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Europe, the fastest-warming continent: accelerating climate action with young people

Report[1]
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Rapporteur: Ms Aurora FLORIDIA, Italy, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

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1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 5000 of 28 September 2026.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has established that human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), have unequivocally caused global warming. Since its first assessment report in 1990, the IPCC's conclusions on this causal link have become increasingly confident. By adopting the Paris Agreement in 2015, States committed themselves to keeping the increase in the global average temperature below 2°C and to pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In 2023, the IPCC established that this threshold was expected to be reached as early as the beginning of the 2030s, even under scenarios involving substantial reductions in emissions, and that warming could reach 3.2°C by 2100 if the current trajectory were maintained. Yet in the face of this clear prognosis, GHG emissions continue to rise.. On 2 September 2026, the United Nations Environment Programme announced that warming would not be halted before reaching 1.5°C and that the overshoot of 1.5°C would henceforth have to be managed.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly asserts that this overshoot must not be treated as insignificant: 3°C is not simply a worsening of the climate, but a shift towards a world marked by extreme heatwaves, massive pressures on water, food, insurance, infrastructure, etc. Nor can it be interpreted as rendering obsolete the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. On the contrary, it requires the right economic, social and democratic questions to be asked, and emissions to be reduced immediately in order to limit the scale and duration of the overshoot. Present action must not be deferred by relying on the uncertain promise that the carbon emitted today could be removed from the atmosphere tomorrow. A possible return below the 1.5°C threshold can neither erase the damage caused while that threshold was exceeded nor serve as a climate policy.

3. The summer of 2026 confirmed it: Europe is experiencing the effects of global warming more intensely than other continents. The World Meteorological Organization and the European Union's Earth observation programme – Copernicus – report that over the past thirty years, the continent has warmed by around 0.56°C per decade, more than twice as fast as the global average, and its temperature is already around 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The summer of 2026 was the third hottest ever recorded in Europe and the hottest on record in Western Europe, with an average temperature 2.54°C above the 1991–2020 average, compared with 1.34°C higher in 2022 and 1.54°C higher in 2024. By the end of July 2026, half of the European Union and United Kingdom was affected by drought; Europe's four major rivers – the Loire, Po, Rhine and Danube – had reached exceptionally low levels, and more than 500 000 hectares of land had been burnt in wildfires by August 2026.

4. The Assembly joins its voice to that of the scientific community in warning member States: the climate change is destroying the conditions in which all forms of life, including humans, can thrive, and thus poses a direct threat to the planet's habitability. The Assembly calls for the concept of habitability to be placed front and centre in European climate action, as a non-negotiable value on which all others must rest. For the habitability of the planet is the primary condition for life and thus the starting point and the heart of all other human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163). Without a liveable climate, accessible water, clean air, and working ecosystems, human rights and the freedoms and dignity they rely on are merely abstract concepts.

5. Climate change kills. It undermines livelihoods and exacerbates vulnerabilities and inequalities. The 2026 Lancet Countdown report puts the number of heat-related deaths in Europe in 2024 at 62 000 and notes an increase in such deaths in 99.6% of the regions monitored. Between 2015 and 2024, heatwave exposure among infants and elderly persons increased by 121% and 266% respectively compared with the period 1991–2000. This is compounded by the fact that, in all member States, the adverse effects on health and living conditions caused by climate change are concentrated among those least able to protect themselves.

6. The negative economic impacts attributable to climate change in the member States are now visible and quantifiable. In the European Union, extreme weather events have caused losses totalling 822 billion euros since 1980, including €208 billion over the period 2021-2024 alone. These figures do not include productivity losses, healthcare expenditure and other indirect costs. According to the European Climate Risk Assessment, annual losses could reach 2.2% of GDP by the year 2070 and a quarter of EU regions could experience GDP losses greater than 5%, even if global warming is limited to +1.5°C. Warming of around 4°C could reduce global GDP by 10–23% by 2100, compared with a scenario in which no further warming occurs.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 28 September 2026.

7. Young people are uniquely vulnerable here: they have contributed little to cumulated emissions yet will suffer the consequences throughout their lives. Among them, girls and young women may be particularly vulnerable when climate change deepens existing inequalities: it can undermine their access to education, resources and healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, and increase their exposure to violence. This injustice also extends across generations. A child born in 2020 will be 80 years old in 2100: for them, the end of the century is not an abstract horizon, but an entire lifetime. According to the IPCC, they will experience a near five-fold increase in extreme weather events under a 3°C global warming scenario. This vulnerability is not only a future concern: in Europe, approximately 43% of schools are located in urban heat islands, where the average temperature is at least 2°C higher than in the surrounding areas. Young people will have to cope with the impacts on their health, livelihoods and personal development, while also funding adaptation measures and attempting to repair the damage that delayed action will have exacerbated.

