

YOUTH AND ENVIROMENTAL CHALLENGES

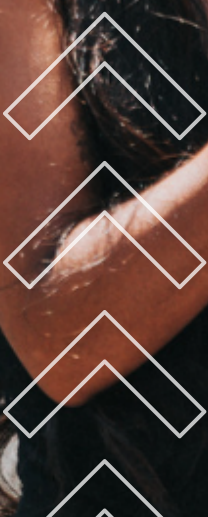


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"Empowering a Greater Future, Rising as One"

United Rising (UR) is an organization fostering collaboration toward the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants from a holistic point of view.





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“I feel scared for the future of our planet ... I feel powerless, sometimes I wish it was a higher priority for everyone”



Preamble

The “Youth & Environmental Challenges” initiative represents a gateway to topics that deeply resonate with United Rising - connecting with us on a profoundly personal level. As these quotes illustrate, individuals often deal with feelings of fear and a sense of powerlessness when facing environmental challenges. Simultaneously, a significant number of young individuals are actively engaged in climate movements, taking individual actions, and expressing a strong desire to make a difference. Therefore, in launching this new project we aim to delve into this subject that is intimately tied to our personal experiences - aiming to address the questions and meet the needs we experience within ourselves and in the world around us.

Our objective is to encompass a wide and adaptable spectrum of initiatives that holistically tackle the relation between young individuals and environmental challenges. We primarily target youth in the age range of 18 to 30 years old—the demographic embarking on their journey into adulthood. The Youth and Environmental Challenges project intends to be a non-discriminatory initiative, in which young individuals from different nationalities and backgrounds can feel represented, find a space to be heard and unload their worries and thoughts on this complex topic. Indeed, United Rising recognizes that as per now it operates mainly within academic environments and is active in projects involving university students or newly graduated. As a result, currently, the outcomes of its initiatives may not fully represent the intersectionality of all young adults within the specified age range.

Nevertheless, we encourage you to perceive this initiative as an unwavering commitment by United Rising to create a nurturing space for personal growth, community development, and educational opportunities for all young individuals who feel invested in this topic - in the hope of offering a safe space where the concerns of youth can be given voice and be acknowledged.

Our Purpose

In a society where environmental challenges are evident and demand our immediate attention, a growing number of young individuals recognize the urgency of our situation. Despite the complex and pressing environmental and sustainable crisis we face, more young communities and individuals mobilize - striving to envision a future that embraces solutions and positive change. Within the same reality, they grapple with the reality that they currently lack control of their destiny in this precarious context.

The purpose of the “Youth and Environmental Challenge” initiative is to explore youth's desire for the rise of environmental change-making initiatives on one side, and acknowledge a sense of overwhelm and disempowerment on the other. Therefore, our objective is to unravel the emotional and social dynamic, as well as the legal and political framework with the European Union, which shapes and influences youth's relationship with environmental challenges. Ultimately, our aim is to comprehensively tackle both dimensions, acknowledging the intricate web of feelings that today's youth is faced with.



Germain Dartagnat - Youth Activist in DRC

A. THE POLICY ARENA

Legislation and policies are paramount tools that shape society and carry a fundamental responsibility to efficiently tackle our contemporary challenges. This is particularly relevant, in most of the affluent regions of the world - holding significant responsibility for the environmental challenges we face.

This project focuses on the policies and legislative tools currently deployed in the European Union. More specifically, it aims to assess to what extent these instruments effectively foster the youth's sense of empowerment and enhance their chance to make a change in the present crisis.

European legislation represents a pivotal tool for establishing uniform standards and coherent policies across diverse Member States. Therefore, it is within this framework that we undertake an evaluative scrutiny of the existing measures designed to nurture youthful leadership in addressing environmental challenges. The purpose is to discern areas of efficiencies within these measures, and scope for improvement on a legal and practical level.



