

From Awareness  
to Action:  
**Engaging Youth in  
the Green Economy  
and Climate Action**



On 11 March 2024, Sara stands in front of a landfill in Kolonia District in the city of Gjakova, Kosovo\*. Seventeen-year-olds Rea Rudi and Sara Kumova and Poema Bobi, 18, live in Gjakova, close to Kolonia neighbourhood which is home to predominantly Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community residents. They are a part of Youth4Clean, a group of teenagers advocating to local authorities for better waste management including less frequent burning of the waste and how to keep children's health safe. Children and their families across the Europe and Central Asia region face unique climate threats. Across the Western Balkans, for example, 99 per cent of children are exposed to excessive levels of ambient air pollution. In response, UNICEF is currently implementing an important project funded by SIDA on air pollution. Through this programme, UNICEF and the Swedish Environment Protection Agency are aiming to improve air quality through increasing capacities of governments for air quality governance and data (SwEPA), strengthening the climate change education system, youth engagement and advocacy for child and youth sensitive Air Quality Policies, while increasing youth employability and eco-innovations.

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Design and Layout: Rec Design Editing: Formato Verde

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(\*Under UNSC Resolution 1244)

# Foreword

Youth are often at the forefront of climate activism for the simple reason of the time perspective: they are likely to be profoundly affected by the long-term consequences of climate change. Hence young people have been calling for urgent transformation of ecologically harmful practices and expressing concern that action is not moving fast enough. And young people have evidence to back their call: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2022) for long had the same message: the window of opportunity to secure a sustainable future is closing rapidly.

Youth should be an integral part of the European Union's ambitious priority to become the first climate neutral continent and lead on international efforts to address environmental challenges across the world. To support that aim, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) partnered to explore young people's knowledge, perceptions and ideas about the climate crisis, including if they feel they have meaningful opportunities for their voices to be heard in climate policies. This report aims to not only give voice to the young generation most affected by climate change, but also to help guide policymakers on how to prepare our education and employment systems, investing in young people's human capital for a green future.

Using U-Report, UNICEF's flagship social messaging and online engagement platform, the geographic scope of this report covers 21 countries in the European and Central Asian regions, as well as the numerous host countries where young Ukrainians were residing at the time of the polls. We were lucky to have representatives of YOUNGO, or the Youth Climate Movement, the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), lend their expertise to us and participate in the design and selection of U-Report poll questions. A special thanks goes to *DARYA – Dialogue and action for resourceful youth in Central Asia*, the European Union's first-ever regional project supporting young people in Central Asia, implemented by ETF. The DARYA project was instrumental in supporting the participation of young people in the Central Asian sub-region, contributing to the high number of responses and in selecting several questions for the poll.

Adolescents and young people who answered this poll told us that social media is their main source of information about climate change and disaster risk. This result presents indeed a unique opportunity of scale to educate masses of young people on environmental issues. But it poses challenges for quality and accuracy, too, including that of disinformation. Respondents also expressed ambivalence on the role of technological fixes in addressing climate change, showing that while some youth can grasp the complexity of needing both technological but also societal and structural change, many would need more education on the subject.

However, a vast majority of young people do not feel like their current education prepares them for life in a green economy. This should worry all policymakers. In particular, many adolescents and young people believe that governments bear a significant share of

responsibility for taking action, alongside various other stakeholders such as international organisations and the private sector. Despite this, respondents reported low confidence that governments will keep their promises on climate change and said there are not enough opportunities for children and young people to express their views on environmental policies in their country.

This report presents several implications for policymakers, touching on both education and youth engagement. These include enhancing the outreach of communication on climate action to youth, establishing and/or promoting climate policy engagement platforms and a more intensive integration of climate change education into curricula. Moreover, it suggests ways forward to enhance green job readiness and skills development of young people to support their human capital development, including fostering holistic understandings of climate solutions.

This is the fourth report of ETF and UNICEF, where the organisations have joined forces to deliver the voices and opinions of young people to policymakers, so that their policies and programmes can be more responsive to the realities of young people. Joint action is needed now more than ever to address climate change, requiring new and transformational partnerships among all stakeholders across Europe, and around the world. For young people in Europe and Central Asia, our common goal remains to support their quest for a sustainable and green future for themselves and for all.

**Pilvi Torsti**

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# Acknowledgements

The regional report “From Awareness to Action: Engaging Youth in the Green Economy and Climate Action” is the result of a joint collaboration between the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (UNICEF ECARO) and the European Training Foundation (ETF).

The report was drafted by Cristina Bacalso from UNICEF ECARO, and Romain Boitard from the ETF, with contributions from Aida Ailarova, Pagmasuren Ganbold from UNICEF ECARO, and Cristina Mereuta from the ETF.

Thank you to ETF’s Christine Hemschemeier and Togzhan Amangeldinova from the DARYA - *Dialogue and action for resourceful youth in Central Asia* project, funded by the European Union and implemented by ETF. DARYA supported the participation of young people in the Central Asian sub-region, contributing to the high number of responses and contributing questions from the DARYA U-Report poll to the regional poll.

This report would not have been possible without the quantitative data collection and analysis work performed by Miriam Obibi at UNICEF ECARO, Juan Pablo Arguello Yopez from UNICEF HQ, and the U-Report team of the UNICEF Ukraine Country Office. We also appreciate the inputs provided by Maria Osbeck and Antonio Jovanovski (ECARO Climate team), Tigran Tovmasyan (ECARO Emergency/DRR team) and Maida Pasic (ECARO Education team).

Special thanks to the young people of YOUNGO, the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), for participating in designing and selecting U-Report poll questions.

Thank you also to Kansu Ekin Tanca from UNICEF ECARO and Elena-Venera Ionita from the ETF for the administrative support.

We express gratitude to our colleagues in the UNICEF Country Offices for engaging adolescents and youth from the ECA Region in this research project.

Our sincere thanks to the over 40,000 young people who participated in the U-Report polls, which comprise this report’s main insights. We hope these voices will shape action and policies for a greener and more sustainable future in Europe, Central Asia, and beyond.

# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC
<b>CoVEs</b>	Centres for Vocational Excellence
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DARYA</b>	Dialogue and action for resourceful youth in Central Asia
<b>ECA</b>	Europe and Central Asia
<b>ECARO</b>	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>YOUNGO</b>	Youth Climate Movement



## Executive summary

This report is based on an opinion poll conducted in 21 countries across Europe and Central Asia. It explores youth perceptions of climate action and their readiness for the green economy.

### Social media is the main source of information for young people in climate change

The findings indicate that social media is the primary source of information on climate change for young people in the region. U-Report cross-country results reveal that “Social media platforms” emerged as the most popular source of information, with 68.5 per cent of respondents, followed by “Schools and higher education institutions”, with 51.1 per cent. “Television” was the third most cited source, with 30.4 per cent of respondents reporting it as their main source of information, indicating a declining reliance on TV. This data highlights the critical role of social media and educational institutions in disseminating information about climate change, as well as the significant challenge of inaccurate information regarding the impact of climate change.

### Young people are unsure about ‘quick’ technological fixes for the climate crisis

Many respondents adopt a technocentric approach to addressing climate issues but are generally split about technological ‘quick’ fixes. We asked them if they agreed with the

statement: “Technological fixes alone (e.g. electric cars, solar panels, energy-saving buildings, hydropower) will solve the climate crisis”. Almost a third of respondents 30.0 per cent “Strongly agree” (6.3 %) or “Agree” (23.7 %) with this statement, 40.2 per cent “Disagree” (28.6 %) or “Strongly disagree” (11.6 %), and 29.8 per cent remain undecided or neutral on this issue. This shows that more is needed to spread information and knowledge about solutions for managing the effects of climate change and promote environmentally sustainable economies and societies.

### Young people do not feel their education prepares them for a green economy

Respondents expressed concern that their education systems do not provide the necessary skills for green jobs. Just under one-in-five respondents (19.2 %) felt that their education is or was equipping them with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for a future green economy, which is relatively low. Over one-third (38.7 %) said “Somewhat”, 31.6 per cent said “No”, with respondents feeling that their education has not provided them with the required tools and 10.5 per cent find it difficult to assess, suggesting uncertainty or a lack of awareness about green economy education.



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## Addressing climate change takes a multifaceted approach, but young people think government should be the most responsible for it

We asked young people who they think should be responsible for addressing climate change and preventing disasters. Nearly half (47.8 %) of respondents selected some level of government (“National governments” (29.4 %) and “Regional and local governments” (18.4 %)), and 22.0 per cent selected “International organisations (e.g. the United Nations)”, which in many cases are intergovernmental. Only 14.6 per cent selected “Business and industries”, despite the hefty impact that industrial processes have on climate change, while personal responsibility ranks slightly lower

at 13.7 per cent. Environmental NGOs are considered responsible by 15.5 per cent on average. Notably, when considering all of these actors collectively, the average support increases to 58.1 per cent, reflecting a broad consensus that addressing climate change requires a multifaceted approach.

## Young people feel little confidence that their government will follow through on its promises to tackle climate change

While respondents believe that governments are responsible for tackling climate change, many lack confidence that these governments will fulfil their climate commitments. Nearly two-thirds of respondents have little to no confidence that their government will follow through on its promises, with 28.0 per cent saying they were “Only a little confident” and

33.3 per cent saying they were “Not confident at all”. A mere 6.2 per cent of respondents said they were “Very confident”. One-in-five (20.3 %) said, “I don’t know what promises my government has made on climate change”.

## There are not enough opportunities for young people to express their views on environmental policies and climate action

The survey results reveal a general consensus that there are insufficient opportunities for children and young people to express their views on environmental policies and climate action. Nearly half (47.7 %) of respondents said that there were “Not enough” opportunities to express their views on climate action and policies. In comparison, nearly one-in-five (19.3 %) said that they were not aware of the opportunities available for young people to express their views.

Key policy implications include enhancing communication efforts to raise youth awareness of climate policies and opportunities, establishing platforms for youth engagement in policymaking and integrating climate literacy and sustainability studies into formal education. Vocational training should align with the demands of the green economy and could focus on developing various green skills in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and waste management. Special attention should be given to including women and girls, to adopt gender-sensitive approaches and create inclusive environments that support young women’s participation in green jobs.

Overall, this report underscores the importance of enhancing education and climate communication efforts to better equip young people for the green transition and the career opportunities it presents, while encouraging meaningful youth participation in shaping sustainable development policies. New approaches are needed to foster the human capital development of young people for a green future and green economy.

