

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe aisbl



Policy Paper of the European Ecumenical Youth for the Respect for the Integrity of Creation

Our Perception

We, the European ecumenical youth, can see an urgent need for the active respect for the integrity of Creation since we do not believe that the Creation is being treated appropriately. Modern way of life based on overconsumption and the paradigm of unlimited growth, both common aspects of our western civilisation, have been affecting the planet too seriously. Pollution, resource depletions, deforestation, species extinction and climate change are only some of many harmful consequences we are concerned about.

Therefore, our society's desire to have more, together with an inadequate protection of nature inevitably leads to compromising the means of our own children, as well as those people who are suffering harmful ecological consequences of our actions already now.

Our Motivation

When Jesus was tested and asked "what is the most important commandment", he referred to the Hebrew Bible: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, "Love your neighbour as yourself." (*Dtn 6, 5; Lev. 19, 18*). The Gospel of Luke explores the subject further and asks "Who is this neighbour" and the following Parable of the Good Samaritan concludes "The one who had mercy". (*Lk 10, 25--37*)

God's Creation shows mercy on us every day. It is the air we need to breath and the earth we need to walk on. We take our nourishments entirely from her along with all the other resources for our lives. We, along with our past, present and future neighbours, are absolutely dependent on God's merciful gift: The Creation we are supposed to govern. (*Gen 1, 28*)

Based on this reflection of the Scripture, we firmly believe in the need of a conservation of the environment as it is a gift of God. Moreover, we are convinced that people should treat the environment with modesty, as we feel solidarity with people affected by climate change and the depletion of resources, as well as with the future generations.

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Our Proposal

The future poses numerous challenges related to ecological justice ahead of us. We will have to face them and we need to become the agents of change. We propose several levels of involvement: personal level, civil society organisations and a larger interaction with politics.

Personal Level

The individual involvement is the most visible and the easiest to start. By positive attitudes not only the immediate surrounding can be influenced, but it also inspires others and by this magnifies the effects of each and every initiative. To achieve this, one needs to evaluate their approach to ecological justice issues in their everyday lives (individual footprints, self-analysis).

EYCE believes that consumerism should be overcome with modesty. This can be expressed in shopping behaviours - not only recycling and upcycling are vital, but taking a step back and careful consideration over each purchase is essential. These individual actions should inspire the others. EYCE reaffirms that personal modesty is crucial for sustaining global ecological justice.

Organisational Level

EYCE calls on civil society organisations, as well as entrepreneurs and large companies to conduct a careful self-analysis of their harming effect to the environment and, based on that, commit themselves to continuously mitigate it. This could be done by using the instrument of *EMAS*¹ or similar ones, e.g. EYCE's initiative *Be Eco Heroes!*²

EYCE encourages work on the level of civil society organisations and other groups to raise awareness about ecological justice issues and its possible solutions. An organisation which educates its constituency about ecology and acts as a good example in treating the environment could serve as an agent of change with a strong potential to influence lifestyles of many, as well as decision making processes. With this in mind, EYCE calls on churches, as a part of civil society, to fulfil their prophetic role with regards to ecology.

Political Level

The ongoing ecological crisis is, in the first place, caused by a crisis in values. The world would not be cured, if profit remains the guiding principle in all decision-making processes. Alternatively, values such as solidarity, modesty and sustainability should be placed before a merely economic profit. EYCE calls for incorporating these values into political discourse.

We envisage this shift in establishing internationally binding mechanisms, which enable states to mitigate ecological damage, specifically climate change, yet not compromise the reduction of poverty and development of the poorest and the most vulnerable. As a first and concrete step in this direction we consider a strong binding commitment to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases as a continuation of the Kyoto Protocol.

¹⁷⁵ Eco-Management and Audit Scheme is an instrument developed by the European Commission for companies and other organisations to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance. More information is available [here](#).

²⁷⁶ Be Eco Heroes! is an EYCE's project which aims to committing its member organisations to become more sustainable. More information is available [here](#).



To fulfil our proposal EYCE has agreed on a commitment to make the council more sustainable.

It represents a **set of internal rules related to mitigating the harming effect of our actions towards the environment** and it is one of the tangible outcomes from the three-year EYCE's Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice.

Worship

EYCE acknowledges the need for respecting the Integrity of Creation not only as a statement, but also as a value based on our Christian faith.

Concrete commitment:

- Whenever a seminar or workshop is organised, at least one of the prayers or services shall be focused on the Integrity of Creation.

Events and Programme

Education is one of the main pillars of EYCE's work and thus, educating the council's followers, participants, as well as other indirect target groups on issues related to ecology shall be always high on the agenda. This could be done by a programmatic focus, as well as by practical arrangements of a concrete event and its explanation.

Concrete commitments:

- While organising an event, the checklist for sustainable events shall be followed (please find attached at the end of the document)
- EYCE commits itself to environmentally responsible travel and to avoiding travel by airplane whenever possible. Costs for the offsetting of carbon emissions can be included in the travel costs. Members are obliged to offset carbon emissions whenever possible

Office

The office provides the support to all of EYCE's activities and therefore sustainable habits shall also be reflected in the day-to-day operation of the council. Special attention shall be paid to power management, office consumables and suppliers of refreshment.

ExCo

The ExCo keeps on working according to these principles and updates them to reflect the current realities.



Checklist for running an eco-sustainable event

<p><i>Travel in a sustainable way!</i> When organising the travel arrangements for the event, make sure to do it as ecological as possible. Trains or buses are preferred. For distances shorter than 1000 km, use plane only if it is absolutely necessary.</p>	
<p><i>Eat vegetarian!</i> At least one day during the event serve only vegetarian meals, explaining to the participants about the impact of the meat production on the environment. A more daring alternative is to arrange full vegetarian menu for the whole week. If you chose doing this, explain the reasons and announce this as a default in the application form, yet allowing participants to require meet menu, if they wish.</p>	
<p><i>Recycle!</i> Make sure there are recycling containers available to the participants at the venue. If this is not possible, create an improvised ones for the most common trash (paper, plastic) and find a place where you can dispose them.</p>	
<p><i>Arrange sustainable water/drink supplies!</i> Make sure drinks will not be served in plastic bottles or tetra-pack boxes. Ideally, use water dispensers, glass containers for juice and other drinks, as well as reusable cups.</p>	
<p><i>Save energy!</i> Make sure to turn off lights, when you leave the meeting room and other facilities. Do not heat and keep open window etc. The person responsible for the day should be entrusted with the task to make sure these are observed.</p>	
<p><i>Educate the participants!</i> At the beginning of the event, introduce the rules regarding waste, energy saving, vegetarian meals etc. and explain the reasoning behind these rules. Make a clear link to solidarity and Christian values!</p>	
<p><i>Dedicate at least one prayer to the care for creation!</i> At least one of the prayers during the event should be dedicated to Creation. Support the participants with resources, if they are supposed to prepare that.</p>	
<p><i>Arrange fair trade/ local production for the coffee breaks!</i> For the coffee breaks during the event make sure to arrange fair trade tea/coffee, as well as locally produced/ organic/ fair trade/ healthy snacks (e.g. local/ seasonal fruits). This will make the coffee breaks more sustainable and healthier! :-)</p>	