



**Engaging Youth in Sustainable Energy Planning (EYES)**

# **Report on the Youth Intervention Team's Research Process**

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## Content

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Objectives	4
1.2	Outputs	5
2	Methodology	5
2.1	Methodology	5
2.2	Validation workshops	7
3	Main Findings	9
3.1	Overall analysis of results	9
3.1.1	Concerns on Climate Change	11
3.1.2	Knowledge on the Climate and Energy Planning Process	11
3.1.3	Engaging Youth in the Climate and Energy Planning Process	11
3.2	Topics youth care about	12
3.3	Barriers to youth engagement	14
4	Evaluation of the overall process	15
4.1	Evaluation of the research	15
4.2	Learning aspects (including case studies)	15



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the YIT research is to contribute to the development and implementation of an innovative methodology within the EYES project that shall foster an inclusive education through the acquisition of skills and competences on energy and climate local planning.

Specific objectives include:

- Putting a specific focus on the learning of the trainees (YIT) during a process of analysing and developing public recommendations for engaging youth in the local climate and energy planning processes
- Performance of the needed research by the YIT under the guidance of the Advisory Board. Through this process, the trainees (YIT) will gather experience and skills on:
  - Energy and climate
  - Civic and social matter of common interest
  - Experience on performing quantitative and qualitative research through different techniques: literature review, survey design and performance, and semi-structured interviews
  - Skills to communicate the results to their peers
  - Development of recommendations by the YIT and delivery to the municipality

The Innovative aspect is defined as “Empowering young people within the Youth Intervention Teams to provide recommendations for the energy and climate planning process resulting from a research on the concerns of other young people, and Supported by guidance from the Advisory Board / Project Team”.



## 1.2 Outputs

In addition to the learning outputs, every country has been through this research:

- Identification of topics youth care about in relation to their role as energy citizens and generally in relation to the local climate and energy planning processes and challenges
- Identification of barriers to engagement by youth in the planning process (e.g. trust, transparency, intimidation, communication, lack of specific knowledge, etc.). This also includes identifying gaps in services/advisory and participation opportunities for youth, especially vulnerable youth groups.
- Suggestions to improve youth engagement (identify guiding principles and the focus areas)

This report describes and explains the development of the YIT activities, including the tools used (surveys and interviews), the main findings, and an evaluation of the overall process. Learning aspects will be highlighted.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Methodology

The Bulgarian survey was carried out during the period April – September 2020 in Varna municipality as a pilot city. The survey was organized mainly as an online tool using google form where the YIT members had the leading role for collection information and feedback from their peers. Those were mainly young people aged between 17 and 29 who contributed to distribution of the questionnaire and gathered feedback from other young people, their mates, school and university students in the municipality.

The questionnaire is available on the following link:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc\\_NI7WqGyCEfmNG5-eO3pHUJjQIFvisK8bUMplzNswfnew5g/viewform?fbclid=IwAR3-ib5yWBHF50QzHon4NMIQ7sIUsmgMqVM1wOE9wJ\\_uP40QPRYu1AEzMcU](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc_NI7WqGyCEfmNG5-eO3pHUJjQIFvisK8bUMplzNswfnew5g/viewform?fbclid=IwAR3-ib5yWBHF50QzHon4NMIQ7sIUsmgMqVM1wOE9wJ_uP40QPRYu1AEzMcU)

The research process was done mainly online as the period coincided with the national restrictions due to COVID-19 and lasted longer than initially foreseen. Mutual meetings and discussions were held on in parallel where the YIT and the AB members searched for support and feedback from the targeted young people.

The previous experience has shown that the questions should be defined with a specific number of “closed” answers rather than having many questions with “open” answers as this would facilitate the feedback process. This is mostly related with the fact that young people do not prefer to take part in time-consuming actions rather than dealing with straightforward actions as the longer a problem is debated the more disinterested it becomes to the audience.



The questionnaire was distributed and feedback was generated both online and offline during peer meetings, from attendants to other events using the communication channels:

- Social media: The UBBSLA website/facebook & facebook of the partners and single users
- The websites of the UBBSLA partner organizations
- Peer activities (youth – to youth interactions), interviews, etc.
- Support of the AB members through distribution and collection of information

The questionnaire was also discussed during bilateral meetings organized between youth representatives and the AB members and local stakeholders (municipality, local companies & organizations) and within participation to events.

