

How to talk to people about climate action



#MyWorldOurPlanet
#EUClimatePact



This document has been co-created together with young people and EU Climate Pact Ambassadors as one outcome of the European Youth Event in Strasbourg 2021. This document should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

Foreword

How do you convince someone to take action on climate change? Given the urgency and seriousness of the climate crisis we need bold systemic changes and we all need to do our bit. But some people are more reluctant than others, and what you say to them really can make a difference!

Most young people realise that climate change is an existential problem, but some may not know what action they can take to address it, or may not be willing to do anything about it.

This toolkit helps you to explain and communicate climate action to your community. We present 6 common arguments people use to justify their inaction, along with suggestions on how you can respond to each of them. We also provide some tips on how to talk about climate change.

93% of young people in Europe think that climate change is a 'serious problem' (Eurobarometer, July 2021).

What can you say that might nudge your friends and peers into making a difference ?

It might be a challenging conversation, but just by speaking to a few friends and peers, you contribute to protecting our future on planet Earth. We hope this guide will help you understand why some people haven't yet taken climate action. Don't forget, our power comes from speaking up!

Although scientists have sounded increasingly dire warnings, they also say it's not too late to take action to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The more we do now and in the next years before 2030, the more likely we are to keep the global temperature rise to under 1.5°C, and namely keep climate change under control (e.g. slow Arctic and Antarctic ice melt, reduce the occurrence of extreme weather episodes like heatwaves and flooding, and prevent species decline).



“My life is busy enough already. I don't have time to read about or engage in climate issues.”



What you can say:

We all lead busy lives, but being informed about climate change and taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is important for your own future and that of your children and grandchildren. The science is compelling: data shows that our world is getting hotter, our weather is becoming increasingly extreme, and greenhouse gas emissions are continuing to rise. Climate change is affecting all of us – as evidenced, for example, by the extreme weather episodes in Europe in 2021, from floods in Belgium and Germany to forest fires in Greece.

We must act sufficiently now. Late action may be more costly in the long-term, and at one point it will likely be too late to make a difference. The crisis will hit us, and there won't be a vaccine available to fix it.

Everyone can incorporate learning about the climate into their everyday routine.

It can be as easy as listening to a podcast on the way to work or while you cook dinner, or following a few climate change experts on social media.

Are you already quite well informed, but don't have the time to act and don't want to sacrifice your lifestyle?

It only takes a **few seconds** to start making a difference: grab your reusable coffee cup instead of using a disposable one on your way to work; make sure you always have a reusable shopping bag stashed in your usual day bag; unplug your electronic devices when you are not using them; and 'like' climate action content on social media to stay informed and help spread the word.

In just a **few minutes**, you can research how to swap out polluting activities for greener ones: browse websites for second-hand clothes before buying new; find recipes to help you swap meat for vegetarian and plant-based meals; or look up whether you can travel by train instead of the plane when you next go on holiday, and make the journey part of the adventure.

You're not just doing this for the planet – it's for you too! Eating a plant-based diet is healthier for you and cycling to the shops is good exercise. Saving energy means saving money. And buying pre-loved clothes is also cheaper – and who knows what you might find!

“I don’t think it’s necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, because there will soon be a technological innovation that can stop global warming.”



What you can say:

With existing technologies, we can drastically reduce the levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, helping to keep climate change under control – think moving from burning fossil fuels to using renewable energy, such as solar panels and wind turbines.

It is also important to invest in research and development for new technologies that can help us achieve climate neutrality by 2050, for example, carbon removal and sequestration (a process that allows us to capture carbon from the air and safely store it in soil, foliage, or even the sea).

But we can't solely rely on new technology being developed to combat the climate crisis. Inventions like solar geoengineering may sound promising, but they take a long time to develop and involve many risks and unknowns. Betting on "miraculous" technology solutions, not knowing when they could be ready and with unknown consequences, would not be reasonable nor responsible.

If you're concerned about **global inequalities**, remember that technology is less likely to reach poorer people in developing countries, who are also more exposed to the dangers of climate change.

People living in poverty are more often reliant on material assets, such as housing or livestock, which can be easily damaged by the effects of climate change.

**“It’s not our role
as individuals
to make changes.
Governments
are responsible
for introducing
policies to address
climate change.”**



What you can say:

Governments do have a major responsibility to address climate change, and systemic changes are needed, which will affect the economy as a whole. These changes include updates to international and national legislation, and increased opportunities and investment in research and development to tackle the crisis.

In addition to regulatory action, citizens have also a role to play. Through their own actions and purchasing power, they can generate pressure on stakeholders and public authorities to take ambitious action. Keeping our planet habitable for generations to come is everyone's responsibility, and what each of us does has an impact.

If you feel it's the government's responsibility, then use your power to influence the politicians who represent you! By joining climate marches, writing to your local politicians, signing online petitions, joining the European Climate Pact movement, and making informed choices at the ballot box, you can tell decision-makers that fighting climate change matters.

***The European Climate Pact** is a movement of people each taking steps to build a more sustainable Europe for us all. The Pact is part of the **European Green Deal**, helping the EU to meet its goal to be the **first climate-neutral continent in the world** by 2050.*

On top of that, **your influence on society around you is bigger than you think.** Teenagers can persuade their parents to change, companies need to listen to consumers, investors are increasingly responsive to the green transition due to external pressure and accountability, and installing solar panels in your home might just encourage your neighbours to do the same.