**Policy Implication 1. Enhance Communication and Visibility of Climate Action**

- ▶ Improve youth outreach on participation opportunities for climate issues
- ▶ Utilise media for climate education and tackle misinformation or disinformation regarding climate challenges
- ▶ Promote government climate commitments

**Policy Implication 2. Establish or Promote Climate Engagement Platforms**

- ▶ Establish or consolidate youth climate forums and councils
- ▶ Promote youth engagement in local climate initiatives, including in informal learning

**Policy Implication 3. Integrate Climate Action into Education**

- ▶ Embed climate literacy in curricula
- ▶ Integrate climate change education into existing subjects
- ▶ Encourage critical engagement with technology in climate solutions
- ▶ Promote digital literacy
- ▶ Encourage sustainability in educational institutions

**Policy Implication 4. Enhance Green Job Readiness and Skills Development**

- ▶ Align education with green economy demands
- ▶ Expand vocational training and partnerships with sustainable Industries
- ▶ Promote local green job opportunities

**Policy Implication 5. Foster a Holistic Understanding of Climate Solutions**

- ▶ Promote systems thinking in climate education
- ▶ Support research and development in green technologies
- ▶ Incorporate social and policy dimensions
- ▶ Foster balanced perspectives

# Introduction

*“Listen to children and young people, because we will live in the world which you are destroying today.”*

*17-year-old female from Bulgaria*

In the face of the increasing environmental crisis, human agency and resilience are crucial for addressing these challenges (Mirzaei Rafe et al., 2019). Building a sustainable society and addressing the climate crisis demands changes in behavior across all age groups, especially among the youth.

Education plays a key role in this transformation. Scientific knowledge and green competencies are essential to drive the innovations required for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Beyond equipping individuals with the scientific foundation for a green economy, education influences behaviour that affects how people make decisions, whether its by encouraging shifts in consumption habits, personal investments, or employment choices. Climate change education should not only provide young people with decision-making skills; it should also empower and support them to take action.

The impacts of climate change are of great concern to young people worldwide:

- ▶ Nearly 160 million children in Europe and Central Asia live in countries at medium to high risk of exposure to a wide range of hazards, shocks and stresses related to climate change and environmental degradation, according to UNICEF’s Children’s

Climate and Environment Risk Index (UNICEF ECA, 2024b).

- ▶ In 2021, around 6,400 children and teenagers in 23 countries across Europe and Central Asia died prematurely as a result of causes attributable to air pollution. The vast majority – almost 5,500 – died before their first birthday (UNICEF ECA, 2024a).
- ▶ The top three environmental health risk factors for children under the age of five in the region are air pollution, extreme heat or cold, and poor water quality.
- ▶ Air pollution inside homes has been linked to almost two-thirds of the neonatal deaths related to the lack of clean air (UNICEF ECA, 2024b).
- ▶ Around 1 in 2 children in the region face frequent heatwaves – double the global average of 1 in 4. 2023 was Europe’s second warmest year in recorded history: for some countries in southwestern Europe, it was the warmest (UNICEF ECA, 2024a).

The climate strikes in 2018 and 2019 confirmed that “young people are at the vanguard of action on climate change” (Sloam et al., 2022). Through various global youth movements, young people are raising their voices to demand access to decision-making spaces and mechanisms to enable them to contribute to the design, implementation and review of climate policies and programmes at all levels. Yet despite the efforts of young people, a lack

of political will and a lack of understanding still hinders governments from meaningfully engaging youth in developing, implementing and reporting on climate action plans. Hence, despite the good intentions, young people's engagement often ends up being tokenistic, marginal, unclear and without adequate resourcing, information, support and guidance. Meanwhile, many youth activists express discontent with the speed of action and have a growing mistrust of promises made by policymakers.

All stakeholders must recognise the ideas, solutions and expertise young people bring to the table, so that their engagement

can improve policymaking with their insights, strengthen education systems and better prepare young people for a green economy. Meaningful participation also fulfils adolescents' and young people's fundamental human right to be heard in decisions that affect them, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Tackling the climate crisis requires ambition and inclusivity, including young people. Without it, the world will face insurmountable barriers to overcoming the impacts and, as a result, will not be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Focus of this report

The European Training Foundation (ETF) and the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) conducted polls to better understand young people's knowledge about climate change; their perceptions on who is responsible for addressing it; and if they feel they have adequate opportunities for participation. Respondents were between the ages of 14 and 34 and the geographical focus of the report was on select countries in the Europe and Central Asia region (see

*Methodology*). YOUNGO<sup>1</sup>, or the Youth Climate Movement, the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), participated in the design of the poll questions. The main objective of the report is to generate new evidence in the area of green skills and youth engagement, in the region and worldwide, to inform policy and programme change.

## Context

Efforts such as harnessing renewable energy, advancing circular economies, enhancing habitat restoration and management for carbon capture and wildlife protection (Stafford et al., 2020) and rethinking the

relationship between nature and society (Fraser, Mabee and Slaymaker, 2003) are just some of the ways scientists, activists and communities are mitigating the negative impacts of human activities on the planet.

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1 <https://youngclimate.org/>

Some may argue that the climate crisis is too urgent to rely on future generations alone and there is truth to that. However, the slow progress in raising public awareness and changing adult behavior regarding climate change shows how difficult it is to unlearn ingrained beliefs and habits. It is far easier to teach the right approach from the start.

A strong education in environmental science, rooted in sound educational practices, will serve the aspirations of people, economies and nations and save lives. It is one of the best investments a society can make in its future.

Education stakeholders must embrace the role of informal learning to engage young people in climate policy effectively. While traditional education builds foundational knowledge in environmental science, informal learning— in civil society, youth centres, clubs and youth-led civil society

organisations (CSOs), community activism, peer engagement and social media — plays a critical role in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards climate action. Informal spaces allow young people to connect with global movements, exchange ideas and take tangible action, which formal education systems sometimes struggle to fully capture.

By integrating informal learning opportunities, such as local environmental projects or digital activism, education systems can empower students to translate their climate knowledge into civic engagement. This helps them understand climate issues and actively participate in shaping policies. Such approaches ensure that education does not stop at the classroom door but extends into young people's daily lives and social contexts, equipping them with the tools to become agents of change.

## Use of the results

The timing of the report was intended to coincide with the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly known as COP29, on 11-22 November 2024, organised in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The findings can supplement the voices of young people and their messages and demands to policymakers at COP29. One mechanism through which youth voices are expressed is through the YOUNGO's Global Youth Statement<sup>2</sup>. YOUNGO consists of youth-led organisations, groups, delegations and individuals working in climate change-

related fields and is the official children and youth constituency of the UNFCCC. These findings can help to provide additional context and support to the demands of young people at the COP29 event.

Moreover, the findings of this report can also, for example, inform discussions among policymakers on green skills and what is needed to support the development of a green economy, as part of regional- and national-level forums, including discussions on educational reforms to make learning systems more sustainable.

2 For an example, see YOUNGO's Global Youth Statement for COP28 in 2023: <https://www.coy18uae.org/global-youth-statement>

# Methodology

This report represents young people's voices, views, sentiments and experiences regarding climate change, the green economy and the opportunities for shaping climate policies. The information for this report was collected through U-Report polls, UNICEF's social messaging tool and online engagement platform and other secure online survey platforms. Young people participate voluntarily and anonymously and the data collection process centred entirely around adolescents and youths. A strict ethical and child safeguarding protocol governed this research.

UNICEF conducted the polls in June-August 2024 with youth aged 14-34 from 21 countries: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kosovo\*<sup>3</sup>, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Respondents also filled out the poll using U-Report Europe, a digital platform for information and engagement of young Ukrainians in their host communities in the EU Member States and several EU neighbouring countries.

In some cases, only selected questions were polled in a particular country, based on technical or programmatic priorities. Participating countries are noted for each question in the *Findings* section.

Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) participating in the DARYA project<sup>4</sup>, held their own poll relating to green skills in teaching and learning in May 2024.

Two of the questions from this poll were identical to the wider regional green skills poll and therefore the results were combined, yielding much higher response rates for these questions. These two questions are explored in "Section 1: Where do young people get their information about climate change and disaster risk?" and "Section 4: Who young people feel is responsible for addressing climate change".

Data was weighted based on the proportion of the country in the original dataset. To get a weighting value, the number of respondents for each country was divided by the total number of respondents who participated in the survey. Each country was then assigned a weighted variable, which was then used for recalculations on the dataset. No external variables (e.g., relative youth population size of country) were applied.

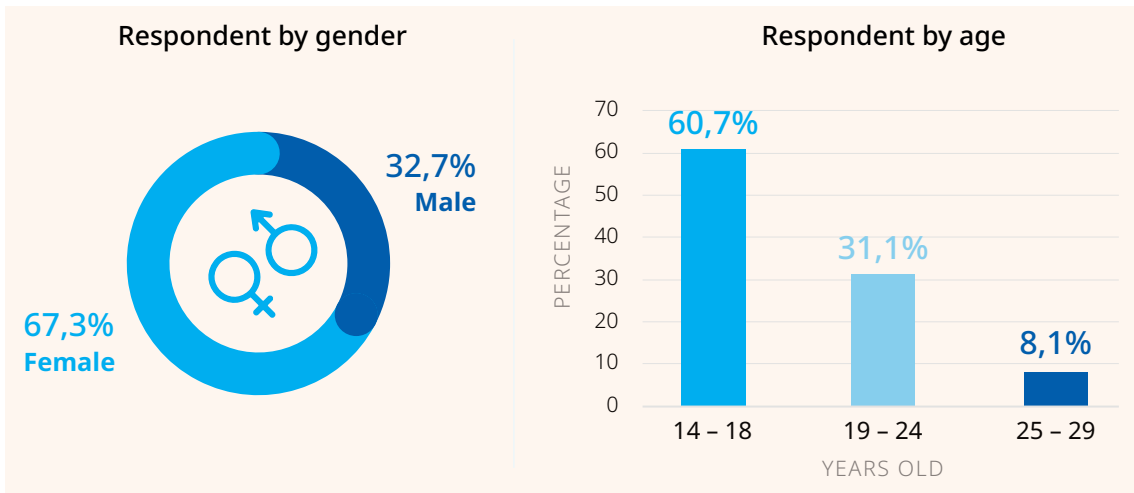
This research is exploratory. The methodology used in this consultation did not ensure representativeness and does not allow generalisations that would apply to the entire adolescent and youth population. This consultation does not use statistical inference to determine properties of an adolescent population, nor to test any hypotheses. Rather, the aim of the consultation was to gain further insights into issues facing adolescents in the region in relation to green skills and to open new avenues for dialogue and policy discussion, as well as for research in the future.

**U-Report polls (regional green skills and DARYA combined): May-August 2024 (total respondents: 40793)**

3 \*Under UNSC Resolution 1244

4 DARYA – Dialogue and action for resourceful youth in Central Asia, is the European Union's first-ever regional project supporting young people in Central Asia and implemented by ETF.

