

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

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Hoekstra

Date: 6 February 2025

Location: Walter Hallstein room, Berlaymont building, Brussels, Belgium

## Introduction

The Youth Policy Dialogue brought together 20 young people coming from 12 different countries in Europe to discuss questions related to the EU's climate policy, the clean transition, as well as fair and green taxation with European Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra. The selection of participants took the gender and geographical balance into account. Prior to the physical meeting, an online preparatory meeting took place on 3 February 2025. The physical meeting took place on 6 February 2025 in the Berlaymont building in Brussels and was moderated by Martina Ceccarelli, Information and Communication Officer at the European Commission.

## Summary of the online preparatory meeting

The preparatory meeting with participants took place online on 3 February 2025 from 14:00 to 14:45. The key objectives were to explain to participants what to expect from the Dialogue, allow them to already get to know each other before physically meeting in Brussels, and clarify any remaining questions from participants. The meeting consisted of a short presentation held by DG CLIMA and DG TAXUD, which was followed by a long Q&A session. The presentation gave some background information on the role of the European Commission and the Commissioner in the institutional set-up of the EU, outlined the Commissioner's portfolio and explained the motivation behind the Youth Policy Dialogue. It also presented the programme for the participants' stay in Brussels and the format for the Dialogue with the Commissioner. The participants were encouraged again to already reflect on what they wanted to ask the Commissioner during the Dialogue. The questions raised by participants during the Q&A session mainly concerned the format for the Dialogue and the programme for the day, the criteria according to which participants were selected as well as individual travel arrangements and the accommodation in Brussels.

## Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue (In person-meeting)

The joint Youth Policy Dialogue organised by DG CLIMA and DG TAXUD brought together 20 young people for a one-day event at the Berlaymont building. The day began with a welcome and a warm-up session, followed by two engaging presentations by policy experts from both Directorates-General, which helped participants get acquainted with the topics and format. After an informal lunch, the core of the Dialogue took place in the Hallstein room, beginning with a welcome statement from Commissioner Hoekstra. In his introduction, the Commissioner presented his portfolio and outlined his ambitions for the remainder of his mandate.

The Dialogue itself was structured into two thematic hours—first focusing on climate action and then on taxation. The exchange was dynamic, with participants well-prepared and actively contributing, thanks to prior guidance and a preparatory meeting. Moderators played a key role in ensuring the conversation remained focused and inclusive. While the Hallstein room’s formal setting contributed to a sense of occasion, it was noted that a less formal space might encourage more spontaneous interaction. At the close of the session, Commissioner Hoekstra thanked the participants and urged them to remain engaged in EU policymaking.

Following a short break, DG TAXUD facilitated a debrief session where participants shared feedback. Overall, the Dialogue was positively received, though suggestions were made for a more flexible format and room layout in future editions. To conclude the day, participants were taken on a visit to the Parliamentarium, providing them with a broader perspective on the workings of the European institutions.

## Topic(s) of discussion

### Climate Action (DG CLIMA)

The first part of the Dialogue centred on the EU’s climate agenda and how to maintain ambition while addressing economic and social realities. Participants questioned the Commissioner on the EU’s progress towards its 2030 targets, public engagement, and the broader political climate. Commissioner Hoekstra reaffirmed climate change as the most pressing challenge, highlighting the need to link climate action with competitiveness and middle-class stability. Discussions also focused on the role of international cooperation, with the Commissioner stressing Europe’s responsibility and efforts to engage global partners more effectively.

Other key issues included the fossil fuel industry’s accountability, the agricultural sector’s resilience, and the environmental cost of ultra-fast fashion and e-commerce. Commissioner Hoekstra emphasized the importance of phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and advancing the circular economy, positioning Europe as a leader in sustainable innovation.

### Taxation and the Green Transition (DG TAXUD)

The second hour was divided into three themes: Green Taxation, Competitiveness, and Tax Fairness. Participants were pre-assigned based on interest and presented questions in short, structured interventions. Topics included the fairness of green taxes, the burden on small businesses, and the role of taxation in steering consumer and company behaviour. The Commissioner noted that taxation must be seen as just and socially balanced to be effective. He emphasized the need for predictability for businesses and highlighted ongoing efforts to close tax gaps and align incentives with climate goals.

In both sessions, Commissioner Hoekstra underlined that climate and tax policies must support a just transition and ensure broad public support—particularly from the middle class. The discussions reflected participants’ strong interest in meaningful action and fair solutions, aligning well with the EU’s broader Green Deal objectives.

## Follow-up debate on the Citizens’ Engagement Platform

Some of the main ideas from young people were:

### **End fossil fuel subsidies and hold the industry accountable for its global impact**

Young participants called for a stronger EU stance on the fossil fuel industry’s role in the climate crisis. They highlighted the injustice of continuing subsidies while vulnerable communities, especially in the Global South, face the worst impacts. They urged the EU to phase out fossil fuel subsidies—especially in the next EU budget—and to hold major polluters accountable. This raised important questions, like how the EU can lead by example, whether stricter corporate accountability is feasible, and how public funds could be redirected to support climate justice and clean innovation?

### **Adaptation funding and fair support for climate-vulnerable farmers**

Young farmers stressed the need for more targeted EU support to help agriculture adapt to climate change. They highlighted the pressures facing livestock farming, the lack of pricing power for small farmers, and the uncertainty around farming’s role in a climate-neutral Europe. They called for better access to adaptation tools, financing, and clear guidance. How can the EU balance climate goals with rural livelihoods, and what kind of support would best help farms remain viable in a warming world?

### **Encourage a business case for sustainability through smarter incentives**

Participants stressed that for climate action to succeed, it must be economically viable—not just idealistic. They highlighted the importance of aligning climate goals with competitiveness, especially for industries and consumers facing high costs. Several called for the EU to strengthen the business case for sustainability through smarter taxation, industrial policy, and investment support. This includes rewarding innovation, making clean technologies affordable, and ensuring predictable rules for businesses. The discussion raised key questions: How can EU policy make sustainability the most profitable option? And what incentives are needed to drive real change across sectors?

## Follow-up Activities

In the lead-up to the event, social media posts and engagement with existing communities of young stakeholders helped promote the event.

During the Youth Policy Dialogue, influencers were invited to help generate interest among young audiences and raise awareness about the opportunity to engage with Commissioner Hoekstra live via the online questions. Audiovisual content, including short video reels and testimonials from participants, was produced and shared on the DG CLIMA and TAXUD channels, helping amplify the event's messages.

The insights and recommendations shared during the Dialogue will feed into the upcoming policy discussions and further stakeholder engagement activities in the run-up to COP30 later this year. In this context, the young participants' concerns—such as the need for fair climate action and better youth involvement—will be presented to relevant policymakers, which always engage with young people in the lead up and during international climate conferences. One possibility is to reach out to the YPD participants for this as well, or integrating their comments into the discussion.

The follow-up can also be tied to the upcoming Youth Check, but that still remains to be seen.

## Annex

Webnews

article:

[Giving young people a voice: A Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Hoekstra - European Commission](#)