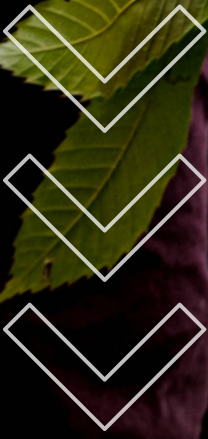
B. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SPHERE

Social and emotional factors have a profound influence on how young individuals perceive and respond to the challenges posed by climate change. The purpose of this initiative is to deep dive into various dynamics that shape the way youth react to environmental challenges.

ECO-ANXIETY

One prevalent manifestation that youth experience is eco-anxiety, a recurring emotional response stemming from the profound fear of witnessing the seemingly irreversible impacts of climate change and the consequential apprehension about the future—both for themselves and subsequent generations. Notably, eco-anxiety affects individuals to varying degrees, particularly those acutely aware of environmental preservation.

United Rising's impetus to confront this pressing challenge is rooted in extensive research. Engaging with students from Utrecht University has provided invaluable insights. Despite their academic prowess, these individuals expressed a profound sense of disempowerment and doubt in their ability to position themselves effectively as conscientious contributors to environmental mitigation. Their awareness of the potential role they could play in advancing society was juxtaposed by a prevailing sentiment of fear and confusion—a testament to the imperative of our initiative.



“I feel that it is such a huge and scary topic that really bothers me. I personally feel more at ease with the thought of **not having kids since then I don’t have to worry about the future conditions they will have to live in.”**

BLAMING AND SHAMING

A recurring attitude, particularly prevalent among the youth, is what can be termed as "blame-shaming" in the context of environmental challenges. Instead of delving into the root problem, individuals tend to point fingers at allegedly unsustainable practices.

Factors such as education, capitalism, media, and social background have shaped individuals who also engage in harmful practices such as overconsumption, excessive waste and irresponsible resource management. Parallely, It's essential to recognize that approximately 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions can be traced back to just 100 fossil fuel producers. Despite this glaring fact, there is a tendency to shift the blame to individuals who contribute to environmental challenges on a significantly smaller scale. Indeed, rather than addressing the underlying issues, we often engage in a cycle of blaming one another for actions that are part of a larger, complex web of unsustainable behaviours. This approach contradicts the idea of fostering responsibility and understanding, leading to resistance in cultivating consciousness and more aligned practices with our contemporary challenges.



Ultimately, instead of addressing the root cause of these negative attitudes, we only scratch the surface, dealing with the effects and inadvertently causing more harm and inefficiency. Here lies the importance of the "Youth & Environmental Challenges" initiative - underscored by the necessity to empower individuals to see the bigger picture, understand the implications of blame-shifting, and analyze its counterproductive effects critically.

“I am scared. And at the same time I feel a little disillusioned at the moment. I have put a lot of energy and time in the climate movements but it feels so hard to address the **scope and root of the problem”**



THE UNSUSTAINABLE NARRATIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY

As a consequence of the blame-shaming dynamic, the fundamental message of sustainability has been diluted, often being used to fuel one's social status. Unfortunately, a significant portion of young individuals in Western society draws their motivation from a place of self-promotion, seeking to cultivate a specific image.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by media portraying a new trend of "sustainable" consumption, encouraging individuals to purchase "sustainable" products. However, the current trend of making sustainability fashionable and trendy has led to unintended consequences. While the demand for sustainable products has increased, it has paradoxically fueled consumption - resulting in more waste. In a nutshell, what was initially a positive shift in perception has now given rise to behaviours that run counter to the core principles of sustainability.

While the surface question revolves around what we buy, the deeper issue lies in the fact that we are buying and satisfying artificial needs, perpetuating consumerism and waste. Products labelled as "eco-friendly" exploit this dynamic, perpetuating new forms of consumerism, which further distorts and misrepresents the essence of sustainability. As a matter of fact, youth, in particular, is targeted by such marketing tactics. Ultimately, this reinforcement of a strong sense of "ego" and detachment from the true essence of empowerment hinders the youth's potential as present and future leaders in addressing environmental challenges.