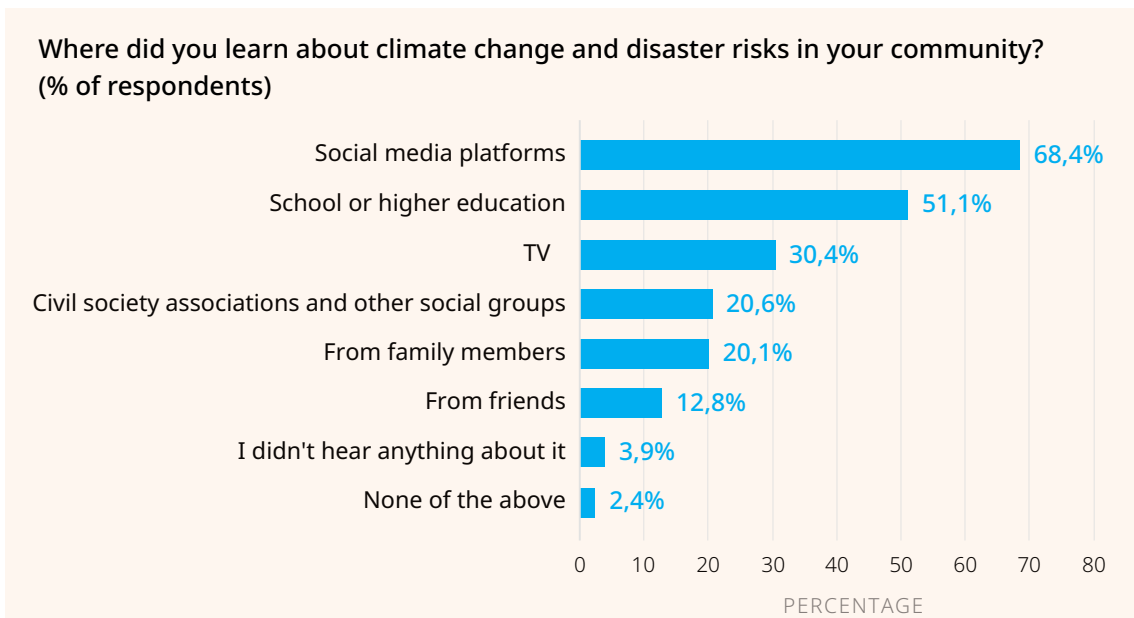




## Findings

### Section 1: Where do young people get their information about climate change and disaster risk?

**FIGURE 1** SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 40,793. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.*

To understand young people's awareness of climate change and where they are getting their information, we asked respondents which sources they rely on to learn about green issues.

*“We want more publicity about the climate crisis among young people and school children. For example, the development of bright brochures, the introduction of the topic of the climate crisis into the school curriculum.”*

*29-year-old female from Ukraine*

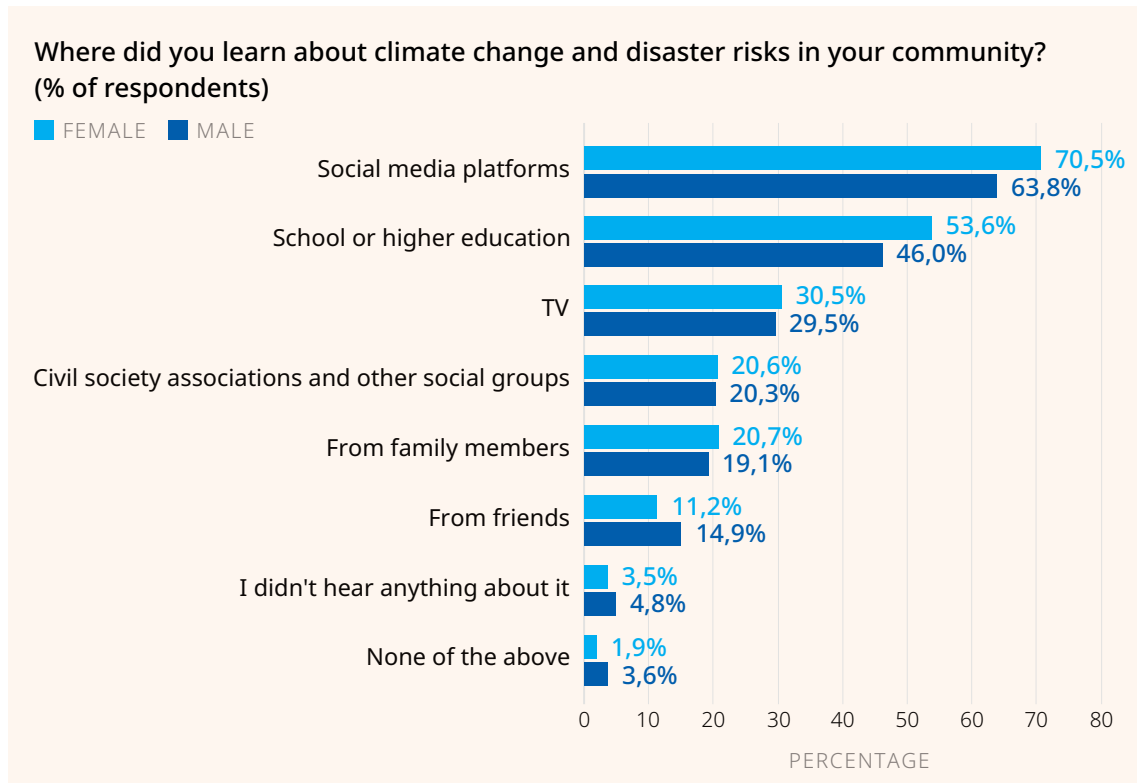
U-Report cross-country results reveal that “Social media platforms” emerged as the most popular source of information, with 68.5 per cent of respondents indicating they learned about climate change and disaster risks through these platforms. Notably, female respondents (70.5 %) were more likely than males (63.8 %) to rely on social media for this information. 19-24- and 25 to 29-year-olds receive their information about climate change from social media (72.2 % and 73.0 % respectively) to a greater extent than 14 to 18-year-olds (65.9 %). The highest percentages of those who rely on social media for climate information were observed in Ukraine (100.0 %) and Bulgaria (85.2 %), while the lowest were recorded in Albania (40.7 %) and Kosovo\* (48.3 %). “Schools and higher education institutions”

were also a key source of information, with 51.1 per cent of respondents reporting they learned about climate change through formal education. Interestingly, there was a gender disparity, with 53.6 per cent of females compared to 46.0 per cent of males. Learning about green topics in formal education is much more common with younger respondents, as over half of 14 to 18-year-olds (52.8 %) and 19 to 24-year-olds (51.2 %) selected this option. Croatia (89.1 %) and Kosovo\* (79.4 %) reported the highest levels of educational influence, whereas Uzbekistan (19.7 %) and Serbia (16.9 %) showed the least engagement in this area.

“Television” was the third most cited source, with 30.4 per cent of respondents reporting it as their main source of information, indicating a declining reliance on TV. However, TV still has a high influence in some countries, such as in Croatia, where 70.9 per cent of respondents selected this option, whereas in Belarus, no respondent selected this option.

“Civil society associations and other social groups” were selected by 20.6 per cent of respondents, while “Family members” and “Friends” accounted for 20.1 per cent and 12.8 per cent, respectively. This indicates that while social groups and personal networks play a role in providing education about green issues, they are less prominent than digital and institutional channels.

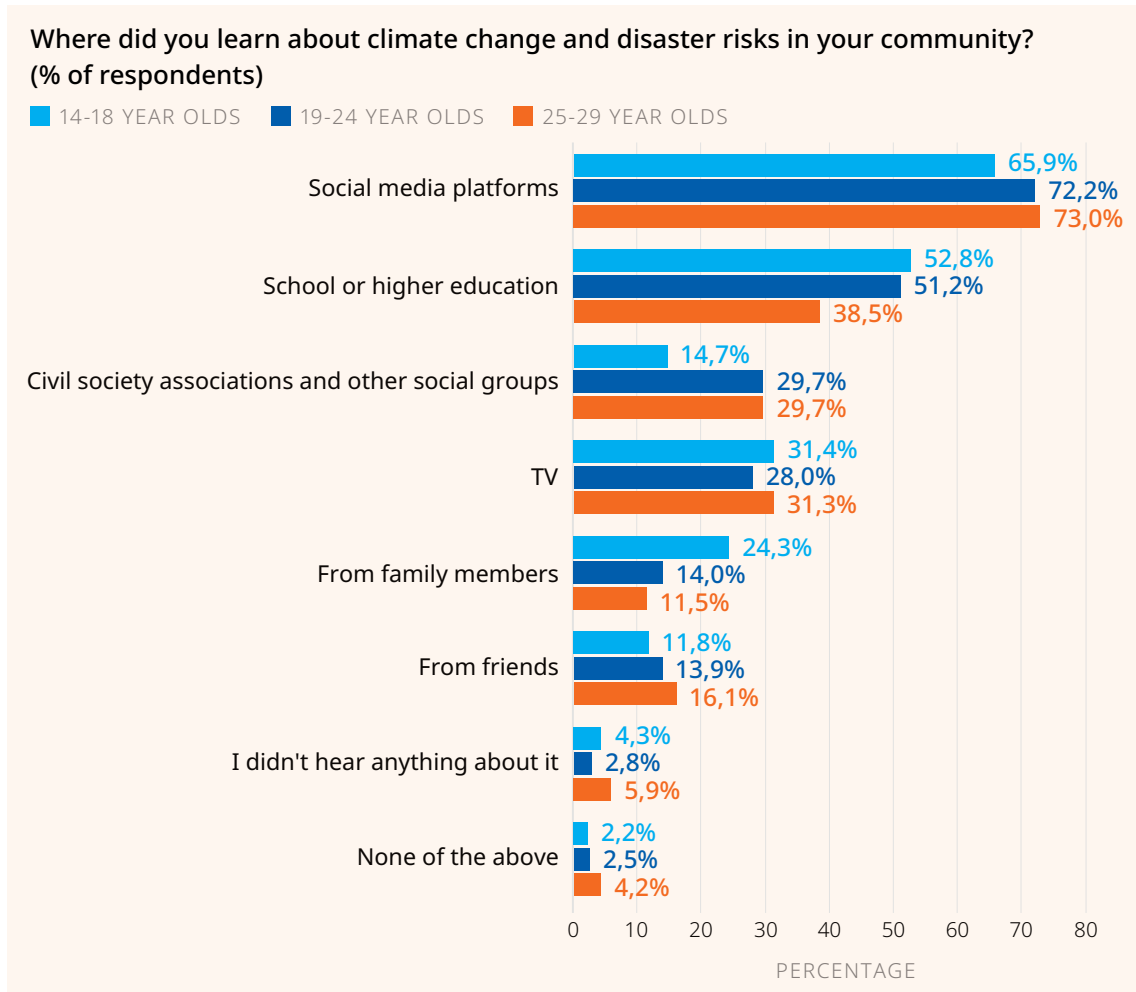
**FIGURE 2** SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: BY GENDER



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: The number of respondents is 40,793. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.*



**FIGURE 3** SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: BY AGE GROUP



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 40,793. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.*

This data highlights the critical role of social media and educational institutions in disseminating information about climate change. A large body of research highlights the multifaceted nature of climate change education and awareness among young people, emphasising the role of both formal and informal learning environments. Social media, the most popular source of information among respondents, has emerged as a critical tool for climate change awareness among youth, serving as a prominent space for engaging with climate-

related content, activism and discussions (Howard-Jones et al., 2021; Narksompong & Limjirakan, 2015; Hickman et al., 2021). The interactive nature of social media allows for sharing personal stories and experiences, fostering a sense of community and urgency around climate issues (Corner et al., 2015). Additionally, social media helps fill educational gaps and raise awareness about climate justice (Trott, 2024), empowering youth to voice their concerns, mobilise support and reinforce their belief that they can influence change alongside traditional

power holders (Duran-Becerra et al., 2020). This reflects a shift in how young people view their role in climate action, as they increasingly leverage technology to advocate for their beliefs. However, a reliance on social media as a primary source of information also poses challenges, as its quality and accuracy can vary (Choon et al., 2019).