The objectives of the survey process were tailored:

- To activate the youth participation in the local policy development and implementation
- To generate ideas and proposals for concrete actions by the youth
- To match the objectives set in the municipal programme and the needs of the young people as resulted from the research process
- To promote innovative and person-oriented (peer to peer) actions

The questionnaire was targeted to young people between 17 and 29 years whereas the participation and feedback of vulnerable group (the young unemployed and low qualified people) was searched.

The following areas of investigation were triggered by the questionnaire:

1. Level of awareness of the youth on the municipal policy applied in energy and climate
2. Mechanisms of young people participation in the local policy implementation
3. Barriers to participation of young people in energy and climate planning process
4. Motivation of the youth for participation and influence on the local policy development
5. Proposals for involvement of young people in combat and mitigation climate change tailored to the municipal government.

Based on the pre-analysis and discussions meetings of YIT and AB members, three case studies were defined to be discussed among the young attendants during the validation sessions:

1. How to improve communication between the municipality and the youth on energy and climate issues?
2. How to involve young people in local climate actions?
3. How to ensure waste reduction in coastal areas to contribute to climate protection and climate mitigation measures?



## 2.2 Validation workshops

Two validation sessions were carried out along with the research process to discuss three primary issues (case studies) as long as the topic of youth engagement was concerned. The validation sessions were initially planned to be organized in June but due to corona situation they were postponed for the period July – September.

The first session was organized on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to discuss the ways of communication between the young people and the municipality. The specific objectives of the meeting were as follows:

- To inform the young people about the actions the local authority implements in the field of energy and climate
- To discuss current problems of the coastal areas, share and utilize best practices and generate proposals for their adaptation as part of the relevant municipal plans and programmes
- To understand the importance of living in a clean environment, especially in the coastal areas
- To enhance the participation of the young people in the local municipal actions for waste reduction in coastal areas

Actions and activities on resource management and waste reduction were discussed as a striving course for deep enhancement of the young people in the local actions initiated by the municipality. In total 24 participants attended the session, out of which were 21 school students aged between 17 and 19 and 3 AB members.



The practical approach of this session was triggered to discussion of the local problems faced by the youth within the process of communication between them and municipality. The participants were given the possibility to think individually and answer the questions through providing options/proposals within the whole group. The group had to answer specific questions related to their knowledge about activities the municipality carries on such as campaigning for environmental actions, separate waste collection, initiatives of social purpose (for ex: campaigns for collection of plastic caps for recycling through involvement of the local communities to contribute thus having both a social and environmental impact).

Aligned with the discussion the ways for improvement of the communication between the municipality and the young people were set based on the options (i) how the young people



can express their viewpoints and interests, (ii) how the municipal councillors to be involved and further transmit the information to the relevant standing (expert municipal committees), (iii) how could municipality improve its communication channels: for ex. enhance the role of the social media; use of youth operating structures in the city, etc.

The second validation session was carried out on 29th September 2020 and was devoted to the practical involvement of the young people in the local planning process. The main objectives of the working session were to discuss and share best practices for young people participation in climate actions initiated by the municipality as well as to ensure the increase of level of awareness of youth in climate actions so that they will be able to more actively propose ideas and initiatives triggering the local environmental issues. In total 23 people attended the session, out of which 19 were young representatives and 4 AB members.



Grouped into 2-3 people per team the participants were given the possibility of individual reflection time and then to share thought and proposals with the rest of the teams. Some of the ideas derived from the discussions were mainly related with the opportunities the young people had to attend the meetings of the respective committees and provided solutions ideas, to discuss issues together with the committee members. They had to be enabled to propose actions for youth involvement, more specifically involvement and demonstration of digital applications, with the active involvement of their peers. In parallel with that the participation to fundraising campaigns organized by local stakeholders as well as within youth projects should be enhanced and activated using also the European Youth Capital - a permanent active body responsible for the youth policy implementation in Varna.