What are the objectives?

The objective of this project is threefold. Our first aim is to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities for young generations when they engage with environmental challenges. We want to gain insights into the culture of 'shaming and blaming' and its effects on youth's relation to environmental challenges. In addition, our aim is to understand how youth can be empowered to take meaningful action, for instance by looking for successful examples of Youth Empowerment. Lastly, we identify and evaluate European strategies to empower young people to become environmental changemakers.



“Let's destroy capitalism, not the planet “

EXPLORE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

In our exploration of youth empowerment, we delve into the strategies young individuals employ to challenge established power structures, encompassing both social and institutional systems. By thoroughly investigating the methods through which youth resist and understanding the perceived effects of this resistance, we aim to deeply engage with the theme of youth empowerment.

We acknowledge that youth empowerment and the relationship of young generations with climate issues vary significantly from country to country and even within countries, shaped by diverse socioeconomic contexts. Therefore, we recognize that this topic has a strong intersectional nature and necessitates a tailored approach. For the scope of this project, UR will focus on the European context. More specifically, we will interact mainly with young people in The Netherlands.

HARVESTING YOUTH EXPERIENCES

United Rising approaches this topic from both macro and micro perspectives. At the micro level, we explore youth empowerment through the harvesting of experiences from young people. We aim to create an environment for discussing experiences around youth and environmental challenges. While deepening our understanding of the topic, we aim to facilitate constructive dialogues that are both productive and meaningful for us as hosts and for the participants. Ultimately, this contributes to empowerment and fosters impactful action.

LEGAL AND POLICY RESEARCH

Lastly, we conduct research to identify European policies and instruments designed to empower youth to take climate action. The purpose is to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of these measures. Moreover, we aim to understand how education contributes to youth empowerment by answering questions such as “Is the current education in line with nowadays’ challenges” and “are schools empowering students with the necessary skills to approach environmental issues?”. Amongst the relevant tools that are to be assessed is the European Youth Strategy, which establishes a framework for empowering and supporting young European citizens between 2019 and 2027. This plan is being implemented via different tools, such as Future National Activities Planners, the 11 European Youth Goals and the EU Youth Dialogue.



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Implementation

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

United Rising believes that the widespread feeling of disempowerment and eco-anxiety caused by the status quo of the environmental crisis can be challenged by a collective action, whereby young individuals would not feel alone in fighting this battle. Therefore, we aim to engage with different local communities and stakeholders, who share our vision and mission and want to foster youth empowerment.

CREATION OF "SAFE SPACES" WITH THE AIM OF WELCOMING A DIALOGUE ON THE THEME AND OFFERING YOUNG INDIVIDUALS THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING HEARD

One of the core goals of our initiatives is to foster the power held by youth in actively and meaningfully changing the current environmental challenges. However, as noted above, young individuals often do not feel heard and understood. By hosting safe dialogues, United Rising aims to combat the taboos on this topic and instead engage in significant and productive conversations, by sharing different points of view and a collective net of support.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Education is central to achieving this project's objectives, as it represents one of the most powerful tools to spear awareness and increase youth empowerment. For such reasons, within this project, United Rising commits to fostering education on sustainability to the new generations - such as university students, by engaging with professors, experts and relevant figures in this field.