Research highlights that formal education systems are crucial in equipping youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to address climate change, empowering them to engage actively with climate issues and enhancing their adaptive capacities (Kundariati et al., 2024; Trott, 2024). Educational settings, which was the second most popular source of information, are increasingly incorporating climate change into their curricula in schools in Europe and beyond, emphasising the importance of understanding the science behind climate change, including its impacts and mitigation strategies (Rushton et al., 2022; Kolenatý et al., 2022). However, there is growing recognition that education should extend beyond traditional classroom learning. Programmes integrating experiential learning, such as field trips to affected areas or community-based projects, have proven effective in fostering students' emotional connection to climate issues and motivating them to take action (Young et al., 2020; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2019). Furthermore, teachers and students advocate for a more action-oriented curriculum that deepens climate knowledge and fosters a sense of responsibility and agency among youth, encouraging active participation in climate discussions and solutions (Dunlop et al., 2022; Kessler, 2021).

Traditional media, such as television, which came in third place among respondents, continues to play a role in influencing young people's understanding and concern

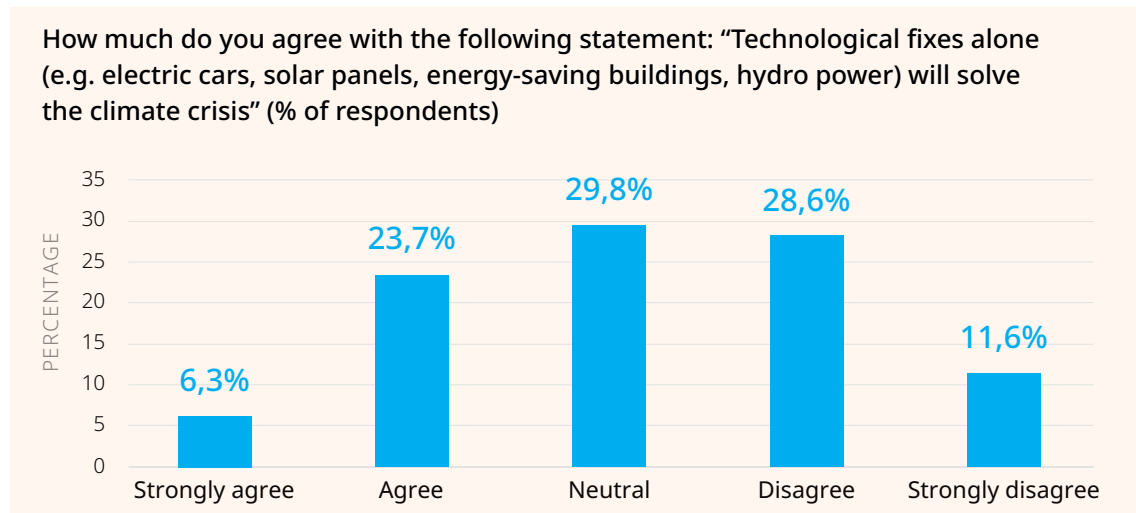
regarding environmental issues. However, media representations of climate change impact youth mental health, suggesting that the portrayal of climate-related risks can affect young people's emotional responses and engagement levels (Gislason et al., 2021). This suggests that media exposure plays a crucial role in shaping youth awareness and action regarding climate change and highlights the importance of responsible media coverage in fostering informed youth perspectives on climate change.

While coming in fourth place, community initiatives are crucial in educating young people about climate change through local workshops, environmental clubs and hands-on, community-led projects that foster agency and deepen understanding (Demartoto, 2022; Trott, 2019). These initiatives often promote intergenerational learning, extending the impact of climate education beyond formal settings as young people share knowledge with their families (Spellman et al., 2021).

In summary, youth in Europe and Central Asia learn about climate change through a combination of formal education, media exposure and community initiatives. Each channel uniquely shapes their understanding and engagement with climate issues, with variations in educational practices, community involvement and media consumption patterns influencing climate literacy and activism. Climate change education should be integrated across various platforms is essential for fostering a well-informed and proactive youth demographic, while also considering regional differences, to tailor educational and communication strategies effectively (Trott, 2024; Demartoto, 2022).

## Section 2: Youth perceptions on the technological fixes and the climate crisis

**FIGURE 4** OPINION ON TECHNOLOGICAL FIXES AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 29 101. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

Solutions to address climate change are varied and complex, however technological solutions are often touted as one of the quick fixes to adequately address it (Choon et al., 2019). While technology plays a vital role, it is only part of a larger array of solutions, including systemic, economic, nature-based and social changes, that are needed to tackle the climate crisis effectively.

To understand young people’s ability to grasp the complexity of solutions to address climate change beyond technology, we asked them if they agreed with the following statement: “Technological fixes alone (e.g. electric cars, solar panels, energy-saving buildings, hydro power) will solve the climate crisis”.

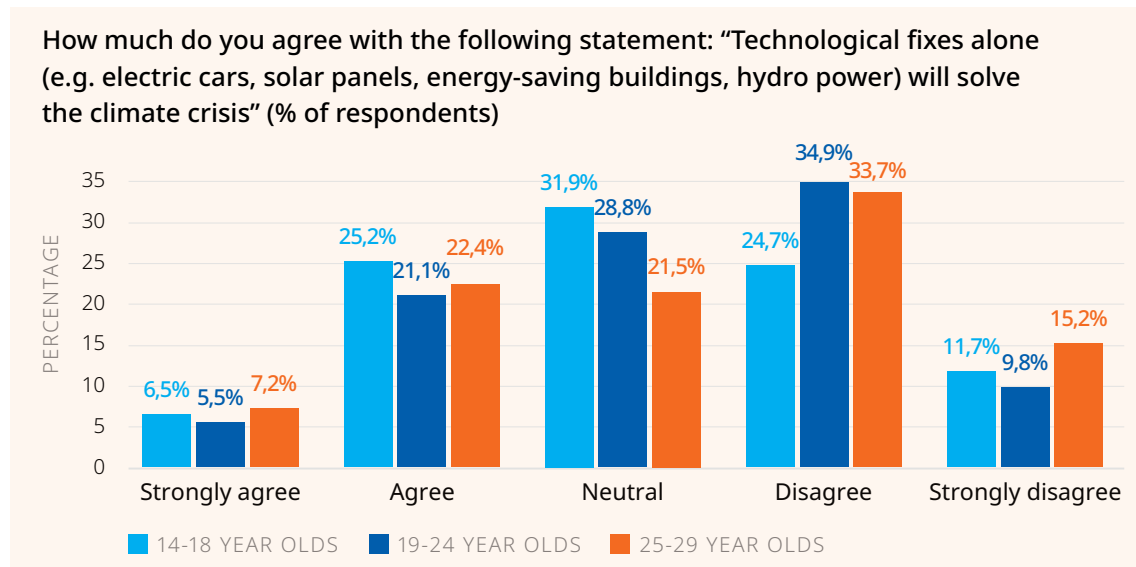
Young people are split about their feelings on this question. Almost a third of respondents 30.0 per cent “Strongly agree” (6.3 %)

or “Agree” (23.7 %) with this statement, meaning that they believe, to some extent, the narrative that green technologies will solve climate change. This group is likely optimistic about the role of innovation in addressing climate change but overlooks the importance of behavioural, social and policy changes.

40.2 per cent “Disagree” (28.6 %) or “Strongly disagree” (11.6 %) with this statement, indicating a scepticism that technological solutions alone are sufficient and demonstrating a more nuanced understanding of the causes of and solutions for climate change. Those who selected this option likely believe deeper systemic changes, beyond just technology (such as policy reforms, lifestyle changes and economic restructuring), are essential for addressing climate change.

29.8 per cent remain undecided or neutral on this issue. This group might recognise the potential of technological solutions but is cautious or uncertain about whether they can solve the crisis by themselves. The results do not show major differences by gender.

**FIGURE 5** OPINION ON TECHNOLOGICAL FIXES AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS: BY AGE GROUP



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 29,101. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

31.7 per cent of 14 to 18-year-olds selected “Strongly agree” (6.5 %) and “Agree” (25.2 %), indicating that they believe in simplistic solutions to address climate change at a higher rate than older respondents. They were also selected “Neutral” (31.9 %) as their most common answer.

When looking by country, respondents who “Strongly agree” or “Agree” about this statement are much higher in Albania (51.8 %), Kosovo\* (42.1 %), than the cross-country average. In contrast, only 13.2 per cent of respondents from Türkiye answered this way.

Research on the impact of climate change beliefs on youth engagement, for example, in relation to energy conservation behaviours, indicates that while many youths recognise the importance of technological solutions, they also express the need for systemic changes to support these technologies effectively (Han and Ahn, 2020). Youth perceive technology as part of a broader framework that requires policy support and societal shifts.

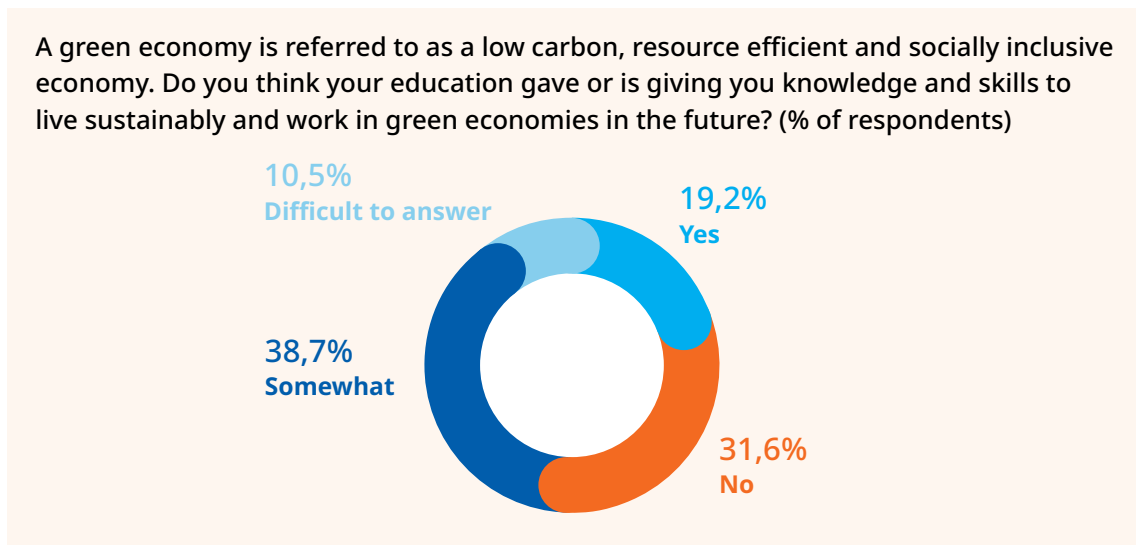
*“It is important to understand that it is wrong to try to make responsibility for the environment and climate change individual. Electric cars and the use of alternative energy sources shifts responsibility to the individual. A person will not produce as much CO2 in a lifetime by choosing a gasoline car as corporations can emit into the atmosphere per year.”*

*19-year-old male from Belarus*

Similarly, research into how green knowledge influences youth purchasing behaviours shows growing awareness of green technologies among youth. However, there is a widespread understanding that technology alone cannot address climate issues without changes in consumer behaviour and societal norms (Amoako et al., 2020). This highlights youth recognition that technological solutions must be integrated with lifestyle changes and community engagement to be effective.

