



“YOUTH DEVELOPED GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION”

“Relieving children and young people from anxiety and fear by informing them about the real state of the environment and at the same time providing positive examples and opportunities to solve problems.”

THE CONTENT

Introduction	2
Guidelines	3
Decision makers	3
Educational system	4
Civil society organizations	5
Media	7
Parents and guardians	8
Peers	9
Society as a whole	9
Conclusion	10

INTRODUCTION

The document "Youth developed guidelines for youth participation in environmental protection"ⁱ (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines) was created at a time when sustainable development and environmental protection became topics that concern the future of our planet, and the future of each of us at both, the global and national levels. The Guidelines are one of the results of the "DIALOGUE from ECO anxiety to ECO action" project ¹and the product of the involvement of 30 children and young people (ages 14 to 23) involved in the project.

The environment is a vital resource that connects us all. It is our common good and it is our duty to protect it for future generations. In this sense, that is impossible without timely, active and comprehensive involvement of children and young people in this process.

The guidelines are result of the local youth dialogues that were carried out in 12 municipalities (Požarevac, Novi Beograd, Palilula, Zvezdara, Inđija, Kruševac, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Rakovica, Niš, Bajina Bašta and Zemun), in which 250 children and young people participated during the year 2022, as well as the *Attitudes of children and young people on environmental protection – “My right to the future”* research² that was conducted by the Friends of Children of Serbia, in which 800 children and young people participated, and which deals with the eco-anxiety³ of children and young people for the first time in Serbia. The draft Guidelines were presented to a wider audience that could and should be directly involved in their implementation: representatives of the Government of the RS, members of departmental committees of the National Assembly of the RS, representatives of civil society organizations for environmental protection and work with young people, youth workers, workers in education, representatives of local governments, children and young people. All the aforementioned stakeholders had the opportunity to become familiar with the draft of the Guidelines, as well as to participate in the discussion and contribute their suggestions, through a simulated public discussion process that included several possibilities:

1. First round - online "Public discussion", realized on the Zoom platform, on June 20, 2023;
2. Second round - "Public discussion" on the draft document Guidelines for young people on their involvement in environmental protection, which was held on June 23, 2023. in the National Assembly of the RS;
3. Submission of comments and suggestions on the draft document via the official form available on the PDS website in the period from June 19 to July 15, 2023.

Through the process of presenting the Guidelines, children and young people became familiar with the mechanism of public discussion as a key form of consultation and citizen participation in the

¹*Project is supported by Tempus Foundation, through Erasmus+ program framework*

²*The results of the survey Attitudes of children and young people about environmental protection- “My right to the future” are available on the website prijateljidece.org*

³*Eco-anxiety is significant anxiety caused by an environmental crisis. Pihkala, P. Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. Sustainability 2020, 12, 7836.*

process of adopting legal solutions and participated in the finalization of the Guidelines. Encouraging and educating young people about the importance of their voice in deciding on issues concerning their future is the foundation for the development of democratic values and active citizens in all areas of social life. Friends of the Children of Serbia are here to remind again and again and to work to ensure that the participation of children and young people must not and cannot be neglected.

GUIDELINES

The guidelines are structured according to the criteria they refer to, i.e. to whom the young people directed them in their desire to be heard and respected: decision-makers, the educational system, civil society organizations, the media, young people and citizens as a whole.

1) TO THE DECISION MAKERS

- **Consultations with young people:** Organize regular open consultations and dialogue with young people on the topic of environmental protection. Provide space for the expression of opinions, ideas and concerns of young people and listen carefully to their proposals;
- **Inclusion of youth in working groups:** Form working groups or advisory bodies that will include young people and enable them to actively participate in the decision-making process. These groups can provide an opportunity for young people to present their ideas and recommendations, as well as to monitor the implementation of environmental protection measures;
- **Environmental Education:** Enhance environmental education programs in the education system. Support programs that promote awareness of the importance of nature conservation, recycling, energy efficiency and other environmental topics. By doing so, you provide young people with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for active participation in environmental protection. In the development of the mentioned programs, it is necessary to consult young people;
- **Financial support:** Consider opportunities to provide greater financial support to youth and youth organizations involved in environmental protection. This may include grants, scholarships or funds intended to finance youth projects and initiatives for environmental protection;
- **Promotion of young leaders:** Encourage young leaders in the field of environmental protection. Recognize and support young people who show passion and engagement in environmental conservation and give them the opportunity to take leading roles in decision-making and project implementation;
- **Technological support:** Use technological tools and platforms to facilitate youth involvement in decision-making processes. Enable online consultations, discussions and surveys so that young people can express themselves and give their input in a simple and accessible way;