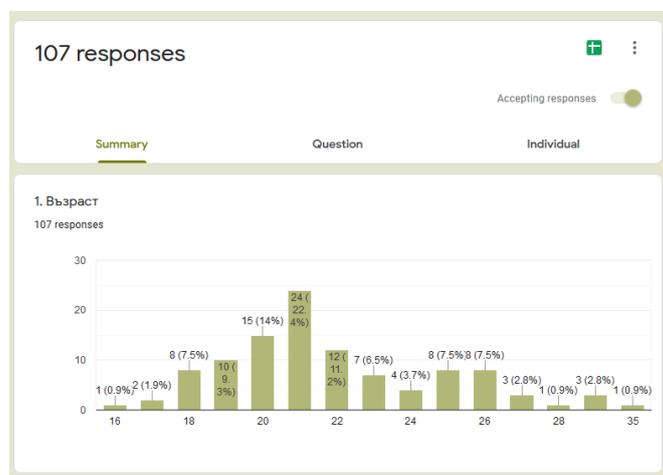


### 3 Main Findings

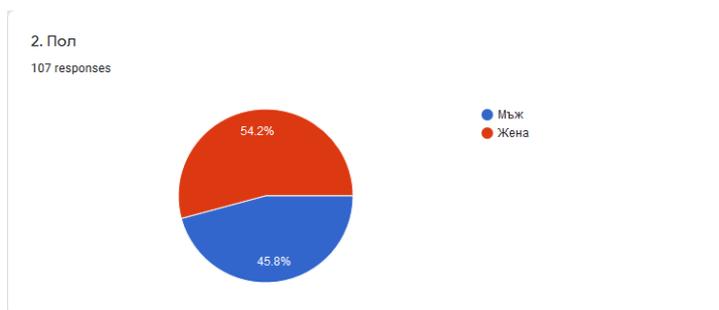
#### 3.1 Overall analysis of results

In total 107 responses have been received from school and university students. The majority of the respondents are aged 21 (22.4%), while there is 1 respondent aged 16 and 1 who is over the threshold e.g. over 29.

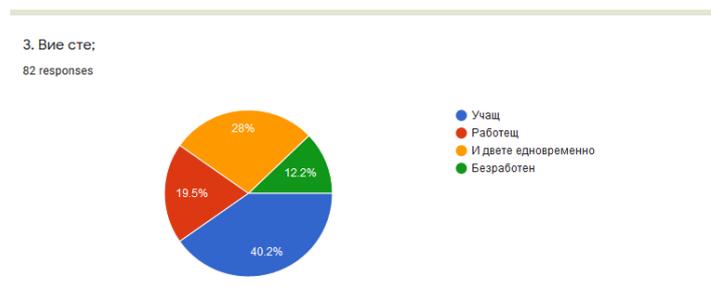
Age Group	Number	Percentage
16 - 17	3	2.8%
18+	103	96.3%
20+	86	80.4%
17 – 29 (UBBSLA target group)	105	98.1%
18 – 29 (EYES target group)	103	96.2%



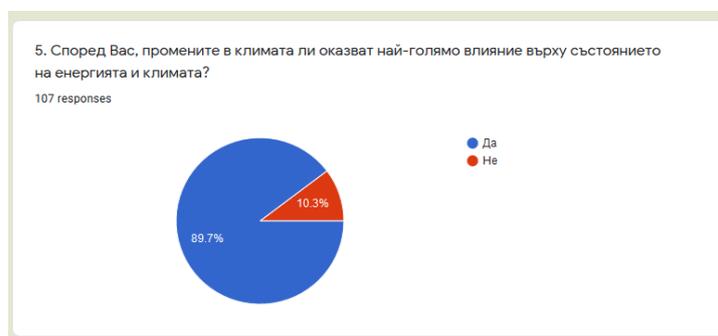
54,2% or 58 out of the respondents are female and 45,8% (49 people) are male, as visible from the graphics below.



40,2% or 32 out of the 82 replies are high school and/or university students and 12% or 9 are marked as unemployed and accordingly fall under the HTRG of UBBSLA as previously defined within the project.



96 young people state that climate change causes the highest level of impact on local energy and climate policy while the rest of the respondents consider that air pollution; human activities more specifically cutting trees affect the local climate and energy to a larger extent.





