



YOUTH SPORT FOR CLIMATE ACTION -

WHERE ARE WE NOW?



After the turbulent year of 2020, ENGSO Youth takes stock of the state of the climate at the beginning of 2021, focusing on the future of youth within the sports movement.

From unprecedented wildfires across the US and Australia to the extraordinary heat in Siberia, the impacts of climate change were felt in every corner of the world in the last few years. This year must be the year for climate action – “the make it or break it year,” said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres at the launch of WMO’s report on the State of the Global Climate 2020 which has highlighted accelerating climate change indicators and worsening impacts.

Unfortunately, many reports show that governments are nowhere close to the level of ambition needed to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement¹. Although some reports state that due to the Covid-19 lockdown carbon emission have been reduced², still the effect of lockdowns on concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere were so small that it registers as a “blip”, hardly distinguishable from the year-to-year fluctuations of the carbon cycle, according to the World Meteorological Organization, and has had a negligible impact on the overall curve of rising CO₂ levels³.

ENGSO YOUTH FOR CLIMATE ACTION

ENGSO Youth serves as a global platform to create opportunities in the youth sport sector in Europe through advocacy, strategic actions and networking. ENGSO Youth recognizes the importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and is committed to contributing to their achievement. At the same time, we remain committed to using sport as a tool to achieve them, while focusing on youth in the grassroots sport sector. By signing the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework, in early 2021, ENGSO Youth openly showed support for the framework. But we see this as much more than “just signing” it; we see it as an open promise to accelerate our work to take action against climate change. With this position paper we would like to address a “call for action” for sport organisations to, through the empowerment and engagement of youth, move to the next level when it comes to climate action initiatives. Let’s move from signing frameworks to taking actions!

As stated in the “Sustainable Development Goals & the 2030 Development Agenda”, published in 2017⁴, we see the Global Agenda 2030 as an “opportunity to ensure that sport and physical activity are integrated as a meaningful and cost-effective tool to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. Furthermore, in the “Youth Sport for Climate Action”⁵ position paper, written and published in 2019, we clearly express that “ENGSO Youth, as the voice of young European sports people, strongly supports the objectives and principles of the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework. We are happy to see that since then, more and more have signed and committed to it, agreeing to support and implement the principles enshrined in the Framework.

As presented within the “Youth Sport for Climate Action” position paper we have already acknowledged some initiatives, like #Sport4Climate, the leading global example, with many influential athletes showcasing their commitment and taking the message forward. Due to the global inter-

1 <https://unfccc.int/news/greater-climate-ambition-urged-as-initial-ndc-synthesis-report-is-published>

2 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0797-x>

3 <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/carbon-dioxide-levels-continue-record-levels-despite-covid-19-lockdown>

4 <https://www.youth-sport.net/sdgs>

https://b2edbaa4-f3ed-4569-9d16-de917ed9777c.filesusr.com/ugd/093f45_c37a1c4bc7694044a36e258c606b12df.pdf

5 https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ac1665_0dc7865adbe74a579328d2804dcbbbfb.pdf



est around sport and its media coverage, sport can influence millions of people around the globe, and lead by example as it reexamines its own practices and policies to move fans and society towards a more sustainable future within and beyond the sporting field and we are happy to see this happening.

To add on this, we as ENGSO Youth support the initiative of the European Commission for the European Climate Pact inviting everyone to participate in climate action and to build a greener Europe. As part of the European Green Deal, the Pact aims to become a lively space to share information, debate and act on the climate crisis, and offer

support for a European climate movement to grow and consolidate.

Recalling the “Youth Sport for Climate Action” position paper we demanded **more spaces for young people** when talking about global sport policies related to sustainable development and climate change, asking for a **global youth advisory group on sustainable development and climate action** to be created, while **youth committees** in national and international sporting organisations to be set up in order to better channel the opinion and voice of young people at all levels. We expressed the need for organisers of middle and large scale sport events to **provide adequate frameworks** for youth-led, peer-to-peer learning activities related to sustainable development and climate action, such as educational side-events, workshops and seminars. We encouraged sport organisations together with their young athletes to **run initiatives for more environmentally friendly and sustainable sporting activities**, and role model youth athletes to use their image and popularity and raise awareness on the importance of sustainable development and climate action. And lastly we noted the need for young people to be encouraged to advocate for their organisations to embrace sustainability practices in their day to day operations.

BUT WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE?

Although there is still a lot to be done, and more active measures to be taken, we are happy to see that things are also slowly moving forward. However, young people are the ones who could be the most affected by the slow pace of the actions against climate change, there is still limited space for young people to actively engage and contribute.

We see young people as the driving force, and should therefore, be considered as one of the main stakeholders **within the sports sector**, especially when talking about sustainable development and climate change.

