Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra, European Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: Youth Policy Dialogue ahead of COP30 in Belém
Date: 27 October 2025

Location: Berlaymont building, Brussels, Belgium

Introduction

The COP30 Youth Dialogue gathered 12 young representatives from across the EU to meet with Wopke Hoekstra, Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, to discuss key topics of negotiation ahead of the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30). The physical meeting took place on 27 October 2025 in the Berlaymont building in Brussels, Belgium, which was moderated by Martina Ceccarelli, Information and Communication Assistant at the European Commission. To allow a free and honest discussion, the event was not livestreamed.

Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue

The Youth Policy Dialogue organised by DG CLIMA brought together 12 young people for a one-day event at the Berlaymont building. The participants represented a wide range of youth organisations, including Generation Climate Europe, Save the Children, and Environment Europe, as well as Climate Pact Ambassadors and national and EESC youth delegates to COP30.

The day began with an informal lunch and welcoming remarks by Paolo Caridi, Head of Unit for Communication and Stakeholder Relations. This was followed by a one-hour presentation on 'The Road to COP30' led by Dimitrios Zevgolis, Head of Unit for Multilateral Affairs, who would also lead the EU Delegation to COP a few weeks later. The presentation and subsequent discussion served as an icebreaker and allowed participants to engage with the topics at a more technical level, before the more formal discussion with the Commissioner, which offered deeper political insights into the negotiations.

At 14:00, the Commissioner joined a 1h30 roundtable discussion covering three topics: Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and EU climate targets, climate adaptation, and climate finance, with approximately 30 minutes allocated to each. Every participant had the opportunity to speak at least once, whether to share their perspective or put a question directly to the Commissioner.

After a coffee break, Gilles Dufrasne, Policy Officer at the Task Force for International Carbon Pricing and Markets Diplomacy, presented the Commission's work on carbon markets and Article 6 UNFCCC negotiations. The day closed with networking drinks with colleagues involved in the COP30 negotiations from across the Commission, including DG CLIMA, DG AGRI, and the EESC.

Topics of Discussion

The youth participants brought both suggestions and concerns to the upcoming negotiations, while also emphasising the importance of continued youth participation and reaffirming EU climate leadership in a fast-paced and ever-changing international political landscape. The main points of discussion by topic were as follows:

1) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and EU Climate Targets

The roundtable opened with a discussion on the EU's NDC and its alignment with the 1.5°C warming target. Commissioner Hoekstra underlined the EU's efforts to set ambitious climate goals despite delays, highlighting the anticipated range for emissions reduction targets. The importance of youth advocacy was reinforced, with participants encouraged to engage with member states in support of high-ambition climate targets. Questions from delegates about gross and net emission targets prompted a broader discussion on the potential use of international carbon credits and the balance the EU is seeking in negotiations.

2) Climate Adaptation

Adaptation strategies were a central theme of the discussion, with participants highlighting the increasing frequency of extreme weather events and the need for resilient frameworks. Commissioner Hoekstra outlined the upcoming proposal for an Integrated Framework on European Climate Resilience and Risk Management, and discussed the challenges of setting financial goals that adequately meet global needs. He underscored the interconnected roles of local, national, and EU-wide efforts, while acknowledging the difficulties in preparing sufficiently for current and future climate impacts. The dialogue reflected shared ambitions to strengthen resilience measures and financial commitments, particularly for vulnerable regions.

3) Climate Finance

The discussion on climate finance focused on mobilising funds to support mitigation and adaptation efforts globally. Significant emphasis was placed on the balance between public and private sector contributions, with concerns raised about increasing public debt. Delegates highlighted the importance of ensuring that finance reaches the most vulnerable, including children who are disproportionately affected by climate impacts. Commissioner Hoekstra reaffirmed the EU's commitment to climate finance leadership, while calling on other global partners to increase their own financial commitments.

Main takeaways

1. **The EU's climate ambition must close the gap between current targets and what science demands.**
   Youth representatives were clear that existing EU commitments fall short of a credible 1.5°C pathway. They pushed for a stronger 2035 NDC (aligned with a minimum 77–94% domestic reduction), a 2040 target in line with ESABCC recommendations, and an explicit exclusion of carbon offsets and international credits from compliance. The Commissioner acknowledged the EU's leadership role but stressed the need to balance ambition with economic competitiveness and political feasibility.

2. **Adaptation and protection of vulnerable groups need far more attention and funding.**

Participants stressed that climate policy cannot focus on mitigation alone. Adaptation efforts must be measurable, locally grounded, and explicitly protective of the most exposed communities, including children, who bear a disproportionate burden yet remain almost invisible in current climate finance frameworks (only 2.4% of multilateral climate finance supports child-responsive activities). Youth called for grant-based, accessible, and disaggregated financing that reaches those who need it most.

3. **Climate finance commitments are inadequate and lack accountability.**
   The youth representatives raised serious concerns about the gap between what developing countries need (at least $400bn annually for loss and damage alone) and what has been pledged under the NCQG. They questioned how CBAM revenues will genuinely advance global decarbonisation rather than EU industrial interests, and called for transparent, equitable governance of climate finance, as well as innovative fiscal measures such as fossil fuel, aviation, and wealth taxes to fund the Baku–Belém Roadmap.

4. **Youth want a structural seat at the table, not just symbolic inclusion.**
   A recurring theme was that youth engagement must go beyond dialogue events. Participants advocated for formal mechanisms such as a Universal NDC Youth Clause, continued EU participation of youth delegates at COP30, and deeper institutional collaboration with DG CLIMA. Commissioner Hoekstra responded positively, affirming that the EU benefits from youth input and committing to ongoing engagement.

Follow-up Activities

Following the COP30 Youth Policy Dialogue, the Commissioner met again with a group of youth representatives in Belém during the negotiations, many of whom had participated in the Brussels event.

A group of participants also submitted a written follow-up with their questions and demands. In response, DG CLIMA and the Hoekstra Cabinet committed to holding regular informal meetings with a smaller group of youth representatives, with the aim of keeping them informed on progress ahead of the next COP negotiations cycle, listening to their views and insights, and ensuring they have a platform to directly voice their feedback, fostering an inclusive and co-created dialogue going forward.

Conclusion

The COP30 Youth Policy Dialogue underscored the important role that young voices should play in the lead-up to global climate negotiations. Commissioner Hoekstra's engagement further reflected the EU's commitment to raising ambition at COP30 and to cross-generational collaboration as a foundation for effective climate action. The dialogue proved valuable in shaping the priorities and strategies that will inform the climate negotiations ahead.

Annex

Webnews Article - Europe's youth engage with Commissioner Hoekstra on the future of climate action - Climate Action