

Motion

Time to tackle eco-anxiety

signed by: Youth and Environment Europe
(YEE)

co-signed by: Erasmus Student Network
(ESN), International Movement of Catholic
Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC
Europe)

The scientific consensus and international commitments under the Paris Agreement underscore the urgent need to limit global warming to well below 2°C, ideally to 1.5°C and make sure we never reach a 2°C temperature rise, and yet, in 2024 global average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for 11 months of the year, with all its devastating consequences. We have seen floods in Valencia, storms in Germany, droughts in Greece and wildfires in Southern Europe, but most of all, extreme temperatures and weather events across the world¹. This makes climate change not great again, but the biggest threat to human existence².

Young people sometimes feel unsure about what they can do to help solve the climate crisis. There is also often a gap in understanding how individual and local efforts contribute to broader climate solutions, leading to a disconnect from the idea that personal actions can have a meaningful impact.

Eco-emotions is the umbrella concept for a wide array of emotions linked to environment, climate and nature³. As the impacts of climate change become more evident, many people experience a range of emotions, from anxiety and grief, to empowerment and hope. While we encourage empowerment and hopeful emotions leading to leadership, we believe that the state of our climate has severe negative external effects, especially on younger generations. This can be illustrated with four examples:

1. The institute for health metrics and evaluation (IHME) report shows that mental health is the biggest disability-adjusted life years problem amongst youth with a scope between 17,7% to 35,7%⁴ depending on the European country.
2. Within eco-emotions, a lot of (young) people state the state of the climate as a motivation for not planning to have children⁵.
3. Climate change is already disrupting European agriculture, with southern regions facing

declining yields due to increased water scarcity, heat stress, and extreme weather events. These impacts disproportionately affect young farmers, who often lack the financial resilience and policy support needed to adapt⁶.

4. 84% of children and youth are moderately worried about the climate crisis, while 59% are very and extremely worried, which showcases the stream of feelings young people have about the actual climate crisis⁷.
5. Youth are increasingly aware of the negative effects of climate change on the planet and human health, but this knowledge can often come with significant affective responses, such as psychological distress, anger, or despair. Experiencing major “negative” emotions, like worry, guilt, and hopelessness in anticipation of climate change has been identified with the term eco-anxiety⁸.

These consequences of eco-emotions are fuelled by other factors that enhance these negative emotions. The three main factors are: the role of social media, social inequality and political inaction.

First, social media plays a double role in shaping eco-emotions. While it can provide a platform for awareness and activism, it can also amplify fear, anxiety, and helplessness through a constant stream of distressing news. Algorithms, designed to maximise profits, prioritise engagement over truth. It often promotes misleading content and climate denialism, leading to confusion and mistrust. It also leads to information fatigue, in which users feel overwhelmed and sign-off altogether, or become desensitised to real issues. Instead of empowering action, this emotional overload often contributes to a sense of paralysis and apathy. While social media is in general linked to increased anxiety, it also shows the need for actual third places in which people can connect.

1 [Data topics, world data](#)

2 [Court of Appeal of The Hague](#)

3 <https://yeenet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Eco-emotions-handbook.pdf>

4 [IHME GBD comparing application](#)

5 <https://link-springer-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/content/pdf/10.1007/s11111-021-00379-5.pdf>

6 [Briefing of EP](#)

7 [Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey](#)

8 [A scoping review of the mental health impacts of the awareness of climate change](#)

Second, already vulnerable groups of young people are particularly affected by eco-anxiety. Youth that have socio-economical problems, such as food provision, housing, and healthcare, are especially affected by eco-anxiety and other negative eco-emotions⁹.

Third, growing political inaction intersects with eco-emotions. Many young people feel betrayed by institutions meant to protect their future. Trust in leadership is eroding, as shown in national surveys highlighting a steep decline in faith in governmental climate action. The suppression of climate activists and civil liberties in European countries and in others such as the US and UK further intensifies feelings of powerlessness.

To cope with the negative eco-emotions, in the same way as any other burdensome or stressful issue, we need to take action in accordance with our values, face and process all kinds of emotions, and achieve balance through rest and recovery.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls on:

The European Union and its Member States to:

- Recognise eco-anxiety and negative eco-emotions as serious mental health and social issues and include them in climate and mental health policy in an explicit manner. For example by including eco-anxiety in mental health awareness campaigns.
- Offer specific funding to research, learn from, and act upon eco-anxiety and its impacts, especially prioritizing youth and other vulnerable populations.
- Demand through the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Code of Conduct on Misinformation that social media companies use fact-checking labels.
- Protect the right to protest and guarantee the rights and safety of climate activists by monitoring and reporting on violations thereof.

National governments and educational institutions to:

- Incorporate eco-emotions and emotional resilience on the education curriculum and to improve the curriculum with a solution-based approach of improving the environment.
- Provide easy and free access to mental health services and peer-support groups for children and youth, especially those whose professional lives are directly threatened by climate change.
- Support youth organisations in addressing the eco-emotion topic through the use of non formal education.
- Make information about climate more accessible.

The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations to:

- Ensure that all internal policies, events, and organisational practices actively reflect sensitivity towards eco-emotional wellbeing, creating leading examples for other youth organisations and institutions.

Because eco-anxiety's root causes derive from the state of our current triple planetary crisis, we also call for:

The European Commission and Member States of the EU to:

- Increase climate ambitions to realise that global warming stays well below 2°C, in accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement, including the 2030 and 2050 milestones of sustainable development goals with a more significant emphasis on European climate policy according to the sustainable development goals.
- With an emphasis on existing plans and goals, strengthen the EU climate resilience strategy and pursuit of climate justice, whilst not abandoning improvements already in motion like the just transition framework.
- Implement science based environmental education as part of the regular curriculum.

9 [A Review of the Relationship between Socioeconomic Status Change and Health written by Enrico Bosters.](#)



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.

