



Listen to the future

Children and adolescents calls for action on child rights in the face of global challenges

World Children's Day is a global day of action *for children, by children* which takes place every year on 20 November, the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

In 2024, some 45 children and adolescents aged 13 to 17 from across North Macedonia came together to reflect on three global megatrends shaping children's futures: the climate crisis, advanced technologies and demographic change. Here is a snapshot of the issues raised and the calls to action that they presented at [Listen to the future: Kids Take Over High-level Government Meeting](#).

"This occasion is not just to hear what we think, but also to recognize that we have concrete ideas and solutions," Kasija, 17

Climate Crisis

The country faces increasing environmental challenges, with the occurrence of more frequent or severe heatwaves, floods, fires, and decreased water reserves. These conditions have reduced agricultural production. Skopje suffers from severe air pollution, contributing to diseases and infant mortality. Fires and illegal logging have led to extensive deforestation, worsening air quality and health issues. Water pollution from garbage and toxic chemicals endangers health and ecosystems, while poor river basin management causes flooding and land erosion. By 2050, the situation is only expected to get worse. Reflecting on these issues, children and adolescents called for the following actions:

- Improve monitoring and control of air pollution and emissions from major pollutants.
- Increase reforestation and investment in green infrastructure and environmental projects, such as cycling trails and bicycle repair subsidies.
- Promote alternative energy sources and reduce fossil fuel use through subsidies for eco-friendly solutions including sustainable transport.
- Strengthen climate education from an early age to prepare young people for climate challenges.
- Tighten control of urban building regulations and increase green areas and urban forests to enhance air quality.
- Introduce new methods for industrial waste management, such as recycling waste into valuable products and generating electricity from waste incineration with minimized exhaust gases.
- Provide space and financial support for youth-led green policy initiatives and projects.

Advanced technologies

The country faces significant digital inequalities, particularly in rural schools lacking adequate infrastructure. Additionally, there is a lack of accessible, high-quality digital educational resources. The increased volume of digital data raises the risk of misuse of sensitive information. The country's health care faces many challenges that can be addressed through advances in technology. To harness the power of advanced technologies to advance child rights, children and adolescents called for the following actions:

- Invest in digital infrastructure in all schools, especially in the rural areas to provide digital equity for every child.
- Develop AI literacy programmes for both teachers and students so that they can be better prepared for the increasingly digital future.
- Adopt regulatory frameworks for the ethical use of AI with a focus on safeguarding children's privacy.
- Leverage the use of AI to develop a national, accessible digital knowledge base available to all students.
- Harness artificial intelligence to monitor and analyze student outcomes, improving curricula and methodologies for personalized learning, especially for children with disabilities.
- Invest in AI focused R&D healthcare to foster innovation and improve care quality.
- Use AI for advanced analysis of health data to create health policies and design preventive measures, such as vaccination campaigns.

Demographic change

North Macedonia faces widespread migration for better living conditions, education, and job opportunities, leading to loneliness and frustration among those who remain. Poor school conditions and inadequate learning materials affect education quality. Urban migration to the capital in search of better healthcare and jobs results in rural depopulation. Children feel neglected and not taken seriously, leading to dissatisfaction. The lack of social and cultural infrastructure affects their social life and development. Negative perceptions about the country fuel the desire to emigrate. To promote equal opportunities to respond to demographic shifts, children and young people called for the following actions:

- Improve infrastructure in villages, including roads, public transport, and schools.
- Ensure equal access to health, education, social services, and stable internet in rural areas.
- Invest in teacher training, modern teaching methods, and digital education, especially in rural areas.
- Provide better living conditions and opportunities in rural areas to reduce emigration.
- Improve state hospitals, provide better salaries and conditions for young doctors, and ensure annual preventive screenings.
- Establish business incubators and provide support for young people to start and develop local businesses.
- Organize more cultural activities, open cinemas and theaters, and create spaces for youth gatherings, including in rural areas.
- Promote optimism and build a positive atmosphere to encourage community involvement and optimism about the future.
- Create platforms for youth participation in decision-making and ensure their voices are heard and respected.
- Move from promises to real actions, ensuring transparency and accountability from the government.

"Today we had an opportunity to share our visions, hopes and ideas for a better future with all of you who have the power and responsibility to turn these visions into reality" Kasija, 17