

9.1 General context

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In order to involve young people in global issues, it is important to know what they think about the world, and their role in it. According to a survey carried out by NDCO 2013, three quarters of young people between 15 and 25 years of age continue to feel involved with the world. A majority of young people are interested in what is happening in our society and in the world. Almost half of the young people are worried about how we care for the earth and want to do something for a better world themselves.

In addition, a majority of young people are interested in what is happening in our society and in the world. Half of the young people are worried and want to do something for a better world. More girls than boys worry about how we care for the earth and more girls than boys want to do something for a better world. People in their twenties are more interested in this than teenagers.

Not only does almost half of the young people want to do something for a better world, 48% actually do something to make the world a better place (34% do not, 19% say 'don't know'). The young people who say they contribute to a better world are again more girls than boys (56% vs. 40%) and more in their twenties than teenagers (55% vs. 39%).

EU cooperation with partner countries is aimed at contributing to human development and engagement of young people worldwide and is core to more resilient societies and to enhance trust between cultures and stability for the EU itself. In addition, it seeks to promote active participation in society at global level. EU is supporting young people to engage with regions outside Europe and become more involved in global policy processes regarding issues such as climate change, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, human rights, etc. In particular, this means:

- Raising awareness of global issues among young people
- Providing opportunities for young people to exchange views with policy makers on global issues
- Fostering mutual understanding among young people from all over the world through dialogue

- Encouraging young people to volunteer for environmental projects ("green volunteering") and to act green in their everyday life (recycling, saving energy, using hybrid vehicles, etc.)
- Promoting entrepreneurship, employment, education, and volunteering opportunities outside Europe
- Promoting cooperation with and exchanges between youth workers on different continents
- Encouraging young people to volunteer in developing countries or to work on development issues in their own country.

Main concepts

Sustainable development

The Flemish Parliament Act of 8 July 2008 concerning the sustainable development ([decreet ter bevordering van duurzame ontwikkeling](#)) adopts the following definition:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Specific attention is paid to the integration of and the synergy between the social, ecological and economic dimension and that the realisation requires a change process in which the use of resources, the purpose for investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes should be tailored to the future and current needs.”

This definition is the guiding principle for everything which has to do with sustainable development in Flanders.

Sustainable development in the Flemish Youth- and Children’s Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019)

The Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy Plan also mentions that sustainability is an interplay between four dimensions:

- ecological: attention should be paid to climate change
- social: attention should be paid to ALL children and young people, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable
- global: attention should be paid to children and young people in Flanders and elsewhere
- economic: aiming at green jobs, circular economy...

However in this policy plan the Flemish Government places the emphasis on the ecological component. Children and young people can make their own active contributions to a sustainable living environment. Structural measures must ensure that they are anchored. Different social actors play a role in this. The Flemish government wants to ensure that sustainable and ecological products are as attractive and accessible as non-sustainable ones. The government

gives financial injections and raise awareness about this theme. Opting for sustainability is rewarded. Children and young people have the right to grow up in a healthy environment. The policy plan takes this perspective into account on several fronts. Monitoring can lead to action plans. Sustainable (re)building and living is given a boost. School is also an important environment where children and young people spend a lot of time. The pursuit of healthy indoor air is essential; a green playground can only be motivating and fun.

Youth representatives and the Flemish Youth Council

One of the aims of the Flemish Youth Council is to represent young people and youth work at national and international forums. By doing so, the Flemish Youth Council sends UN youth representatives to various (inter)national forums.

There is also a [youth representative for Europa](#) that takes part in gatherings of the members of the European Youth Forum.

Youth interest in global issues

Sustainable development and green patterns of consumption and production

The process for drawing up the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 completed several participatory stages. In the spring of 2019, an extensive environmental analysis, the Great Priorities Debate, took place. The environmental analysis ([omgevingsanalyse](#)) provides an overview of trends, figures, research and the voice of children, youngsters and experts. During this debate, the various policy areas of the Flemish government, experts, young people and actors from civil society and from local governments discussed the major cross-policy challenges - or 'transversal' - that children and young people lay awake of, and that need to be addressed in the coming years. At the end of the debate, the priority themes that the broad field of youth and children's rights wants to see included in the next youth and children's rights policy plan (APR) were surveyed. The next government will be able to choose a maximum of five of these.

This environmental analysis reported also an overview of the themes sustainability, ecology, environment and "green living" for children and young people. The environmental analysis states that young people do not understand that themes such as environment and sustainability do not have high priority at political level. They believe that attention must be paid to waste policy, fewer cars, green energy, adapting consumption behaviour, protecting nature and making nature more accessible. An advice of the Flemish Youth Council also mentions that young people recognise the need for sustainable consumption ([advies duurzaam consumeren](#)).

The results of the survey of Youth Pact 2020 ([Eindrapport Jongerenpact 2020](#)) mention that young people are clearly very aware of the many challenges we face as a society, not least global warming. However, the many ominous reports about this do not mean that young people look at the future without confidence. Young people believe that everyone should take their

responsibility and they're looking at themselves in the first place.

The results of the survey mention that more than 93% of young people themselves want to do something about global warming: more economical use of energy, recycle more or use public transport more often. But also more buying stuff together and sharing it with other people in the neighborhood. 60% of the young people in the dreamteam-survey finds that a system of borrowing or sharing goods can ensure that we can maintain our current standard of living. A quarter of young people do not believe in this. Rather than consuming less, young people mainly want consumption to be different in the future. For example, more than half of the young people (51.9% - dream team) say that by 2020 they will only be able to use fair trade products. and buy organic. 53.7% even hope that by then there will only be sustainable products to be found. Young people are certainly also looking to the government to raise awareness among citizens and to encourage business to have greater respect for the environment. For example, 70% of the young people in the teens-survey believe that by 2020 our energy should only come from environmentally friendly suppliers. Young people mainly mention green energy and energy efficiency, they also ask for more green areas, attention for bikers and public transport. Young people want to move around independently: public transport should be affordable, child-friendly, eco-friendly and accessible.

Children's rights

[Globelink](#) runs the project KRAS in the last two years of secondary school. In this project students debate a specific sustainable development topic. In 2013, the topic was Children's Rights. At the end of the school year, the Flemish Parliament invites the students from different schools to a big closing colloquium, where students can present their recommendations.

The recommendations of the KRAS-project on Children's Rights mention that children and young people need to be protected, especially those in vulnerable situations, such as refugee children, children in difficulties... The young people of the KRAS-project also reject child labour.

In addition, young people of the KRAS-project attach great importance to education. They believe in awareness-raising campaigns and schools play an important role in this process. In their opinion schools should raise awareness on the importance of healthy nutrition, the healthcare system and ecological awareness.

Despite the many initiatives, much remains to be done about the right to participate. The young people of the KRAS-project believe that young people should be involved in social debates and their advice should be binding.

Entrepreneurship, employment, education or volunteering opportunities with regions outside Europe

The results of the survey of Youth Pact 2020 mention that one third of young people wants to work or study abroad, particularly if it adds value to their job or their training, if it is for a good cause or if they can travel together with someone familiar.

Young people who are not going abroad are afraid to miss their family and friends. Learning

another language is no threshold.