8. Yet Europe does have a genuine capacity for action. Recent studies estimate that, even if other regions of the world were not to step up their efforts, reducing European emissions would cost less than the damage to our continent that inaction would entail. Insufficient global action is therefore no justification for a European wait-and-see approach. The decisions taken today will have a very tangible impact on the quality of life on the continent for the remainder of the lives of young people today and the generations to come. Intergenerational equity demands that those who currently hold the power to decide and act in our European countries do not pass on the burden of risks, damage and reparations to their children.

9. The Assembly is convinced that young people's creativity, dynamism, social engagement and skills must be mobilised to address climate change. This does not mean tokenistic consultations without any genuine follow-up. Young people should participate in setting priorities and making trade-offs, including choices concerning the economic, tax and financial frameworks that shape incentives and investment decisions. In particular, they should be involved in defining the criteria governing public support, so that such support ceases to favour activities harmful to the climate and ecosystems and instead encourages low-emission and resource-efficient models, the circular economy, biodiversity protection and sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives led by young people.

10. In its Resolution 2553 (2024) "Strengthening the youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly" reaffirmed in Resolution 2639 (2026) "Strengthening democracies with young people: from participation to shared responsibility" the Assembly committed to integrate a youth perspective into the follow-up to its work. Youth involvement in its work on the environment and climate crisis is essential.

11. The Assembly underlines moreover the importance of the Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, which provide a useful framework for addressing the long-term effects of public decisions, the representation of future generations and intergenerational equity in climate action.

12. The Assembly welcomes the adoption of Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action, the first international instrument specifically dedicated to this issue. It invites member States to implement it fully and without delay. In order to make it an effective lever for accelerating climate action, it calls on them in particular to:

12.1. enshrine in their laws and climate plans ambitious overall and intermediate targets that are compatible with human rights and accompanied by deadlines, monitoring, corrective measures and an assessment of their effects on young people and future generations, in order to ensure an equitable distribution of efforts between generations;

12.2. establish permanent mechanisms enabling young people in all their diversity, while ensuring in particular the effective participation of girls and young women, to contribute to the formulation, arbitration and monitoring of climate policies, including their economic, tax and financial dimensions, with a clear mandate, sufficient resources and an obligation for the authorities to respond publicly to their proposals;

12.3. include youth delegates, with appropriate status, training and resources, in national delegations participating in European and international climate negotiations, and to report publicly on their contribution;

12.4. establish, at national, regional and local levels, participatory budgets and multi-annual funds enabling young people and youth organisations to design, select and implement projects for mitigation, adaptation and nature restoration, while ensuring that small organisations and informal groups have access to this funding;

12.5. equip all young people with the knowledge and skills they need to understand climate choices, counter misinformation and greenwashing, and take part in collective action, through schooling, vocational training, higher education, non-formal learning and youth work, as well as through equitable access to reliable and accessible information, while ensuring that curricula, textbooks, teaching resources and information materials provide scientifically accurate, up-to-date information tailored to young people's ages and needs;

12.6. develop paid pathways to quality jobs in sectors essential for reducing GHG emissions and for society's adaptation to the effects of climate change, and to ensure that climate policies do not exacerbate precarity among young people, particularly in terms of access to housing, energy, food and mobility;

12.7. prevent and address the effects of climate change on young people's physical and mental health, particularly eco-anxiety, through accessible and tailored services, while strengthening their capacity to take collective action;

12.8. prevent the discrimination that young people face related to climate change, to pay special attention to young people who are vulnerable or marginalised, especially those exposed to multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, and to ensure that climate policies are based on the principles of climate justice, fairness, and intergenerational solidarity;

12.9. ensure protection of young environmental defenders against threats, excessive surveillance, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), disproportionate use of force and any undue restriction of their freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association;

12.10. provide local and regional authorities with the necessary powers and resources to work with young people to develop local mitigation and adaptation policies, and to make schools, universities, youth centres and other essential services resilient to climate risks.

13. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to carry out an annual review of the implementation of climate commitments. This review should take the form of a public debate involving young people in all their diversity, during which the government would report on the gap between the targets set and the results achieved, the public and private funding mobilised and the corrective action proposed.

14. Lastly, the Assembly calls on those member States which have not yet done so to recognise at national level the right to a healthy environment and to support, within the Council of Europe, the drafting of a legally binding instrument guaranteeing this right as a standalone one, with particular regard to the rights of young people and future generations.