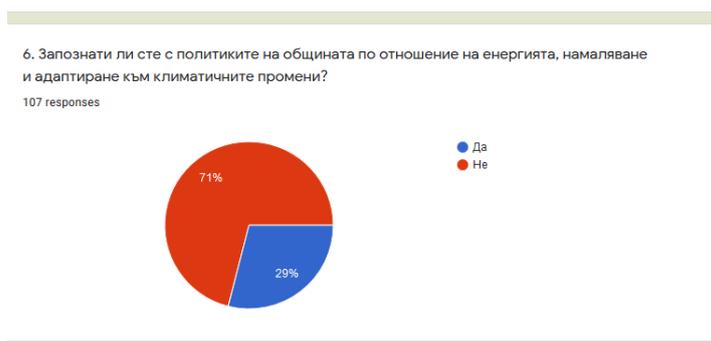
### 3.1.1 Concerns on Climate Change

Increase of air temperature is mostly affected by climate change, as stated by 52 people (48,6%), and increase of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is the impact scaled as a second threat by 30 of the respondents (28%). The percentage of those who consider air pollution as the biggest treat is 12,1% followed by glacier melting (8,4%).



### 3.1.2 Knowledge on the Climate and Energy Planning Process

71% of the interviewed young people are not aware of the municipal policy on climate adaptation and mitigation measures and therefore the EYES activities are up- to date and on the right direction.

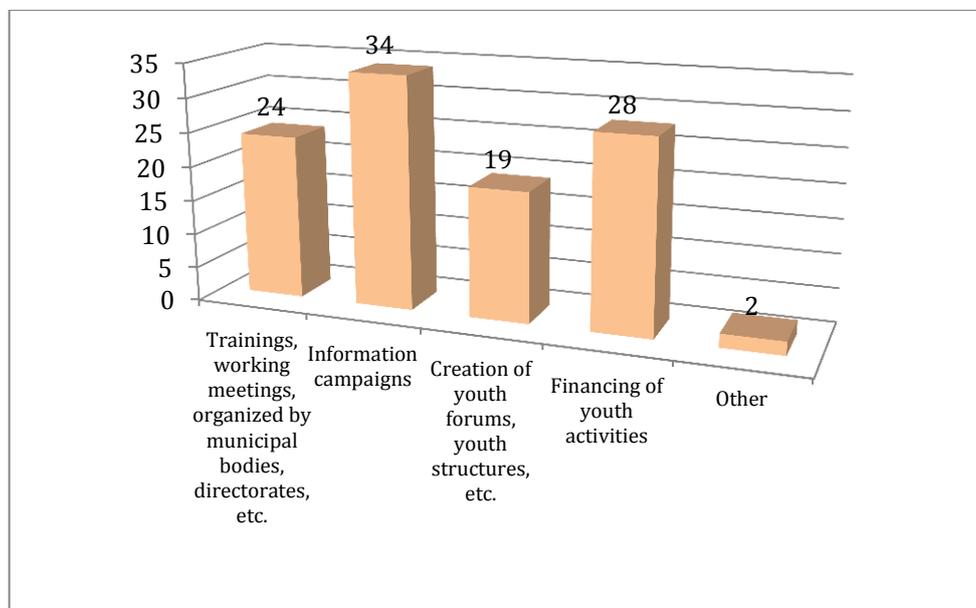


### 3.1.3 Engaging Youth in the Climate and Energy Planning Process

The young people were asked the mechanisms they know about youth engagement in the local planning process. The majority of them (34 people or 31,8%) addressed the information campaigns organized by the municipality as the most common and most popular among them. 28 people or 26,1% consider the involvement of youth in activities financed by the



municipality are also a positive approach of youth engagement. 24 young people address trainings and working meetings as an important tool for youth engagement and 19 (6,72%) consider youth forums and youth structures as an asset to the purpose.



Among the most important topics youth care about are summarized as follows:

- Monitoring and control on pollution in urban areas
- Reduction of plastic bags, plastic packages and use of eco-friendly ones
- Separate waste collection
- Cleaning actions and campaign on beaches
- Green actions: reduction of over building actions thus saving the trees
- More use of public transport in urban areas than private cars
- Interactions between the local authority and the young people mainly through the social media

### 3.2 Topics youth care about

#### Climate Change as a security threat

99% of the youth identified climate change as a global security threat which mostly affect the local and energy planning.

Younger generations are more likely to suffer the effects of bad planning and weak policy decisions.



## **Climate Change mitigation in the municipality**

The youth care about the future of the Earth, the clean environment they live in and keeping the clean air as much as possible. Keeping four seasons all year round is also a pre-condition for the clean environment and protection of the Earth. This is complemented by the mitigation measures the municipality is focusing on at the local level. Among the core actions proposed are the organization of start-up contests targeted to youth who wish to implement project related to energy. In addition seminars and competitions on similar topics should be organized and visibility of the actions to be ensured.

