as a way of not only fighting the climate crisis but also creating value for young people, tackling inequalities, and building a greener and fairer future. We stand ready to collaborate and support these efforts, confident that together, we can build a world that respects, preserves and betters our planet for present and future generations.

Sincerely,

The representatives of the Youth Advisory Climate Councils

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