B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution… (2026) "Europe, the fastest-warming continent: accelerating climate action with young people". It notes that the habitability of the planet is the primary condition for the values of freedom and dignity enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) and that the decisions taken today will determine this habitability throughout the lives of present and future generations.

2. The Assembly welcomes Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action, the first international instrument specifically dedicated to this issue. The recommendation establishes an essential framework for protecting young people's rights, supporting their action and ensuring their effective participation in climate decisions. It is now time to accelerate and make visible its implementation across all member States.

3. The Assembly stresses that every delay in climate action shifts an increasing share of the risks, harm and effort required onto today's young people and future generations. In this regard, the judgment in *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* is particularly significant: the European Court of Human Rights recognised the need for a fair distribution of the burden between generations and for immediate action to avoid placing a disproportionate burden on future generations. The judgment makes clear that compliance with the obligations arising from the European Convention on Human Rights cannot be reduced to setting climate targets. It requires an effective framework, a pathway with interim targets and verifiable deadlines, the quantification of national emissions limits through a carbon budget or an equivalent method, and concrete measures to ensure that emissions are actually reduced.

4. The Assembly also welcomes the adoption of the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment (2025-2030) and its Action Plan, which follow up on the commitments made by Heads of State and Government in the Reykjavík Declaration and help implement the Reykjavík process on environment and human rights. It considers that their implementation provides an opportunity to embed the youth perspective and intergenerational equity permanently in the Organisation's work.

5. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

5.1. organise, before the five-yearly review scheduled for 2029, a mid-term review of the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2024)6, based on common indicators, information provided by States and independent contributions from national youth councils, youth organisations and young environmental defenders, and publish the results and any best practices identified;

5.2. supplement the Action Plan related to the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment (2025–2030) with an initiative on futures literacy and intergenerational justice, drawing on the methods developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on intergenerational governance and the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations, and adapting them to the Council of Europe's needs;

5.3. make the supervision of the execution of the judgment *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* an opportunity to ensure exemplary execution in full compliance with the positive obligations identified by the European Court of Human Rights, based on the adoption of an ambitious carbon budget accompanied by binding intermediate targets, as well as on a mechanism endowed with sufficient resources and genuine supervisory powers; such execution should be guided by the protection of the rights of young people and by the need to avoid placing a disproportionate burden on future generations;

5.4. without further delay, begin drafting of a legally binding instrument recognising, at Council of Europe level, the autonomous right to a healthy environment, guaranteeing substantive and procedural rights, giving due consideration to present and future generations and providing for an independent monitoring mechanism to which civil society and young people can contribute;

5.5. strengthen the ambition, transparency and exemplary nature of the Council of Europe's internal approach to reducing its carbon footprint, by publishing annually its carbon footprint, the progress made in relation to its trajectory and the implementation of its action plan, by explaining any deviations and adopting the necessary corrective measures, and involve the Advisory Council on Youth in this monitoring.

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3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 28 September 2026.

6. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers recognise that armed conflicts and environmental destruction can significantly increase climate vulnerability and have long-term consequences for young people and future generations, and ensure that climate resilience, environmental restoration and reconstruction policies take into account their rights, needs and interests.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Aurora Floridia, rapporteur[4]

1. In preparing this report, the rapporteur sought to follow up on the commitment made in Resolution 2553 (2024) "Strengthening the youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly" to hold an annual thematic debate with the participation of the Advisory Council on Youth, a commitment reaffirmed in Resolution 2639 (2026) "Strengthening democracies with young people: from participation to shared responsibility". She therefore took care to involve youth representatives in the preparation of this report and in its debate in the plenary session.

2. The climate emergency is no longer a projection: it is a scientifically established reality and one that Europeans are experiencing at first hand. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has unequivocally demonstrated the role of human activities in global warming and warned that every additional fraction of a degree increases the risks. Its findings have been confirmed and clarified in relation to Europe by the World Meteorological Organization, the European Union's Copernicus programme and numerous other studies. The continent is warming by 0.56°C per decade – more than twice as fast as the global average – and its temperature is already around 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The summer of 2026 – the third hottest ever recorded in Europe and the hottest in Western Europe – saw deadly heatwaves, droughts affecting half of the European Union and the United Kingdom, exceptionally low water levels in major rivers and more than 500 000 hectares ravaged by wildfires. The economic arguments are no less compelling: extreme weather events have already caused €822 billion in losses across the European Union since 1980, including €208 billion between 2021 and 2024, not to mention healthcare costs and productivity losses. The data cited in the GIEC report all point to the same conclusion: inaction will cost far more than action, whereas reducing emissions has the potential to yield substantial economic and health benefits. Taking action on climate change is not only a scientific and humanitarian imperative, therefore; it is also the economically responsible choice.