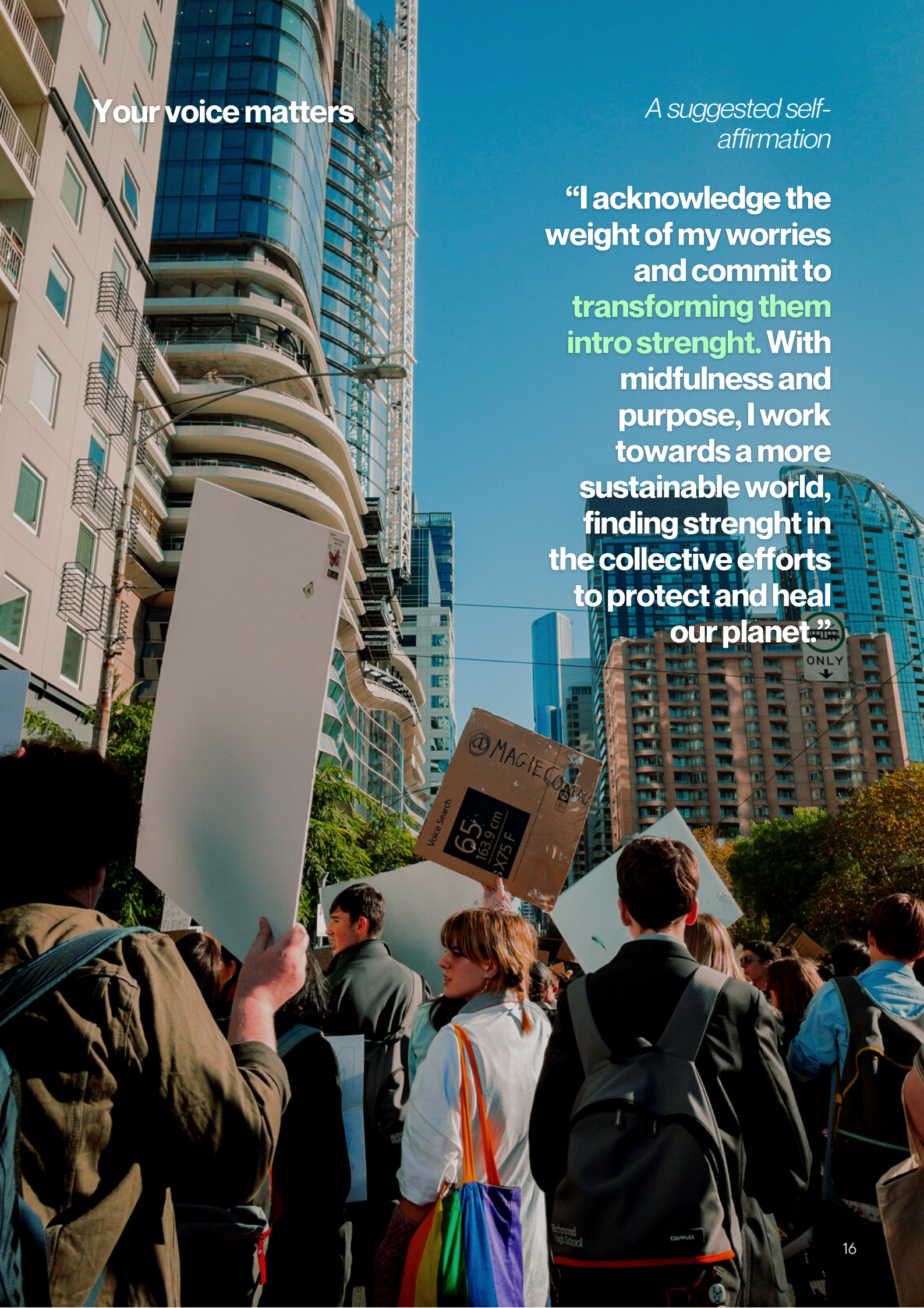
ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT POLICY TOOLS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, BOTH THROUGH THEORETICAL/ACADEMIC STUDIES AND EMPIRICAL STUDIES

In order to holistically approach the interrelation between youth and their empowerment towards environmental challenges, UR is engaged in an analysis of the current legal and policy framework. This goal is achieved through different methods, such as academic and theoretical research but also empirical studies - where the voice of young individuals will help us assess the effectiveness of the measures.

Your voice matters

A suggested self-affirmation

“I acknowledge the weight of my worries and commit to transforming them into strength. With mindfulness and purpose, I work towards a more sustainable world, finding strength in the collective efforts to protect and heal our planet.”





United Rising



For ongoing updates, support, and active participation in our collective efforts toward building a more sustainable world, we invite you to visit our website and connect with us on social media.

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