### Section 3: Are education systems preparing young people for a green economy?

**FIGURE 6** SUITABILITY OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS FOR A GREEN ECONOMY



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 30,058. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

To understand to what extent formal education is providing young people with the knowledge and skills to prepare them for sustainable living and green economies, we asked respondents if they think their education gave or is giving them the

knowledge and skills to live sustainably and work in the future.

Just under one-in-five respondents (19.2 %) felt that their education is or was equipping them with the knowledge and skills that will



prepare them for a future green economy, which is relatively low. Over one-third (38.7 %) said “Somewhat”, indicating that while some relevant information is being taught, there may be gaps in comprehensive education relating to a green economy. 31.6 per cent said “No”, with respondents feeling that their education has not provided them with the required tools, showing a potential disconnect between educational content and the growing demand for sustainability skills. The remaining 10.5 per cent find it difficult to assess, suggesting uncertainty or a lack of awareness about green economy education.

When looking by country, respondents answered “No” to a much higher degree than the cross-country average in Bosnia and Herzegovina (41.2 %) and Romania (42.3 %), with almost two-thirds of respondents feeling like their education does not prepare them for a green economy in Bulgaria (62.7 %). The results do not show major differences by gender or age.

This data suggests an urgent need to enhance educational programmes to better align with green economy requirements and learner’s interests, particularly as sustainability becomes a critical global priority and an integral dimension of employability. It reveals that many young people feel their education does not adequately prepare them for the job market, particularly in sectors related to the green economy. This sentiment reflects a broader concern among youth about the relevance of their education to current and future employment prospects (UNICEF and ETF, 2024).

Many educational systems are not adequately preparing students for green jobs. Research indicates that there is often a disconnect between the skills taught in educational institutions and the competencies required

by employers in the green economy, leading to skill shortages in the labour market, making it challenging for firms to find candidates with the necessary green knowledge and skills (Napathorn, 2021).

Moreover, the perception of green jobs among young people can greatly influence their readiness to enter these fields. In some regions, green jobs are viewed as less desirable compared to traditional employment opportunities, which may lead to a lack of motivation among students to pursue careers in this area (Lozornio & Smith, 2021). This perception can be exacerbated by the limited visibility of successful role models in green sectors, which diminishes young people’s aspirations to engage in these careers (Symonds & O’Sullivan, 2017). Consequently, educational reforms that promote the visibility and attractiveness of green jobs are essential to enhance students’ readiness and willingness to pursue these opportunities.

Furthermore, integrating sustainability and climate change education into the broader curriculum is vital for fostering a workforce that is knowledgeable about climate issues and equipped to tackle them through innovative solutions (Gómez et al., 2022). Educational institutions should be encouraged to incorporate green technologies and sustainability practices into their programmes, preparing students for the demands of a low-carbon economy (Gómez et al., 2022). This approach enhances students’ readiness for green jobs and cultivates a culture of sustainability among future generations.

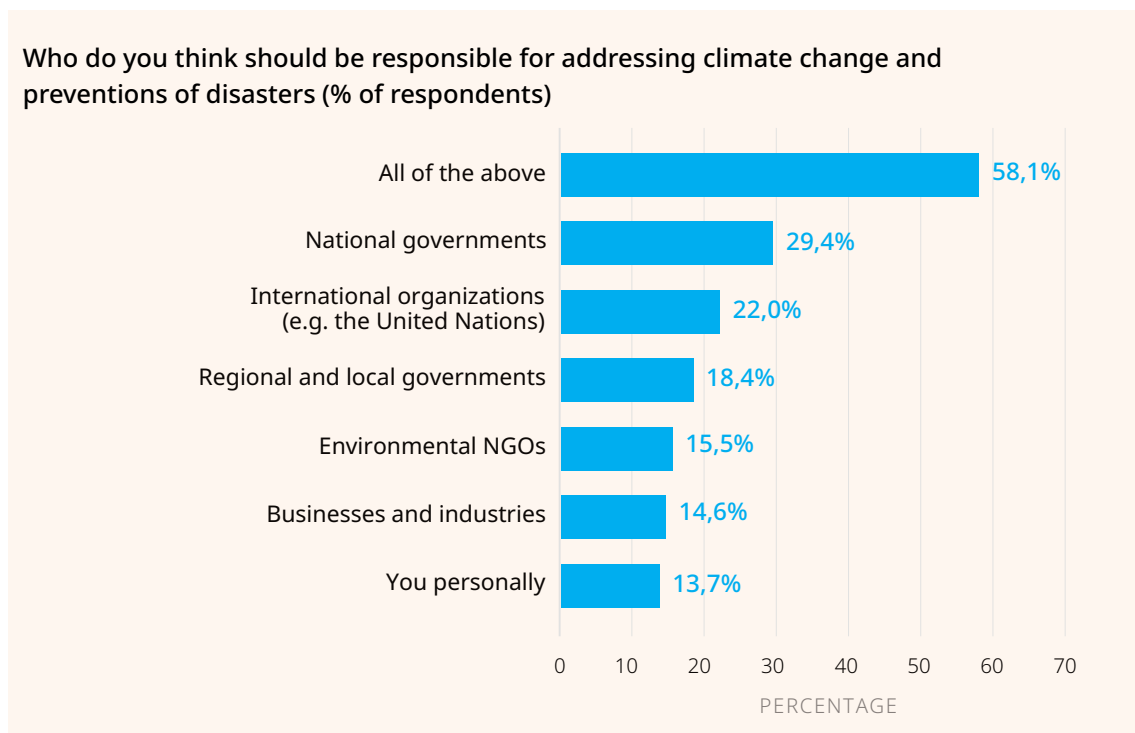
In sum, while young people in the region exhibit a growing awareness and interest in the green economy and green jobs, youth often feel their formal education does not fully prepare them

for the green economy. Many express the need for additional practical experiences, relevant curricula and stronger connections between education and employment opportunities in

the green sector. Addressing these gaps is essential for fostering a workforce equipped to meet the challenges of a transitioning economy and labour market.

## Section 4: Who young people feel is responsible for addressing climate change

**FIGURE 7** STAKEHOLDERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 34,538. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.*

Climate change impacts all levels of society, with several actors responsible for addressing it. We explored youth perceptions regarding responsibility for tackling climate change, by asking young people who they think should be responsible for addressing climate change and preventing disasters.

The survey results indicate that on average, respondents believe national governments should bear the greatest responsibility for

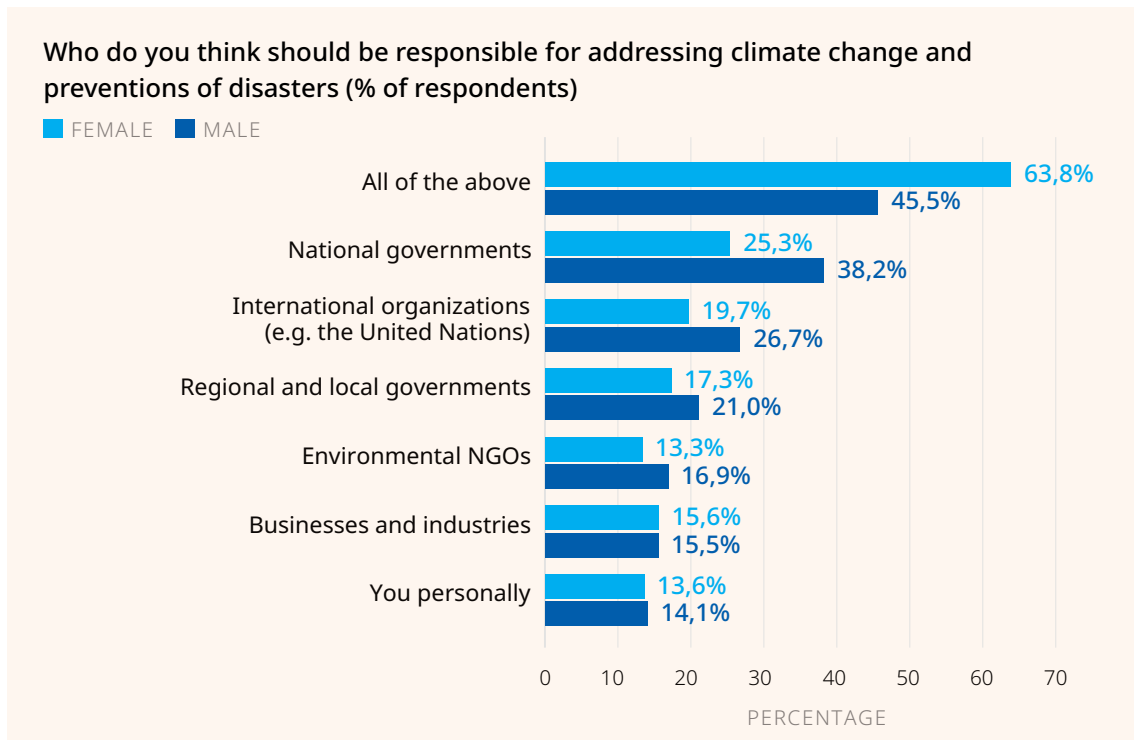
addressing climate change and preventing disasters. Nearly half (47.8 %) of respondents selected some level of government (“National governments” (29.4 %) and “Regional and local governments” (18.4 %)), and 22.0 per cent selected “International organisations (e.g., the United Nations)”, which in many cases are intergovernmental.

Only 14.6 per cent selected “Business and industries”, despite the hefty impact that

industrial processes have on climate change, while personal responsibility ranks slightly lower at 13.7 per cent. Environmental NGOs are considered responsible by 15.5 per cent on average. Notably, when considering all

these actors collectively, the average support increases to 58.1 per cent, reflecting a broad consensus that addressing climate change requires a multifaceted approach.

**FIGURE 8** STAKEHOLDERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE: BY GENDER



Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 34,538. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.

