LCOY Austria

The Demands of the Youth

Generation of Change

CLIMATES Austria

YOUNGO
OFFICIAL YOUTH CONSTITUENCY OF THE UNFCCC

Introduction

Dear decision-makers,

At the ninth Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) Austria, around 300 young participants formulated key demands for the Austrian Federal Government. LCOY 2026 was held under the mandate of YOUNGO, the official children's and youth constituency of the UNFCCC, and organized by the youth climate organization CliMates Austria — this year with support from the Austrian youth biodiversity network GYBN Austria and the WWF youth network Generation Earth. The results of this multi-day participatory process reflect the determined voice of Austria's youth as well as current scientific consensus.

The already clearly noticeable, intensifying impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis are the result of political decisions. The Austrian Federal Government is obliged to follow the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, the EU Green Deal, and the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

With its Alpine region, Austria is particularly affected by the impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis. As global warming increases, droughts, heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and storms are growing in intensity and frequency. The national average temperature in 2025 was 2.2°C above pre-industrial levels, making it the warmest year since records began. Current estimates continue to project a global temperature rise of 2.2 to 3.4°C unless existing climate commitments are significantly strengthened.

Introduction

According to the Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt), Austria's greenhouse gas emissions are falling, but not fast enough: current greenhouse gas projections show that, with existing measures, Austria will clearly miss its legally binding EU target of a 48% reduction compared to 2005 in sectors outside emissions trading by 2030. The situation is aggravated by the Climate Protection Act, overdue since early 2021, and a national Energy and Climate Plan that remains inadequate. While the 2025–2029 government program of the ÖVP–SPÖ–NEOS coalition announces a new climate law intended to establish a framework for climate neutrality, climate change adaptation, and the circular economy, binding sectoral reduction pathways and emissions budgets remain unresolved.

We, the youth of Austria, will live for decades with the cumulative consequences of this inadequate climate policy. For us, the climate crisis is a question of justice: its consequences do not affect everyone equally but deepen existing inequalities along lines of generation, social status, gender, geography, and political participation. In an aging society, intergenerational justice is therefore central.

The Youth of Austria calls for a socio-ecological transformation: away from an economy based on fossil resources and extractivist structures, and towards a socially just society that operates within planetary boundaries and safeguards the livelihoods of current and future generations.

Introduction

The full demands paper covers nine thematic areas: climate, energy and mobility, biodiversity, water, agriculture and food systems, health, poverty and inequality, education, and empowerment.

Climate

Austria has fallen significantly in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI). International experts particularly criticize deficits in climate governance, transport, energy efficiency, and the implementation of existing targets.

Current measures are insufficient both to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and to achieve the binding EU climate targets for 2030. While the 2025–2029 government program contains important commitments, such as a new Climate Protection Act, the expansion of renewable energy, and investment in climate-friendly infrastructure, their swift and binding implementation will be decisive.

We understand climate protection as a matter of human rights and justice. Effective climate policy must jointly promote ecological sustainability, social security, and democratic participation.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- a strong Climate Protection Act with binding sectoral reduction pathways, annual emissions budgets, and clear responsibilities,
- the rapid phase-out of climate-damaging subsidies, particularly for fossil fuels,
- the legal establishment of climate impact assessments for infrastructure and investment decisions,
- cross-departmental climate governance that includes all sectors of the economy,
- recognition of Austria's international responsibility for climate adaptation, climate finance, and loss and damage,

Climate

- the inclusion of "climate refugees" in migration law,
- a science-based, internationally coordinated, binding climate law aligned with the latest findings of the IPCC, the AAR2, and the Federal Environment Agency.

The excuse that Austria is too small to pursue effective climate policy must finally end. The government must take on a pioneering role, follow through on its promises, and act in line with the lived realities of future generations.

Energy & Mobility

According to the 2026 Climate Protection Report, the energy and mobility sectors remain among Austria's largest greenhouse gas emitters. At the same time, they are key levers for a socially just transformation.

A future-proof energy system must be renewable, nature-compatible, affordable, and resilient. Austria likewise needs a mobility system that offers everyone, regardless of where they live, climate-friendly and affordable alternatives to the private car. The necessary transformation of the energy and mobility sectors also reduces international dependencies.