3. To articulate what is at stake today, it is proposed that the Assembly embrace the concept of habitability.[5] Habitability does not merely refer to the ability of human beings to survive in a given environment: it is based on the interdependent relationships through which the diversity of life produces and sustains the conditions enabling all forms of life, including humanity, to exist, thrive and reproduce. Human societies are not separate from the biosphere therefore, but rather dependent on its health. Just as freedom and dignity have become core values in the protection of the human person, so habitability must become a core value of European climate action, enabling decisions to be assessed in terms of their impact on living conditions, both today and in the long term.

4. Young people must not be regarded solely as a vulnerable group or as the future beneficiaries of climate action. Their knowledge, experience and capacity for mobilisation must contribute, as of today, to the design, negotiation and monitoring of public policies. Building on Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action, the draft resolution proposes making their participation permanent and effective, supporting their initiatives, giving them access to knowledge, skills and quality jobs, protecting young environmental defenders, ensuring respect for their rights, and preventing climate change from negatively impacting their living conditions and their physical and mental health.

5. The rapporteur attaches particular importance to ensuring that this participation encompasses the economic choices that determine, in practical terms, the manner and pace of the climate transition. In her view, it is important that economic incentives and public support cease to favour activities that are harmful to the climate and ecosystems and instead encourage companies that effectively reduce their emissions, preserve resources and biodiversity, develop the circular economy or commit to a measurable transition towards sustainable models.[6] Attention should be paid to young people's entrepreneurial initiatives and to businesses created around these objectives. The gradual phasing out of ineffective fossil fuel subsidies would free up resources to support these initiatives.

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4. This explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
5. B. Morizot and L. Neyret, "Liberté, dignité, habitabilité. Donner au siècle la valeur qui lui manque", Gallimard, 2026.
6. OECD Publishing: "Tax Policy Reforms 2026: OECD and Selected Partner Economies"; "Effective Carbon Rates 2025: Recent Trends in Taxes on Energy Use and Carbon Pricing", OECD Series on Carbon Pricing and Energy Taxation; "Environment at a Glance Indicators; Scaling finance and investment for climate adaptation: Input paper for the G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group" (2025); "Inventory of Support Measures for Fossil Fuels 2025: Policy Trends"; Katarina Svatikova, Andrew Brown et Peter Börkey, "Economic instruments for a resource-efficient circular economy", OECD Environment Working Papers, No. 257, 2025.

6. The draft resolution and recommendation aim to ensure that climate action is sustainable and verifiable. They propose interim targets aligned with electoral terms of office, rather than merely distant deadlines, as well as regular parliamentary scrutiny and an assessment of the consequences for young people and future generations. The draft recommendation calls on the Committee of Ministers to use the monitoring of the execution of the *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* judgment as an opportunity to ensure that it is implemented in an exemplary manner, thereby giving substance to the positive obligations identified by the European Court of Human Rights and providing guidance to member States. However, the rapporteur points out that the indirect protection afforded by the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35 and ETS No. 163 (revised)) is not sufficient to remedy the absence, within the European Convention system, of an autonomous right to a healthy environment. While other regional human rights protection systems have already enshrined this right, it is time – as the Assembly has been calling for since 1999 – for the Council of Europe to fill this gap by commencing work without further delay on drafting a separate, legally binding instrument, guaranteeing substantive and procedural rights together with an independent monitoring mechanism.

7. Lastly, the rapporteur attaches great importance to the Council of Europe setting an example through its own operations. The Organisation already has a carbon footprint that is updated annually, a quantified emissions-reduction pathway and an action plan. The draft recommendation proposes strengthening this approach by incorporating the reduction pathway into decisions concerning buildings, travel, procurement, digital activities and events; publishing the results, any deviations and the corrective measures adopted; and involving the Advisory Council on Youth in monitoring them. The Council of Europe would thus demonstrate that youth participation, transparency and climate accountability must also guide the functioning of international organisations.

8. This report constitutes an initial policy response, one that is deliberately concise and action-oriented. It sets in motion a process that will be continued and explored in greater depth by Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova's (Ukraine, ALDE) report on "Climate action as a human and democratic responsibility". That report will examine more broadly the institutions, democratic safeguards and accountability mechanisms needed to drive long-term climate action, share the burden fairly, combat inequalities, ensure an informed public debate and hold public authorities and economic actors to account. The proposals set out here on youth participation, the long-term perspective, parliamentary scrutiny, intergenerational equity and the right to a healthy environment are intended to feed into this discussion and to be further developed in this second report and in the continuation of the Assembly's work on the urgent question of climate action.