- **Visibility and recognition:** Promote and affirm the efforts and achievements of young people in environmental protection. Provide platforms for sharing stories, experiences and projects of young people to inspire and motivate others to get involved in environmental conservation;
- **Responsibility:** With a proactive and responsible approach to environmental protection, you build trust in your relationship with young people and encourage them to cooperate.

These guidelines can help decision makers to strengthen the role of young people in environmental protection and encourage their active participation in shaping a sustainable future. It is important to continuously support and work together with young people in order to achieve positive developments towards the preservation of the environment.

2) TOWARDS THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- **Education program:** Ensure that environmental protection is integrated into education programs at all levels. Ensure that sustainable development, recycling, energy efficiency, biodiversity protection and similar topics are regularly covered in lessons;
- **Equipment and infrastructure:** Provide adequate equipment and infrastructure to preserve the environment in the school. This may include placing recycling containers, composting bins, arranging eco-gardens or creating spaces for nature conservation;
- **Eco-clubs and initiatives:** Encourage the formation of groups that deal with environmental protection. Provide support and resources for organizing initiatives and projects related to environmental protection, such as cleaning the environment, planting trees, educational campaigns, etc.;
- **Involvement in decision-making:** Enable young people to actively participate in decision-making processes related to environmental protection at school. Organize regular meetings, polls or workshops where young people can express their ideas, concerns and suggestions,
- **Educational Resources:** Provide access to a variety of environmental education resources, such as books, magazines, videos, and interactive content. Encourage the use of these resources to inform and motivate young people to engage in environmental protection;
- **Partnerships and cooperation:** Establish cooperation with local, national and international civil society organizations and environmental experts. These partnerships can provide additional resources, mentoring and support in the implementation of projects and activities; Research which local organizations can be your partners and resources in activities related to environmental protection, plan and organize joint actions;
- **Promotion and recognition:** Promote the activities and achievements of young people in environmental protection through school media, websites, events and public presentations.

Organize lectures, debates, workshops and events in schools on the topic of environmental protection. These activities should be interactive and involve students to allow them to actively participate and express their opinions. Encourage their efforts and motivate them;

- **Ongoing support:** Provide ongoing support and engagement in environmental protection. Communicate regularly with young people, listen to their ideas and feedback, and adapt activities to their needs and interests.
- **Providing support for student mental health:** Improve the knowledge and skills of professional teams in relation to eco-anxiety in children and young people, provide support for students to strengthen their mental health capacities.
- **Empower parents:** Help parents of students become interested and involved in environmental protection, organize joint activities with parents and children, in this way students will receive a positive message and support in their further environmental protection activities. Share the guidelines for parents with them through all relevant channels (Councils, sessions, parent meetings, open doors...).

These guidelines can help schools support and engage young people in environmental protection in a way that is most relevant and beneficial to them. It is important that schools and all educational institutions recognize the importance of young people as key actors in the preservation of the environment and provide them with support to take an active role in that process.

3) TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- **Creating an inclusive space:** Create an inclusive and safe environment for young people in your organization. Ensure that every young member feels welcome, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or any other characteristic. Encourage different perspectives and ideas from young people;
- **Education and Training:** Provide educational resources and training to youth on environmental issues. Organize workshops, seminars or courses on sustainable development, climate change, waste management, energy efficiency and other relevant topics. Encourage the personal development of young people through the acquisition of knowledge and skills;
- **Active involvement of young people:** Involve young people in decision-making processes and planning activities of the organization. Give them the opportunity to express their ideas, suggestions and initiatives; Encourage their active participation through the formation of working groups, mentoring and delegation of responsibilities;
- **Organize youth-oriented events and projects:** Create specific youth-oriented events, projects and campaigns to engage and motivate them to involve in environmental conservation. This may

include workshops, competitions, volunteer actions or educational programs tailored to their interests and needs;