Young people in rural areas in particular suffer from inadequate public transport services and a lack of infrastructure for active mobility.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- the accelerated expansion of renewable energy under binding, nature-compatible conditions, while strengthening its economic viability,
- the modernization and increased efficiency of existing energy infrastructure,
- a socially just phase-out of fossil energy,
- a general speed limit of 100 km/h on motorways as an immediately effective climate measure,
- the development of a continuous, safe, and attractive cycling network, along with more bicycle streets and parking facilities,
- the removal of fossil subsidies and climate-damaging incentives in the transport sector,
- a massive expansion of public transport in rural areas with more frequent services and better regional connectivity,

Energy & Mobility

- affordable mobility for pupils, apprentices, and students, in particular through low-cost or free regional and nationwide public transport tickets,
- easier access to the Klimaticket, especially for low-income households,
- further development of on-demand bus and micro public-transport systems,
- support for livable, climate-adapted cities based on the 15-minute city principle,
- an amendment to the Federal Roads Act to protect the Lobau and other ecologically valuable natural areas from further road projects,
- interdisciplinary strategic environmental planning at the regional level,
- shifting short-haul flights to rail, together with a more integrated European rail and ticketing system.

As long as climate-friendly infrastructure is not available everywhere, responsibility for sustainable behaviour cannot be shifted onto individuals. Politics must first create the conditions for climate-friendly choices and free itself from international dependencies.

Biodiversity

In Austria, the biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis are not in conflict with one another. Both a stable climate and intact biodiversity protect us from natural disasters, promote our wellbeing, and strengthen the resilience of natural habitats.

The COP31 Global Implementation Targets also address this connection, with their focus on "Biodiversity in Adaptation," placing nature-based solutions at the center of climate adaptation. Austria's biodiversity is suffering under our extractive economic system and the inadequate implementation of political promises. According to the WWF status report on biodiversity, over 80% of EU-protected species and habitat types in Austria are not in a favorable conservation status for native flowing waters; this figure rises to 86%.

Biodiversity loss is the direct result of political failure and must be consistently addressed by the Federal Government.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- greater support for small-scale natural habitats (so-called stepping-stone biotopes) to counteract the fragmentation of natural habitats caused by human activity,
- an end to the Lobau motorway: as part of the Danube floodplains, the Lobau is an important green and cultural anchor, fulfilling key functions in flood protection, regulating the city's air and water quality, and providing habitat to countless species,
- stricter regulation of environmentally harmful chemical substances that endanger biodiversity, with particular focus on PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances),

Biodiversity

- state-funded research into environmentally sound alternatives to PFAS,
- a uniform framework for biodiversity protection across the federal government, states, and regions, covering both the restoration of lost habitats and nature conservation in general,
- funding for de-sealing soil and restoring nature in cities.

With the Biodiversity Strategy 2030+, the Federal Government has presented a promising plan. It must now be implemented in full, closing the roughly 70% funding gap instead of cutting the budget by around €11 million annually (WWF Climate Protection Monitor 2026). High biodiversity brings numerous positive knock-on effects (pest resistance, erosion protection, greater food security, and more). Biodiversity must therefore be understood as the powerful lever that it is, and protected and strengthened by the government accordingly.

Water

Water plays an indispensable role in environmental and climate protection. It is the basis of life for people, animals, and plants. At the heart of the water issue are freshwater reserves, precipitation patterns, and the state of aquatic ecosystems. Protecting water is among the most urgent tasks of environmental protection and must be treated with corresponding political priority. According to the current report of the Federal Ministry (Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Klima- und Umweltschutz, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft - BMLUK), the goal of the EU Water Framework Directive, achieving "good ecological status for all waters by 2027", will be missed: only 43% of the water network currently meets this standard.

A shift in perspective is needed in the legal understanding of natural ecosystems, one that fundamentally changes society's relationship with the environment and fosters a partnership between people and nature, rather than treating nature merely as a resource. Aquatic ecosystems must be protected and, if used at all, managed exclusively in a sustainable way.

Flood protection is also central: at the latest since the flood event of September 2024 and its consequences, we know how important protective and preventive measures are.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- comprehensive restoration of rivers and floodplains to protect aquatic ecosystems and enable their regeneration,
- expanded construction of fish passages to secure the migration of fish populations,

Water

- prioritizing the protection of remaining aquatic ecosystems over the further expansion of hydropower plants,
- modernization of existing hydropower plants (for example through improved permeability for aquatic life) and the decommissioning of outdated, unused plants,
- consistent and timely implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive,
- recognition of the Danube's own legal personhood for its protection and preservation, with the right to ecological integrity, cleanliness, and protection from economic exploitation,
- expansion of urban and industrial greywater infrastructure through targeted subsidies for businesses particularly in the construction sector, where incentives can encourage more sustainable greywater management,
- mandatory greywater infrastructure for new buildings, especially in urban areas, to treat used water and return it to the cycle,
- protection of groundwater from PFAS and microplastics,
- ensuring high standards of wastewater treatment.