*“Everyone should be responsible for the impact they make, no matter the social status or any other criteria...Change should start at the top [with world leaders]. They should provide an example for their people with their own actions, so that everyone else will follow suit and create a positive impact. If we just work together towards the common goal, the planet can still be saved.”*

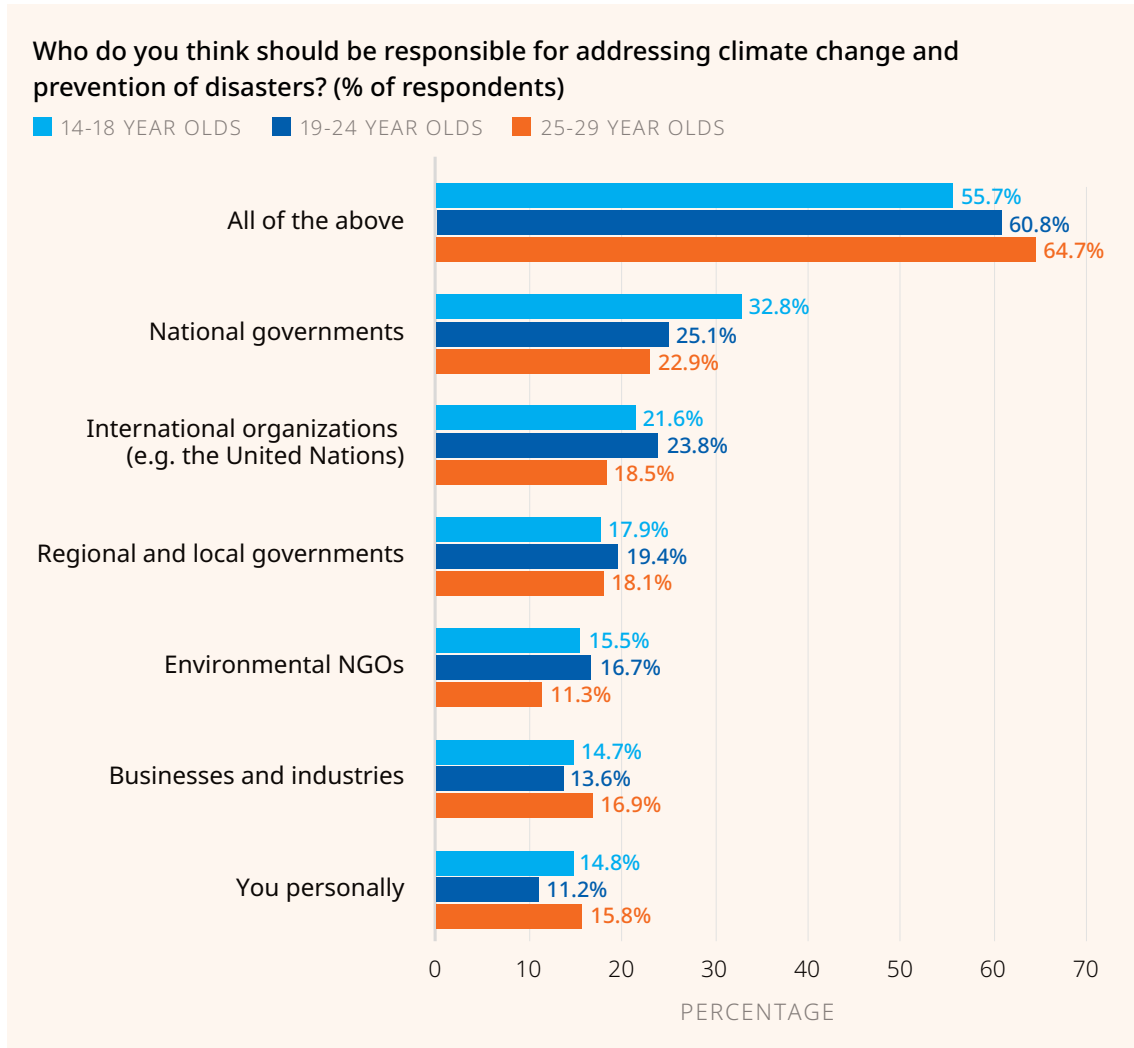
*16-year-old female from Romania*

When looked at by gender, “All of the above” was selected by over 18 per cent more Females (63.8 %) than Males (45.5 %). In contrast, Males selected “National governments” (38.2 %), and “International organisations (e.g., the United Nations)” (26.7 %) to a much higher degree.

When broken down by age, 25 to 29-year-olds selected “All of the above” (64.7 %) to a higher degree than younger age groups, and “National governments” was more popular with 14 to 18-year olds (32.8 %) than their older counterparts. When looking by country, no major variations exist, with

the exception that some countries chose “All of the above” to a much lesser extent than the cross-country average, namely Kyrgyzstan (45.7 %), Turkmenistan (44.0 %) and Kazakhstan (27.9 %).

**FIGURE 9** STAKEHOLDERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE: BY AGE GROUP



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 34,538. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo\*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and U-Report Europe. Multiple selection possible.*

The data highlights the complexity of youth perceptions. Our poll suggests that respondents increasingly believe that effective climate action requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including governments, businesses and individuals. A sense of collective responsibility shapes their perceptions of climate change.

However, it is clear that many young people also feel overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis and often look to adults and policymakers for leadership. However, they also desire more proactive involvement in climate action, indicating a dual expectation of responsibility from both themselves and established authorities (Sanson et al., 2019).

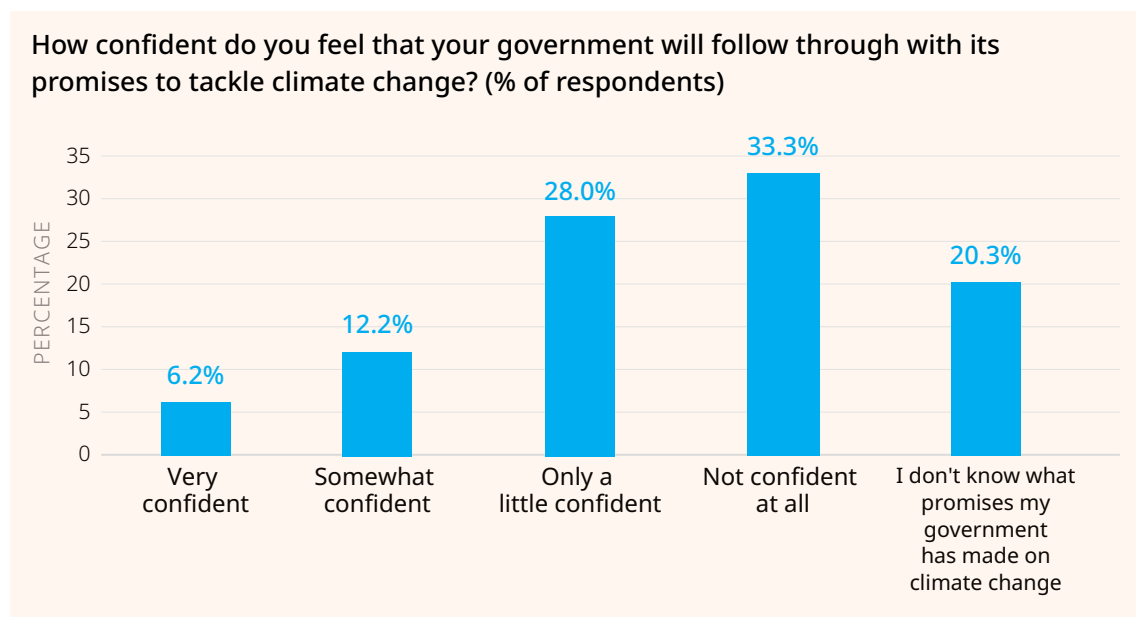
In the region, the perception that governments are primarily responsible for climate action is stronger than many other areas globally. This perception can be attributed to several factors, including historical context, socio-economic conditions and the legacy of centralised governance systems prevalent during the socialist era. For example, Eastern European governments historically played a dominant role in all aspects of life, including environmental management. As a result, citizens often view the government as the primary actor responsible for addressing societal issues, including climate change. This expectation persists even in post-socialist contexts, where individuals may feel that the state should lead climate initiatives due to the

ingrained belief in government responsibility for public welfare. Research shows that youth feel a strong obligation to advocate for climate action, particularly when they perceive governments and corporations failing to meet their commitments (Lee et al., 2020; Han & Ahn, 2020).

The perception among young people that governments are primarily responsible for climate action presents challenges and opportunities for policy development. To effectively address climate change, it is essential to strengthen the narrative towards a multi-faceted approach that emphasises the roles of individuals (including young people), communities and businesses alongside governmental action.

## Section 5: How confident young people feel that their government will tackle climate change

**FIGURE 10** CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT TO KEEP CLIMATE PROMISES



*Source:* U-Report polls, June-August 2024. *Note:* Number of respondents is 26,143. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.

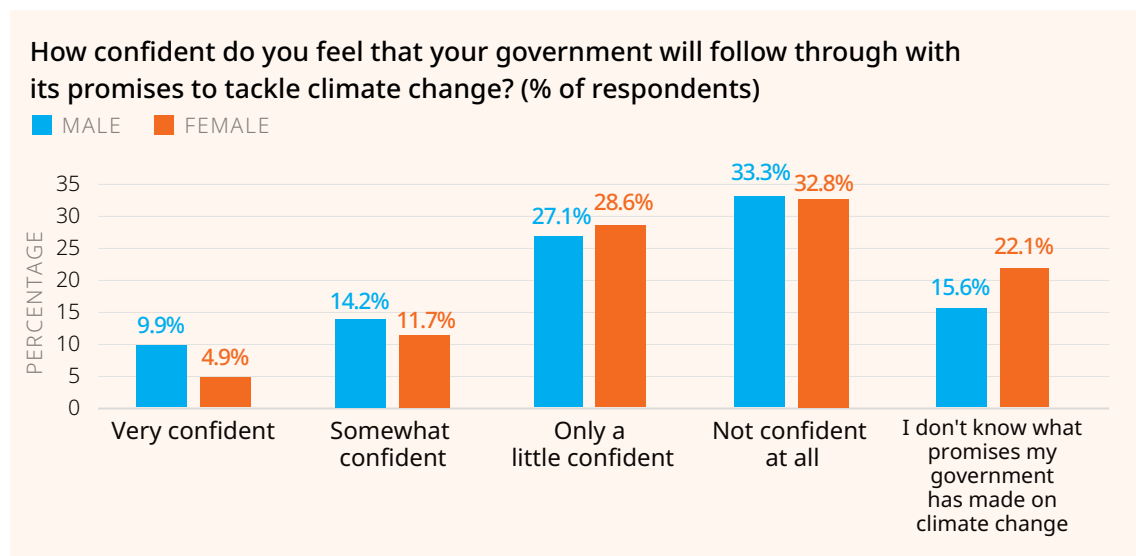
Given that governments are one of the key actors responsible for addressing climate change, we wanted to ask young people how confident they felt that their government could follow through on this responsibility. Governments have pledged through certain international treaties, such as the Paris Agreement signed at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015, as well as regional and national policies and plans.

The survey results show a high level of scepticism regarding governments’ ability to follow through on their climate change commitments. Nearly two-thirds of

respondents have little to no confidence that their government will follow through on its promises, with 28.0 per cent saying they were “Only a little confident” and 33.3 per cent saying they were “Not confident at all”. A mere 6.2 per cent of respondents said they were “Very confident”. One-in-five (20.3 %) said, “I don’t know what promises my government has made on climate change”.

There are no major variations by gender, except that there are more Females (22.1 %) than Males (15.6 %) who are not aware of the promises made by their government on climate change.