Doing something on an individual level might also **benefit you directly.** For example, joining a project with a tangible impact, like a tree-planting scheme or litter-picking event, will allow you to see immediate results and connect with like-minded people.

“I don’t want to change my personal habits and lifestyle, because it wouldn’t have any impact compared to the big companies that are responsible for the majority of global emissions.”



What you can say:

In our globalised world, most of the things you buy – from food, clothes and energy for your home to your mobile phone contract – are connected to global supply chains and big companies. This means that what you choose to buy or not to buy influences the choices that big companies make – this is how market pressure works, and we have big power as consumers. For example, rising consumer awareness about unsustainable palm oil has pushed companies into sourcing sustainable alternatives, with many highlighting this on their packaging.

What items will you be buying soon?

If you need new clothes, think about where and how they're made and consider buying second-hand. Choose to buy local, seasonal produce, which will help to develop sustainable and fair value chains in Europe, rather than consuming products that may have linkages to deforested land around the world. Europe has global market power – if Europeans don't buy something, then businesses and countries in other parts of the world will be incentivised to change.

As with Argument 3, you can point out that doing something on an individual level might also **benefit people directly**.

“Climate action taken by European businesses and citizens will not have a significant impact on a global scale, because other countries that are responsible for the majority of emissions follow different regulations and have not made environmental commitments.”



What you can say:

While our share of global emissions has decreased over time – compared to other major emitters – there are still **plenty of polluting activities going on in Europe**. However, we know it is possible to decouple economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions, as the European Union has proven the case, and we are optimistic that the energy and climate transition will generate growth and jobs, while reducing our external dependency on fossil fuel imports.

We still have a long way to go towards climate neutrality by 2050.

The EU still generates over 2.6 million tons of carbon emissions each year? That's over 7% of the global total.

Moreover, Europe has a massive impact on emissions made outside the EU. What we buy – from food and clothes to toys and electrical goods – is connected to emissions and the destruction of nature in other parts of the world. Buying a new phone? Think about where it's made and consider buying second-hand or repairing your existing one first.

There are also **historical emissions** to think about – the total emissions by country since the industrial revolution began. It's no surprise that Europeans have been responsible for a lot of emissions over the past 250 years. Carbon dioxide also has enormous staying

power – so the emissions from coal we burned long ago are still in the atmosphere.

NASA estimates that carbon dioxide hangs around in our atmosphere for 300-1,000 years.

Europe is at the forefront of global climate action. The EU actively engages in climate diplomacy at UN COP climate change conferences, and it is a world leader in climate financing for developing countries that are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The EU has also set the ambitious goal of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

But Europe will not solve the climate challenge on its own, which is why it is now intensifying partnerships and close cooperation with strategic partners (G20 countries) to forge progressive coalitions and accelerate climate action and investments. All countries have committed to “nationally determined contributions” under the Paris Agreement – the challenge is now to have this fully implemented and strengthened. Europe stands ready to lead and to make sure that our partners will follow with similar ambition.

**"I already do enough
for the climate.
Why should I do more?"**



What you can say:

Even if you've already chosen to take smaller steps, there's still a huge opportunity for you to make a difference: remember that every extra tonne of emissions that you help to avoid is important.

Every tonne of CO2 emissions avoided saves three square metres of Arctic summer sea ice.

Taking climate action is in **our own interest** – it's an opportunity to take care of our own health, home and future, and the people and places we care about. It is also about addressing an **ethical problem**, because the people who will be most affected are the ones contributing the least to it: developing countries, people living in poverty, smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples and rural coastal populations. It is also a **generational problem** – we may not have to live through the worst impacts of climate change, but our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will.

An easy way of doing more is by talking to your family, friends and neighbours, spreading the word on social media, and considering how you could help bring about positive change in your school or university, workplace or other groups you belong to. Equally important is making your voice and expectations heard by local, regional, national and EU policy makers. You could also become a Climate Pact Ambassador and become active in your local community.



Tips on how to talk to people

- 1 Rely on facts and science to start with.** Follow the work of scientists working for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); read their reports on climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for reducing the rate at which climate change is taking place; and follow reliable media sources.
- 2 Keep it human.** Has your area experienced flooding, heatwaves, droughts or forest fires recently? The chances are that more climate disasters – like the ones experienced across Europe and the wider world in recent years – are not that far away in time or distance. These disasters have human consequences and affect the lives of real people, so remind people that global warming is making these catastrophes worse and bringing them closer to home.
- 3 Keep it real.** Give real-life examples of easy things that you and those around you can do for the planet. We are all influenced by others, so try to frame climate action as a movement that people are really involved in, and that they shouldn't miss out on.
- 4 Do motivate.** Don't finger-point. Instead of saying, 'You shouldn't drive so much', invite others to walk to the train station with you in the morning and get some exercise. Or highlight the cost savings of consuming less energy at home. It's important to think of ways to talk about climate action positively, but also to show people there are other benefits too.
- 5 Stay open-minded.** Always try to put yourself in the other person's shoes – some forms of climate action are not achievable for everyone.
- 6 Suggest a follow-up chat.** If someone seems keen to know more, or if you don't have the answer to one of their questions then and there, suggest you get together for a coffee to discuss things further. Or you could take the time to research their question and email them more information about it. And above all, keep it friendly – we're all in this together. If one conversation isn't working out, end it for the time being and think about returning to it another time.

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