Austria must prepare early for the decline in water resources. It is essential to recognize the natural strengths of healthy aquatic ecosystems and preserve them so that people and the environment benefit equally through lower flood risk, higher water quality, and effective CO_2 sinks.

Agriculture & Food Systems

Agriculture is not only a cultural backbone of Austria but also a significant part of our economy. Its most valuable contribution to society, however, lies in what it produces: our food. Agriculture and nutrition are inseparably linked: what people eat influences what is grown and produced, and what is grown and produced in turn influences what people eat.

A genuine transformation of our food system therefore requires change on both sides: in how we farm, and in how we eat. The Earth4All and Nexus reports identify three central levers for a sustainable transformation of Austria's food system: changing our diets, restoring soil health, and changing what we farm.

The current Federal Government's commitment to expanding regional and organic farming through the Austrian Organic Action Program is welcome. At the same time, we emphasize that agricultural policy must actively support the shift towards vegetarian and vegan diets, rather than allowing the organic label to obscure the climate impact of high consumption of animal products.

At the same time, Austrian agriculture remains largely dependent on pesticides to secure yields and farmers' incomes, even though these harm insect populations and pose health risks. This endangers ecosystem services, such as pollination, on which our food supply depends, and contributes to biodiversity loss. The Federal Government's plan to promote the development of safer alternatives is therefore welcome, but not sufficient on its own.

The Youth of Austria therefore demands that public funding and public procurement support climate-friendly, biodiversity-promoting, and socially just food systems, instead of favoring emissions-intensive forms of animal farming.

Agriculture & Food Systems

The Youth of Austria Demands:

- gradually reallocating subsidies for cattle farming to support farmers transitioning to ecological plant-based agriculture or establishing animal-welfare or sanctuary farms,
- expanding and legally anchoring the availability of plant-based food in state institutions such as schools, universities, ministries, and other public bodies,
- making the cheapest dish on every menu in Austrian gastronomy plant-based,
- introducing stricter regulations against soil sealing, alongside incentives for de-sealing and the agricultural reuse of vacant or unused land,
- ensuring fair wages along the entire agricultural value chain,
- capping profit margins and mark-ups on food products to ensure fair pricing along the entire value chain,
- increasing support for research into alternative and innovative agricultural production methods,
- banning harmful pesticides to secure biodiversity-rich agricultural systems that are more resilient and sustainable in the long term.

All agricultural policy measures and legal regulations must be developed in close cooperation with farmers and consumers. In particular, those directly affected by political decisions must have an active voice in shaping them. We expect the Austrian Federal Government to follow the example of the COP31 Presidency, which has placed the transformation towards sustainable and resilient food systems at the center of its political agenda. Austria's food security depends on decisive action now.

Health

The dualism between environment and human beings must be overcome: human health and an intact environment are inseparably linked. Only by pursuing the concept of strong sustainability can a healthy planet enable a healthy life for all.

According to the Nexus report, Austria's health sector is increasingly suffering the consequences of the climate catastrophe, for example through rising hospitalizations due to heat and other extreme weather events. Health also holds a central place on this year's COP31 agenda, with a focus on transforming health systems towards low-emission, sustainable, climate-resilient, and equity-oriented structures.

Steadily rising temperatures represent the greatest climate-related threat to human health. Preventing heat-related deaths and illness must therefore be a top priority, an issue that particularly affects residents of densely populated areas.

The Youth of Austria Demands:

- embedding heat protection in urban planning in line with the Climate Resilient Cities approach, for example through widespread greening of building façades, as well as a comprehensive car ban in cities,
- establishing heat shelters throughout all Austrian cities, where people can cool down, rest, and access emergency medical help,
- targeted training for medical professionals on the health consequences of the climate catastrophe and appropriate countermeasures,

Health

- consistently accounting for geographic and social inequalities in the health sector,
- abolishing the two-tier healthcare system, and instead providing targeted support for people with lower incomes.

The government must recognize that our health is inseparably linked to the health of our planet: protecting it means protecting ourselves. Particular focus should be placed on Austria's urban areas, which suffer especially from heat stress.

Poverty & Inequality

Social inequality intensifies the climate and biodiversity crisis, and is in turn intensified by it. According to the World Inequality Report 2026, the wealthiest 10% of the world's population cause nearly half of global CO_2 emissions. A just climate policy must therefore take into account the unequal distribution of responsibility, resources, and capacity to act.