**FIGURE 11** CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT TO KEEP CLIMATE PROMISES: BY GENDER

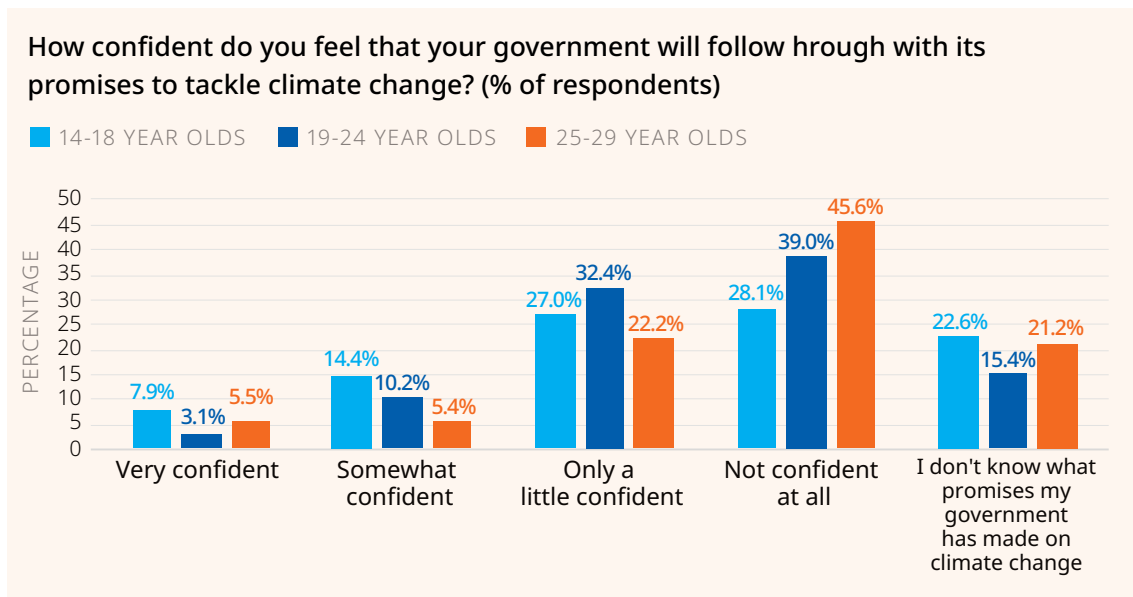


*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 26,143. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

By age group, older respondents are more sceptical of their governments keeping their promises than younger ones, with 45.6 per

cent of 25 to 29-year-olds saying they were “Not confident at all” compared to 28.1 per cent of 14 to 18-year-olds.

**FIGURE 12** CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT TO KEEP CLIMATE PROMISES: BY AGE GROUP



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 26,143. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

When looking by country, the countries that are most sceptical of their government’s promises on climate change when compared to the cross-country average are Türkiye (41.2 %), Greece (41.9 %), Montenegro (44.3 %), Serbia (50.7 %) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (56.7 %). Conversely, almost one-quarter of respondents in Belarus said they were “Very confident” that their government will follow through with its climate change commitments.

*“At COP29 in Azerbaijan, you have the opportunity to take urgent and ambitious actions against climate change. So show courage and leadership toward a more sustainable and equitable future.”*

*18-year-old female from Croatia*

Recent studies have explored youth confidence in their governments’ ability to address climate change. One study discusses

the mental health impacts of climate change on youth, emphasising that many young people feel anxious about the future and sceptical of government action. The authors argue that this anxiety is compounded by a perceived lack of effective governmental response to climate issues, leading to a diminished sense of agency among youth (Gislason et al. 2021; Feldman, 2021), while at the same time, youth often believe they must take action themselves because governmental responses are insufficient (Han & Ahn, 2020). However, youth exhibit limited confidence in their ability to mobilise for climate action, often feeling that their efforts depend heavily on government and community support (Mwanza et al., 2023). This finding suggests that while youth are concerned about climate change, they may feel powerless without strong governmental backing and resources. This ambivalence reflects a broader sentiment among youth who recognise the need for systemic change but are unsure if their governments

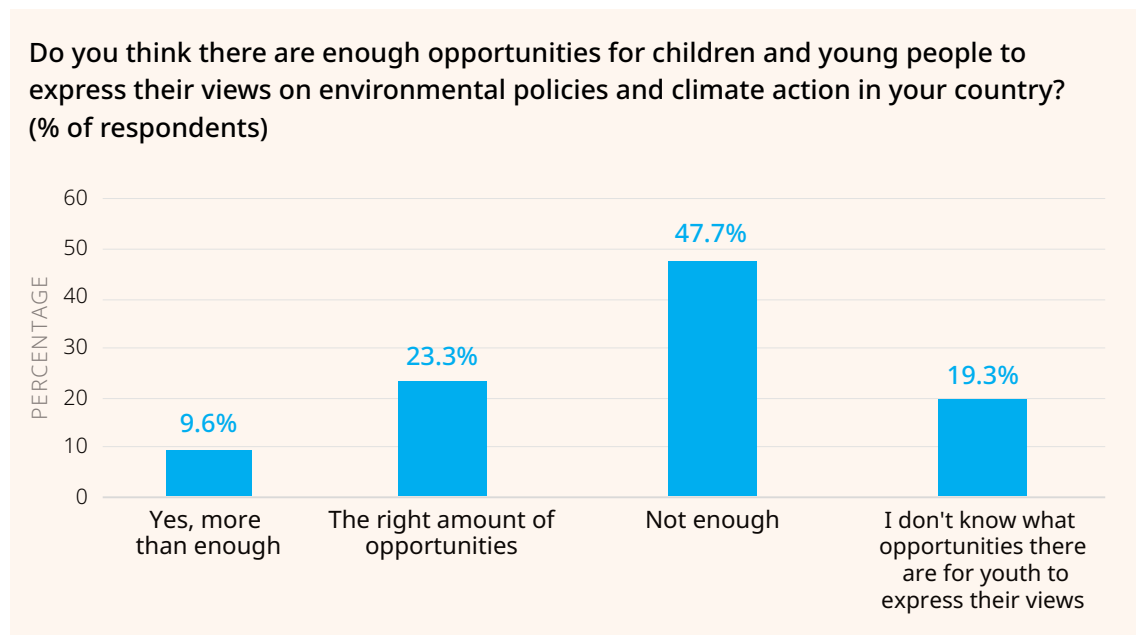
will deliver. This was echoed in a previous UNICEF-ETF study (2021), where young people in Europe and Central Asia felt that their governments were not doing enough to create a green economy.

In summary, youth confidence in their government's ability to address climate change varies, with many expressing

scepticism and frustration over governmental inaction. Young people's perceptions of governmental effectiveness are crucial in shaping their engagement and sense of agency. Addressing these concerns is essential for fostering a collaborative approach to climate action, including youth perspectives and participation.

## Section 6: The right of young people to be heard when making policies about climate

**FIGURE 13** OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE POLICIES



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 24,215. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

*“I would like to see organisations that encourage youth participation in decision-making processes and for COP to be designed in a way where young people can voice their opinions and ideas”*

*24-year-old male from Türkiye*

Meaningful child and youth participation is critical in environmental policies, given that policies are designed with the needs of the younger generation in mind, given that they are the generation that the effects of climate change will most impact. Participation and their right to be heard in decisions that impact them is also a fundamental human right. We asked young people if they felt they



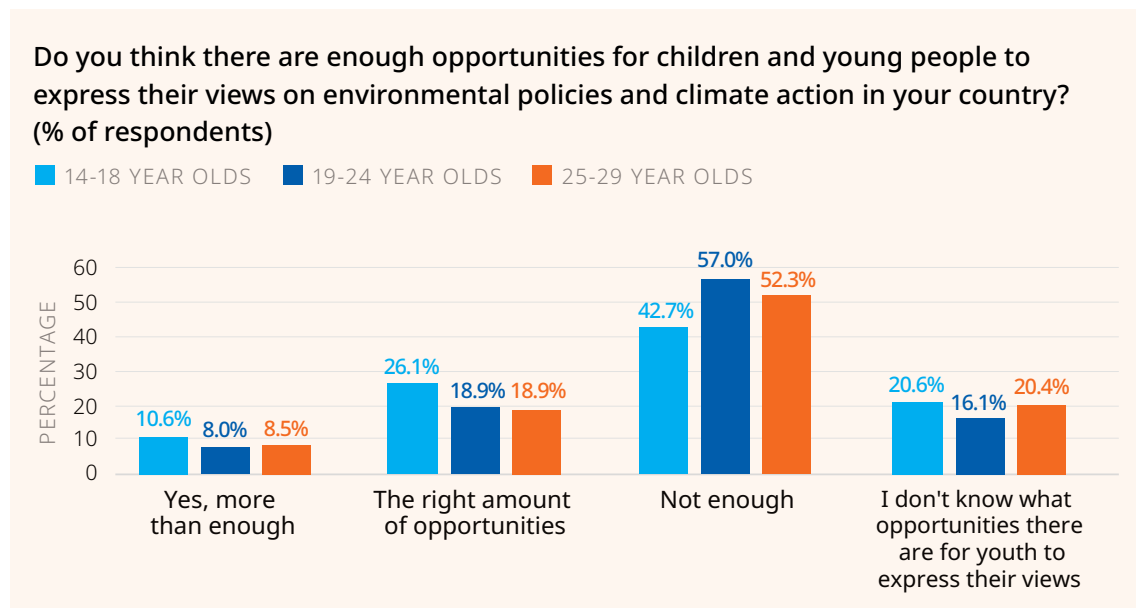
had enough opportunities to participate in policies and actions related to the environment and climate.

The survey results reveal a consensus that there are insufficient opportunities for children and young people to express their views on environmental policies and climate action. Nearly half (47.7 %) of respondents said that there were “Not enough” opportunities to express their views on climate action and policies. In comparison, nearly one-in-five (19.3 %) said that they were not aware of the opportunities available for

young people to express their views. This indicates a need for better communication and outreach regarding youth involvement in environmental decision-making processes.

Together, this makes up almost 70 per cent of respondents who feel that there are either not enough opportunities, or are unaware of any opportunities, to have their voices heard in climate policy. These averages suggest governments need to create and promote more platforms for youth participation in environmental discourse. The results do not show major differences by gender.

**FIGURE 14** OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE POLICIES: BY AGE GROUP



*Source: U-Report polls, June-August 2024. Note: Number of respondents is 24,215. Participating countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine and U-Report Europe. Only one choice possible.*

By age group, older respondents felt there were insufficient opportunities for participation compared to younger respondents, with 57.0 per cent of 19 to 24-year-olds and 52.3 per cent of 25 to 29-year-olds selecting “Not enough”, compared to 42.7 per cent of 14 to 18-year-olds. Similarly, more 14 to 18-year-olds

felt that there were “The right amount of opportunities”, with over one-quarter (26.1 %) selecting this option.