In order for us to achieve our commitments in a meaningful way, and to contribute towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development goals through sport, we call on the United Nations and its agencies; the Council of Europe; the European Union; the different European countries; the international and national sport organisations, movements and federations; national, regional and local authorities to take action upon the following priorities through:

- Safeguarding and promoting **quality and meaningful youth participation** within the SDGs and climate change related processes. Especially when **developing policies, strategies and action plans to build sustainable sports, by recognising and positioning** young people as **rightful stakeholders** that stand at the same level as other experts and private representatives. Meaningful youth engagement should involve youth-led initiatives and stimulate their participation, in order to **guarantee young peoples’ direct impact on the decision-making process**. It can

also involve collaborative participation, where youth is **regularly involved in a systematic way**, through their **equal participation** within different committees, advocacy groups or meetings. This should be achieved through:

1. Being 'acknowledged' and 'recognised' by stakeholders and being 'taken seriously', as an equal and serious actor.
 2. Ensuring meaningful involvement and space for youth to 'influence policy, a seat at the decision-making table and contribute to the development of policies from the starting points and climate action through sport strategy and policy developments, multidisciplinary advisory boards dealing with the implementation and promotion of the SDGs or tackling climate change.
 3. Supporting the establishment of new forms of youth participation and safe spaces for youth in cooperation with various stakeholders, within schools, sport clubs, academia, and the sport for all sector.
 4. Including young people in existing structures such as sustainable development of sport councils and bodies, SDG.
- Ensuring **access** of young people to the **governance processes** for the implementation of the SDGs and climate action strategies within the sport sector **at all levels**, local, regional, national and European. There is a need to put young people at the centre of SDG and climate change related policies and to **safeguard principles of social inclusion and diversity** by:
 1. Ensuring that the language used in these processes is accessible and clear for all citizens, especially young people coming from diverse backgrounds as a relevant stakeholder.
 2. Ensuring that policies, strategies, action plans etc. related to sustainable sport development shall be shaped, implemented and evaluated with the active inclusion and participation of young people whose future depends on today's global actions.
 3. Bringing youth interests into the discussions, through providing young people with adequate time slots and spaces where they can intervene and make their voice heard.
 4. Proposing evidence-based strategies for the implementation of the SDGs within the sports sector and tackling climate change through sport, that consider young people as a specific category; and mandating intersectional audits on the possible impacts of specific policies on different groups, before a policy is adopted.
 - Supporting education for Sustainable development (ESD) and climate change, as a complementary approach to all youth and sport related processes should **enhance collective action** among sustainability initiatives. This includes **demystifying** the complexity of issues and making the SDGs **understandable and easily interpretable** by all young people. It means **ensuring equal access** of young people to SDG-related knowledge, skills and competences needed **to participate in and co-shape** their communities, assuring the SDGs will be a main societal backbone. ESD provides the empowering mechanism through which we can transform the critical sustainability challenges that we are facing in the sports sector, into opportunities by:
 1. Increasing awareness on climate change and the SDGs while focusing on understanding the impact on human rights, and on the health, well-being and dignity of young people.
 2. Supporting the skills development of young people, thereby facilitating the transition to an increasingly sustainable society.
 3. Supporting physical education practitioners and teachers, as well as other educators and sport workers in advancing their understanding on the SDGs in order to empower young people in engaging with the SDGs.
 4. Empowering young people to engage in identifying and developing solutions based on the SDGs that can



- further improve their quality of life.
5. Educating athletes and elite sports practitioners on Sustainable and human rights-based approaches and support through raising awareness, and implementing sustainable practices that would serve as an inspiration to grassroots sports and young people.
 6. Ensuring that sports education for SDGs initiatives are inclusive, affordable and accessible to all young people, from all socio-economic backgrounds, to avoid furthering existing gaps.
 7. Urging educational institutions and governments to provide the institutional support, resources and legitimacy for youth-led change processes towards sustainability in sports. Mechanisms should include dedicated funding, institutional integration, working space, mandates, recognition, and training for youth-led sustainability initiatives.
- Creating synergies to foster cross-sectoral and multi stakeholder cooperation between the SDGs, sports and youth stakeholders among others, by:
 1. Harmonising SDG strategies and policies, by creating links between SDGs and youth priorities, in all processes, such as the ENGSO Youth practice with integrating the specific SDGs within the strategic plan.
 2. Ensuring that cooperation between youth and sport organisations and stakeholders in SDG Governance is the rule rather than the exception.
 3. Stimulating sharing tools and practices among the sectors, on how the SDGs could be furthered, such as the "Score all 17" manual [2] developed by ENGSO Youth through the Sport for Sustainable Development project.
 4. Ensuring that the policies within the sport sector drive sustainable development and climate action with the urgency it requires and in a holistic, just and gender responsive way. The policies should address the multiple dimensions of sustainable development and drive immediate action to realize sustainable development in the here and now.
 5. Allocating resources to empower youth as change agents for climate action and sustainable development of sport.

CONCLUSION:

Across the globe, youth are increasingly mobilizing themselves and taking leadership roles to advance their communities and countries towards sustainability. In this process, young people recognize that creating a sustainable future will require a collective vision, commitment and action from youth around the world. Therefore, youth-to-youth empowerment and mobilization present a unique opportunity for harnessing the knowledge, energy and creativity of young people to advance the sustainable development goals and climate action.

Young leaders within the sport sector can be inspirational role models for encouraging other youth who share similar concerns in their local contexts and mobilize them. This can be achieved through peer mentoring, sharing of knowledge and skills, and fostering open and safe platforms for expression and action in the sport sector and beyond.

ENGSO Youth, commits to taking responsibility for empowering and mobilizing young people and is dedicated to using this collective driving force to maximize positive impact on the sport sector, on our society and environment. Youth must be involved in the planning and implementation of all the areas of sustainable sport development, and use their position to empower and mobilize other young people to become change makers.

Youth is a key stakeholder, therefore it should be recognized as such at all levels, domains and stages of sports governance. When given the opportunities and support they need, young people are ready to take on leadership roles to advance the sports sector, their communities and countries towards sustainability.



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