- **Empowerment for self-initiative:** Encourage young people to take initiative and start projects or campaigns related to environmental protection. Provide them with mentoring support, technical resources and fundraising assistance. Support their creativity and innovation;
- **Networking and Partnerships:** Encourage youth to network with other environmental organizations, institutions and individuals. Organize joint events, projects and/or campaigns in order for young people to connect, exchange ideas and experiences, and strengthen their influence. Establish cooperation with educational institutions such as preschools, schools, faculties or universities. Organize lectures, workshops or practical training on environmental protection to engage young people;
- **Communication and public advocacy:** Support youth to develop communication skills and public advocacy on environmental issues. Give them the opportunity to express themselves publicly through the media, social networks, public forums or presentations. Help them articulate their views and encourage them to be active advocates for change. Open clear and accessible channels of communication to young people, open e-mail addresses, social media and platforms for feedback and questions. Be open to conversation, proposals and suggestions of young people;
- **Provide mentoring and training:** Organizations should provide mentoring and training opportunities to youth. Encourage older members or volunteers to work with young people, transfer their knowledge and experience and provide support in their professional and personal development;
- **Monitoring and support of local independent actions:** More experienced civil society organizations should provide support to initiators of local activities through information, resources and advice. Also, through their formal communication channels, these organizations can add seriousness to the local initiatives. Through collaboration, more experienced organizations can communicate the messages and actions of local initiatives to a wider audience.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate your organization's performance in supporting youth in environmental protection. Listen to their feedback and suggestions to improve your activities. Collect data on the results achieved and share them with young people and the wider public;

These guidelines can help civil society organizations and movements to support and engage young people in the way that is most useful and relevant to them. It is important to give young people the opportunity to actively participate in environmental protection and empower them to be leaders of change in their communities.

4) TO THE MEDIA

- **Promotion of youth initiatives:** Media houses and representatives can devote space and attention to young people who have started initiatives for environmental protection. In this way, the media can present their projects, actions and achievements, which will inspire other young people to get involved and take an active role in environmental protection;
- **Dialogue and interaction with young people:** Media houses and representatives can organize or broadcast panel discussions, shows or interactive platforms where young people will have the opportunity to express their views, ideas and recommendations regarding environmental protection. Open conversations with experts, activists and representatives of environmental protection organizations allow young people to be heard and their voices promoted;
- **Education and information:** Media houses and representatives can provide relevant and verified information, news and resources about environmental protection, especially aimed at a young audience. Through articles, reports, video materials and interactive content, the media can educate young people about environmental issues, sustainability and concrete steps they can take to contribute to environmental protection;
- **Campaigns and challenges:** Media houses and representatives can launch campaigns and challenges that will encourage young people to get actively involved in environmental protection. These challenges may include cleaning up the environment, reducing the use of plastic, spreading awareness about recycling, and more. The media can monitor and promote the participation of young people in these actions and support their efforts;
- **Partnerships with schools and CSOs:** Media houses and representatives can establish cooperation with schools, youth organizations and environmental associations to jointly organize events, competitions, workshops and seminars. These partnerships allow the media to directly engage young people in educational and practical environmental protection activities;
- **Promoting the success of young people:** Media houses and representatives can regularly report on the successes of young people, teams or groups that have achieved significant results in environmental protection. In this way, the media will motivate other young people to get involved and provide them with an example of how their efforts can be recognized and valued. Identify and highlight young leaders and innovators who excel in the field of environmental protection;
- **Support digital engagement:** Young people are very connected to digital media. Create platforms and channels on social networks or websites dedicated to environmental protection, where young people can share their ideas, experiences and actions. Encourage dialogue and interaction among young people to create a community that supports environmental protection;
- **Organize competitions and awards:** Organize competitions, awards or scholarships for young people who excel in the field of environmental protection. This will motivate young people to stay active in this field, give them recognition for their efforts and encourage others to get involved;

These guidelines can help Media houses and representatives to support and promote the involvement of young people in environmental protection in a way that is inspiring, engaging and adapted to their needs and interests. It is important to encourage young people to recognize their power and role in preserving the planet and to support them in making positive changes.