## **Transportation and mobility**

Varna is a big city where the traffic harms the urban air at most and targeted actions shall be undertaken. The young people propose various initiatives to be organized such as: Day without cars, Day of the public transport, etc. to stress on the importance to live in a pollution free environment.

## **Sustainable Lifestyle**

Among the topics related with the sustainable lifestyle is the improvement of energy policy pursued by the municipality, more specifically to remove the use of solid fuels for domestic purposes.

## **Waste Management**

It was proposed external activities such as outdoor actions and activities complementing the school curricula to be initiated by the school boards in cooperation with the municipalities. For example: information campaigns for separate waste collection, recycling and reuse of domestic waste.

## **City Environment**

The young people consider that working mechanisms for the improvement of the city environment would be the creation of youth working committees within the municipal administration to work more closely with the municipal administration. More concrete information on youth activities shall be presented by the responsible youth departments to involve more actively the youth structures working with people.



### 3.3 Barriers to youth engagement

The Youth Intervention Team has asked their peers what barriers prevented them from becoming engaged in the local energy and climate planning processes and discussions. According to their research, the main barriers to engagement by youth are the following:

#### **Communication**

Most of the youth consider that insufficient information is provided for the successful measures and practices realized by the municipality. This would be improved mainly through the social media channels.

According to the youth communication is the most important tool for information.

#### **Cooperation**

Cooperation is related with the insufficient communication and lack of joint initiatives on a regular basis. Such information is provided on specific occasions, celebrations, but not regularly. The level of the involvement of young people in the municipal actions is insufficient. Therefore more interactions between the local authority and the school boards, the youth operating structures, organizations, etc. shall be ensured.

#### **Relevance**

The young people identify the information is not properly presented and/or targeted to the specific target group, yet it is not oriented toward the local community. The majority of youngsters need participatory activities, such as information campaigns and interactive events, gaming and active training activities, where the information from the municipal administration is freely accessible and meetings with the relevant decision makers are possible. A positive asset to the purpose would be the participation to contests and or the organization of competitions for generating good ideas. Some of the young people are very confident that they can influence on the energy and climate actions for example as “using sustainable transport, ride bicycle, use public transport, etc. by the local residents”.

#### **Attitude**

Personal attitude is a core perception as defined by the youth. Often young people do not have time for participation in activities due to personal engagement, other duties, etc. An option would be financing of such activities rather than mere volunteering. Additional funding of climate related initiatives should be provided especially when involving youth in public participation.



## 4 Evaluation of the overall process

### 4.1 Evaluation of the research

Overall the research process was very successful as it has reached many young people through various communication channels e.g. has passed the threshold set by the project of 100 people.

There are more young people now who are aware of the local community actions, local policy development and implementation. Moreover, most of them stated their readiness and willingness to cooperate the local authority in the process of defining and searching for innovative ideas and actions on environment protection, waste management, efficient use of resources, etc. They are more aware of the mechanisms on how to participate and how to stay their voice heard and how to propose solutions.

The young people got acquainted with a lot of initiatives and actions realized by the municipality so the level of knowledge and awareness has been raised to a significant extent.

During the last few months the biggest climate change was affected not by people but a single virus which provoke the social distance, the misuse of communication and therefore the pollution has undoubtedly decreased.

### 4.2 Learning aspects (including case studies)

The project team was able to get a feedback on the needs and preferences and the problems youth care about when it comes to local climate and energy planning. A social outcome of the process where youth met other youth was to get to know each other, to communicate, to accumulate and share additional information, ideas and viewpoints.

It was strongly recommended that the green activities shall be tackled especially in urban areas where the local community plays an important role through keeping solutions, protection and preservation.

Waste management is another important topic as Varna is a marine city and the more clean are the beaches and the sea, the better representation will be made and the more popular it will become and the more tourists and guests will be attracted.

Innovations and digital solutions stay as an outstanding pillar in the present time as the social media and digitalization is a leading environment. This is also complemented by the COVID situation where the social interaction was entrusted the biggest share and the most efficient way of communication. It was made feasible that collaboration is a pivotal for the successful results and achievements. Based on the assumptions during the research process the following spheres were identified as core dimensions:

1. Green activities
2. Waste management & monitoring
3. Innovations & digital solutions