Having a voice in decisions that impact them is a fundamental human right of children. This is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, under Article 12, the right to be heard. It can also lead to more

effective and relevant policies. Despite this, systemic barriers limit their participation, suggesting that while youth express a desire to be involved, the mechanisms for their engagement are often inadequate (García-Antúnez et al., 2023).

Research on school strikes for climate highlights that young people engage in activism as a response to their perception that adults and institutions are failing to act decisively on climate issues and they lack formal opportunities to participate. Youth believe they must take matters into their own hands, as they feel that traditional power structures are not adequately addressing the climate crisis (Han and Anh, 2020). This underscores a growing frustration among youth regarding the perceived inaction of those in authority, in particular when there is a lack of meaningful spaces for young people to participate and have their voices heard.

Research on community-based climate action demonstrates that hands-on educational activities combined with participatory action research can enhance youth engagement and agency in climate discussions (Trott, 2019). This suggests that while there are opportunities for youth to express their views, there is a need for more comprehensive and supportive frameworks to facilitate their involvement.

In summary, while there is a growing recognition of the importance of youth voices in environmental policy and climate action, many young people feel that opportunities for their participation are limited. Studies indicate a desire for more inclusive decision-making processes and highlight the need for innovative approaches to engage youth effectively. Addressing these gaps is essential for fostering a sense of agency among young people and ensuring their perspectives are integrated into climate action.



## Policy implications

The findings from U-Reporters and related research provide critical insights for policy aimed at educational reforms and climate action implementation. These insights emphasise the need for a more integrated, emotionally responsive and action-oriented approach to climate change education that can be adapted to the specific contexts of different countries. New approaches are needed to foster the human capital development of young people for a green future and green economy.

*“Act now, there is no time left.”*

*16-year-old female from Albania*

Firstly, addressing the gaps in climate change education policy is crucial. Many countries lack comprehensive policies that support climate education in schools, leading to inconsistent implementation (Dunlop & Rushton, 2022). Policymakers should work towards establishing clear guidelines and standards for climate change education, ensuring that all students receive a consistent and high-quality education on this critical issue. This includes monitoring and evaluating educational programmes to assess their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments based on evidence and feedback (Anderson, 2012).

The emotional dimensions of climate change education must be prioritised. Research indicates that young people often experience anxiety and fear regarding climate change, which can hinder their engagement and willingness to act (Rushton et al. 2023). Therefore, educational policies should incorporate emotionally responsive pedagogies that inform students about climate science and address their emotional

responses. This could involve training teachers to facilitate discussions about climate change that acknowledge students' feelings and promote resilience (Howard-Jones et al., 2021). Such an approach can help students process their emotions and empower them to take constructive action.

Beyond these two broad dimensions and based on the survey results, and the available literature on the subject, the following policy insights can be made:

### 1. Enhance Communication and Visibility of Climate Action

- ▶ **Improve youth outreach on participation opportunities for climate issues:** Schools and governments should enhance communication about platforms for youth participation in climate issues, such as online portals, social media campaigns and school newsletters, addressing the 19.3 per cent unaware of these opportunities. This increased visibility will foster youth engagement in climate action. Children's and youth's role as agents of change should be facilitated using inclusive spaces, no language barriers, safe & meaningful participation.
- ▶ **Utilise media for climate education:** With 68.5 per cent of respondents, particularly females, relying on social media as their source of information on climate change and disaster risk, education policymakers should launch campaigns with influencers and content creators to promote environmental awareness. As accuracy of information spread

online is often questionable, youth organisations, authorities and environment specialised civil society organisations could work more on addressing the risks of online misinformation and disinformation. Additionally, revitalising climate messaging on TV for the 30.4 per cent who rely on traditional media can further broaden outreach. Highlighting youth-led initiatives can motivate others to participate by fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

- ▶ **Promote government climate commitments:** Governments and schools can collaborate better to communicate climate commitments, such as decarbonisation goals, ensuring that youth understand these policies and how to engage with them. Child and youth sensitive climate policies should also be advocated for, including National Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans.

## 2. Establish or Promote Climate Engagement Platforms

- ▶ **Establish or consolidate youth climate forums and councils:** Where absent, education providers and governments should establish forums and councils where youth can contribute to environmental policy discussions, addressing the 47.7 per cent who feel opportunities for youth engagement are lacking. These platforms provide structured, safe and meaningful

spaces for students to participate in local, national and international climate discourse. One example would be to institutionalization of the *Presidency Youth Climate Champion, with a mandate to mobilize substantive youth input and outcomes from the COP and UNFCCC processes*. Schools can also establish partnerships with government and environmental organisations to do this. This builds trust in their ability to influence policy and fosters a deeper understanding of climate governance, fostering a more nuanced view of governmental responsibilities and improving confidence in the process. It also falls in line with international frameworks such as General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, the Aarhus Convention, and the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action (2019).

- ▶ **Promote youth engagement in local climate initiatives, including in informal learning:** Relevant government entities should highlight local climate actions and grassroots movements to encourage youth participation. Intergenerational learning programmes and community workshops can empower young people to participate actively in climate action.

### 3. Integrate Climate Action into Education

- ▶ **Embed climate literacy in curricula:** Climate literacy should be incorporated into education at all levels, using frameworks like the European Commission’s sustainability competence framework<sup>5</sup>, tools like Scaffold<sup>6</sup>, and the UNICEF regional strategy on climate change education. Project-based learning, policy simulations and events where students propose climate actions to stakeholders will promote civic responsibility and inclusiveness. Educational programmes must also promote civic responsibility and individual roles in climate action. These approaches should ensure inclusiveness, allowing all learners, irrespective of gender, ethnic, or social background, to participate in climate-related activities. By providing equitable opportunities, we can engage diverse perspectives that enrich discussions in climate education.
- ▶ **Integrate climate change education into existing subjects:** Instead of treating climate change as a standalone topic, integrating it into subjects like science, geography and social studies enhances its relevance and effectiveness. It is vital that teachers receive adequate training and resources and that these educational strategies cater to diverse learning needs and promote inclusivity, ensuring that every student can engage with and benefit from climate change education. This should be matched by a through-the-grades approach in which there is a cumulative build-up in the width, depth and sophistication of climate change-related knowledge, skills and attitudes to be attained in each school year (Kagawa, 2022)<sup>7</sup>.
- ▶ **Encourage critical engagement with technology in climate solutions:** With 31.1 per cent of respondents believing technology alone can resolve climate issues, while 40.0 per cent disagree, curricula should promote critical thinking about the role of technology in climate solutions. A balanced understanding of how technology, policy and social changes work together for effective climate action can prepare students to engage thoughtfully with these critical issues.
- ▶ **Promote digital literacy:** Students must be equipped to recognise reliable, scientifically sound information and develop skills to assess climate information found on social media critically. By integrating media literacy into the curriculum, educators can provide students with the tools necessary to evaluate sources, discern biases and understand the motivations behind information dissemination. This foundational skill set fosters

5 [GreenComp: the European sustainability competence framework - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-iss/education/sustainability-competence-framework)

6 [Scaffold: a card game to revolutionise teaching | ETF \(europa.eu\)](https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/scaffold)

7 In Kagawa (2022) see p.35 (Recommendation 4) and p.41

informed citizens and encourages active engagement in climate policy and advocacy, ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, can participate meaningfully in discussions about climate issues (Hobbs & Coiro, 2019).

- ▶ **Encourage sustainability in educational institutions:** Schools and universities should adopt sustainable practices within their operations and work towards decarbonisation. This commitment will prepare students for green jobs while fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. Initiatives could include campus sustainability projects, energy efficiency programmes and partnerships with green businesses; ensuring that these initiatives are accessible and inclusive will promote engagement from all student demographics, allowing every learner to contribute to and benefit from sustainability efforts.

#### 4. Enhance Green Job Readiness and Skills Development

- ▶ **Align education with green economy demands:** Educational institutions, particularly those focused on Vocational Education and Training (VET) and continuing learning, must align curricula with the evolving demands of the green economy. Despite this necessity, nearly 80 per cent of respondents

indicated they do not feel their education adequately prepares them for the green economy. This gap highlights the urgent need to integrate green skills across various disciplines and emphasise opportunities such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and eco-friendly manufacturing. By creating a more fluid connection between education and the labour market, students can become more aware of regional job opportunities and better prepared to contribute as informed citizens in a net-zero economy. UNICEF, Generation Unlimited and various public, private and youth partners also aims to empower the most vulnerable youth with the education, skills and opportunities to be champions for the planet.

- ▶ **Expand vocational training and partnerships with sustainable industries:** Governments should invest in vocational training, apprenticeships and internships focused on green industries. Stronger partnerships between educational institutions and green businesses will ensure relevance of learning and exposure to green technology and processes and equip young people with the skills required for green economy jobs, reducing job insecurity and boosting career prospects. Initiatives like Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) may also prove instrumental in supporting green and digital transition<sup>8</sup>.

8 [Vocational Excellence – ENE | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#); [Centres of Vocational Excellence - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

- ▶ **Promote local green job opportunities:** Campaigns and job fairs that showcase the attractiveness of green careers can shift perceptions, making these jobs more desirable. Tailoring education to meet regional green economy needs will connect students with local employment opportunities, particularly in regions where green sectors are developing rapidly. Special attention must be given to creating inclusive spaces and opportunities that connect young women with local green economy jobs. By fostering a supportive and gender-sensitive environment, we can ensure that women and girls are equally empowered to contribute to deploying green technology.
- ▶ **Support research and development in green technologies:** Investment in R&D for green technologies, whether sophisticated or 'low-tech', should be coupled with educational programmes that showcase the role of innovation in climate action. This will create job opportunities and demonstrate how businesses and individuals can contribute to climate solutions.
- ▶ **Incorporate social and policy dimensions:** Expand climate education to include topics such as lifestyle changes, economic restructuring and the importance of policy reforms. Students should understand the systemic changes needed for sustainable climate solutions, focusing on the interconnection between individual actions, social behaviour and policy implementation.
- ▶ **Foster balanced perspectives:** Encourage balanced views by presenting case studies where technology has contributed to climate solutions and where it has fallen short. Promote discussions on the ethical and environmental implications of technology and innovation.

## 5. Foster a Holistic Understanding of Climate Solutions

- ▶ **Promote systems thinking in climate education:** Climate and sustainability education should emphasise the interconnectedness of science, politics, economics, and social justice, helping students understand the multifaceted nature of climate change. By exploring how technological, policy, behavioural, and social changes work together, students will better understand the comprehensive strategies needed for sustainable solutions. This holistic approach can also address the scepticism reflected in survey results.

## Conclusion

To ensure meaningful progress in sustainability, governments, educational institutions and schools must consider these implications. To enhance youth engagement in climate action, schools and governments must improve communication through media campaigns, youth forums and platforms that increase the visibility of climate issues and government commitments. Climate education should be integrated across curricula, emphasising interdisciplinary learning, critical engagement with

technology and media literacy, while promoting sustainable practices in educational institutions. Additionally, aligning education with the demands of the green economy through vocational training, partnerships with sustainable industries and promoting local green job opportunities will prepare students for green careers, while fostering a holistic understanding of climate solutions that incorporate social, policy and technological dimensions.





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