5) TO THE PARENTS:

- **Learning by example:** Parents should be role models of sustainable behavior. Regularly practicing recycling, reducing water and energy consumption and caring for nature will inspire children to follow the same path;
- **Exploration and conversation:** Encourage children to explore the natural world around them. Discuss plants, animals, cycles of nature and environmental challenges. Open communication encourages their understanding and interest.
- **Join environmental organizations:** Find out about local environmental organizations and initiatives. Involve children in the activities of these organizations so that they feel part of a larger community working to preserve nature;
- **Activities to do together:** Plan family activities that encourage environmental awareness. Guided nature walks, park cleanups or tree planting can be fun and educational activities for the whole family;
- **Encouraging creativity:** Encourage children to express their ideas and concern for the environment through play, drawing, writing or making recycled objects. This helps them express themselves and develop a sense of responsibility;
- **Providing information:** Share with children information about environmental problems and their solutions. Use simple language adapted to their age to help them understand the importance of nature conservation.
- **Rewarding and encouraging:** Set goals and reward children for their environmental efforts. It could be reducing the use of plastic products or saving water.
- **Social activism:** Encourage older children to join eco-clubs at school or organize eco-actions with their peers. This will allow them to feel part of a larger movement for change.

These guidelines can help parents support their own children in their efforts to save the planet, while developing shared opportunities to protect the environment and bring about more lasting change in society as a whole.

6) TOWARD PEERS

- **Education and awareness:** Be educated about environmental issues and be aware of the impact you have on the environment. Share your knowledge with your peers and inform them about the importance of nature conservation and sustainable development;
- **Sharing experiences:** Share your environmental experiences and successes with your peers. Show them how small steps can have a big impact and inspire them to take action;
- **Creativity and Innovation:** Encourage peers to use their creativity and innovation to find new ways to contribute to environmental protection. Organize competitions, actions or projects that will encourage young people to develop ideas and solutions;
- **Teamwork:** Encourage teamwork among peers related to environmental protection. Organize group activities such as cleaning parks, planting trees, recycling, but also community initiatives and public advocacy;
- **Local Community Awareness:** Encourage peers to be aware and engaged in environmental protection in their local community. Organize volunteer actions, workshops or public forums to inform young people about local environmental challenges and opportunities for action;
- **Digital Activism:** Harness the power of social media and technology to raise awareness and mobilize peers about environmental protection. Share information, campaigns and actions through digital platforms and inspire others to join;
- **Leadership and Advocacy:** Encourage your peers to take the lead and become environmental advocates. Support them to get involved in school or local committees, organizations or projects dealing with environmental issues. Teach them public speaking and advocacy skills to effectively present their ideas and demands.

These guidelines can help young people support and engage their peers in environmental protection in a way that is inspiring, engaging and tailored to their needs and interests. It is important to encourage young people to recognize their power and role in preserving the planet and to support them in making positive changes.

7) TOWARDS SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

- **Support and encouragement:** Society should actively support and encourage young people to engage in environmental protection. This includes supporting their ideas, initiatives and projects, as well as recognizing their contribution to nature conservation;
- **Sharing positive examples:** Society should recognize and promote the positive values and examples of young people who have engaged in environmental protection. The aim is to inspire others to join and support these initiatives;

- **Active listening and respect of young people:** Society, especially adults, should actively listen and respect the opinions, ideas and concerns of young people regarding environmental protection. Adults should show openness to dialogue, be willing to learn from young people and consider their perspectives when making decisions related to the environment. This approach will help build trust between generations and encourage young people to become actively involved in environmental protection;
- **Encouraging youth independence:** Society should encourage youth to take an active role in environmental protection and support their independence. Adults should provide support and resources to young people to independently implement their ideas and projects. This may include providing mentorship, access to financial resources or space to implement their initiatives.

These guidelines further emphasize the importance of respecting the opinions of young people and encourage adults to actively engage in supporting and involving young people in environmental protection.

CONCLUSION

This document will serve all interested parties, as a kind of guide for understanding the attitudes, needs, but also the possibility of contribution of children and young people in the field of sustainable development and environmental protection.

A healthy environment is not only our responsibility but also a human right. We have a moral obligation to fight for the preservation of nature and to provide a better future for generations to come. Environmental protection is an issue of national importance, in which young people should and must play a key role.

“Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.”