The Eurosystem Household Finance and Consumption Survey highlights the high concentration of wealth in Austria. At the same time, rising living costs, housing costs, and social insecurity are fuelling growing fear of poverty. Climate policy and social justice must not be played off against each other, they are mutually dependent.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- reintroducing progressive inheritance and gift taxation for large fortunes,
- introducing an unconditional basic income,
- introducing a financial transaction tax at the European level,
- maintaining and further developing CO_2 pricing and the climate bonus as a central instrument for emissions reduction and social balance,
- linking financial, budgetary, and investment policy to binding climate and sustainability targets,
- increasing taxation of emissions-intensive luxury and overconsumption, while keeping basic needs affordable,
- consistently upgrading social, health, and care professions through better working conditions and fair pay,
- targeted investment in disadvantaged regions and municipalities particularly affected by poverty or social exclusion,

Poverty & Inequality

- additional poverty-mitigating funding for schools to enable genuine equal opportunity in education,
- an inclusive integration and citizenship policy that strengthens rather than hinders social participation,

A successful socio-ecological transformation can only succeed if it creates security, participation, and future prospects. Climate policy must therefore be consistently linked with poverty reduction, gender equality, and social inclusion.

Education

The COP31 Presidency deliberately focuses on "Youth and Education." Climate literacy is a basic prerequisite for implementing the Paris Climate Agreement and must therefore be systematically integrated into the national education strategy.

Climate literacy means more than teaching scientific fundamentals. Young people must be empowered to interpret scientific findings, understand social and economic connections, recognize disinformation, and participate effectively in the socio-ecological transformation.

Although the Austrian government program sets important impulses in democratic education, financial literacy, and education for sustainable development, a binding, nationwide integration of climate and environmental literacy into regular classroom teaching is still missing. Access to sound knowledge about the climate and biodiversity crisis therefore still depends heavily on the commitment of individual teachers.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- the binding introduction of climate and environmental education as an independent school subject at all grade levels,
- integrating climate, biodiversity, and sustainability perspectives into all degree programs and vocational training,
- strengthening green finance competencies as part of the financial literacy strategy planned in the government program,
- expanding plant-based and sustainable catering at schools and universities, alongside accompanying education on nutrition and environmental impact,

Education

- practice-oriented learning formats such as excursions, school gardens, fieldwork, and cooperation with regional businesses,
- easier participation for pupils and students in climate and environmental conferences, for example through school leave and official participation certificates,
- targeted support programs for low-income families to ensure climate literacy regardless of social background,
- mandatory further training on climate and biodiversity topics in businesses and public institutions,
- using diverse media channels, particularly public broadcasters, to widely convey climate literacy,
- supporting low-threshold participation formats such as climate clubs, sustainability councils, and student initiatives.

Education is not a side issue of climate policy; it is its democratic and societal foundation. Collectively learning self-efficacy should therefore be a high priority.

Empowerment

Our democracy thrives on political participation. Government action is most effective when it results from decision-making processes close to citizens. The Earth4All report makes clear that fundamental paradigm shifts, as well as a deep restructuring of our economic system and consumption patterns, are needed in climate and environmental protection. This can only succeed together, once we understand the sustainability transition as the opportunity it truly is.

Faced with the multiple crises of our time, many young people feel a sense of powerlessness and helplessness. The Youth of Austria therefore calls on the government to empower the younger generation and, through decisive policy, enable a green future for them.

The Youth of Austria demands:

- an institutionalized, binding youth participation in climate policy,
- a strengthened Youth Check (Jugend-Check) which effectively prevents the passage of laws that ignore or weaken children's rights,
- a comprehensive understanding of children's rights in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 26 on "children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change" by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes that climate protection is a necessary condition for the protection of children’s rights,
- systematically integrating environmental and social education topics (such as gender equality, participation of marginalized groups, and environmental awareness) into democratic education as a mandatory subject in lower secondary school,

Empowerment

- public, low-threshold safe spaces for exchange and community among children and young people.

Empowerment only succeeds if socially disadvantaged people are protected, supported, and actively included by policy. The questions the climate catastrophe forces upon us must only be decided together. Making this possible is one of the central tasks of your legislative term.

Closing Statement

The climate and biodiversity crisis is not a distant question for the future; it already shapes how we grow up, learn, work, and live today. Education, health, agriculture, water, energy, mobility, biodiversity, and social justice are not separate challenges, but parts of one and the same task: a socio-ecological transformation that leaves no one behind.

We, the youth of Austria, have formulated our demands with expertise, foresight, and a sense of responsibility. It is now up to you. Every further delay deepens the crisis and shrinks the window for a just, livable future. We will follow these developments closely, continue to demand our rights to be upheld, and hold you accountable.

The time for half-measures is over. Act now for us, with us, and for all the generations who come after us.

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photocredits: @lina rummler