

GREEN YOUTH MANIFESTO

By the youth of Drobeta Turnu Severin (Romania) and Karlovo (Bulgaria)

Our Vision

We, the youth of Drobeta Turnu Severin and Karlovo, stand united in the face of environmental challenges that threaten our future. We believe in a greener, cleaner, and more sustainable tomorrow, shaped by the voices and actions of young people. Our generation is ready to lead and we demand to be heard.

We recognize that our local communities face distinct yet interconnected environmental challenges — from polluted rivers and unmanaged waste to insufficient climate education and youth exclusion in green decision-making. As young citizens, we are not just concerned; we are prepared to be part of the solution. This manifesto represents our collective call for systemic change at the local level.

Our demands to local authorities and stakeholders

1. Establish Green Youth Councils

Local Problem: In both Drobeta Turnu Severin and Karlovo, there is minimal youth representation in local decision-making bodies, especially on issues related to environmental sustainability. Many local youth express frustration that their ideas are not heard, and there is no formal channel through which they can influence climate or ecological strategies. This gap leads to a disconnect between youth interests and municipal planning.

Our recommendation:

Create formal "Green Youth Councils" that operate as consultative and project-based structures. These councils should be integrated into municipal governance frameworks and granted the right to:

- *Review and comment on proposed environmental policies*
- *Initiate youth-led projects in green infrastructure, education, and monitoring*
- *Participate in joint public consultations and budget proposals*
- *Liaise with international youth and climate bodies*

The council should be composed of a diverse body of students, young professionals, and NGO youth representatives, and should include training modules on policymaking, climate advocacy, and sustainability.

2. Launch circular economy youth initiatives

Local problem: The linear consumption model — take, make, dispose — dominates both cities. Reusable resources are wasted, local dumpsites are overflowing, and there is limited public understanding of the circular economy. Youth have few opportunities to learn sustainable production or entrepreneurial skills.

Our recommendation:

Establish youth-focused Circular Economy Labs in schools, community centers, and makerspaces, with municipal and NGO support. Activities should include:

- *Workshops on upcycling clothes, transforming waste into functional items (e.g., school furniture from plastic), and composting*
- *Recycling drives tied to rewards (e.g., sports passes or public transport credits)*
- *Partnerships with businesses for eco-mentorship and pilot green start-ups*
- *Creation of pop-up circular markets led and managed by youth*

This program should culminate in a regional Circular Youth Forum where the best projects are exhibited and shared across borders.

3. Empower youth in water monitoring and protection

Local problem: The Danube and Stryama rivers are affected by visible and invisible pollutants: sewage discharge, agricultural runoff, industrial chemicals, and microplastics. Despite the presence of environmental agencies, young people are not engaged in monitoring or restoring these critical freshwater systems.

Our Recommendation:

Develop an annual Youth Water Stewardship program that enables youth to:

- *Use digital water testing kits to track turbidity, pH, nitrates, and temperature across seasons*
- *Analyze the data with local environmental scientists and propose practical local actions*
- *Publish river health reports and advocate for pollution reduction at public events*
- *Organize river festivals with storytelling, cleanups, and water conservation education*

This initiative should involve cross-border collaboration between Romanian and Bulgarian schools and NGOs.

4. Adopt a tree / Adopt a street programs

Local problem: Tree cover and green space maintenance are inconsistent. Streets in newer or lower-income neighborhoods often lack shade, flowers, or functional biodiversity. Maintenance crews are overstretched and youth are willing to help, but have no framework for involvement.

Our Recommendation:

Create an “Adopt a green space” program where students and youth groups:

- *Choose a site (a street corner, park bench area, abandoned lot) and co-design a greening plan*
- *Plant drought-resistant trees and flowers with guidance from horticulturalists*
- *Monitor health of greenery using a mobile app, tracking watering and waste levels*

- *Receive public recognition, with street plaques and annual green ambassador awards*

Municipalities should allocate small budgets to participating teams and encourage intergenerational collaboration with elderly residents.

5. Make climate education practical and local

Local Problem: Climate education in both countries remains largely theoretical and fragmented. It is often presented through outdated textbooks and fails to connect with students' immediate surroundings and concerns. Teachers lack training in environmental literacy, and youth initiatives often remain extracurricular and unsupported.

Our Recommendation:

Reform curricula to integrate climate science, systems thinking, and sustainable development across all subjects. Schools should:

- *Design interdisciplinary eco-projects tied to local issues (e.g., river flooding, heatwaves)*
- *Partner with local universities, scientists, and NGOs for expert talks and mentorship*
- *Include climate resilience simulations and debate activities*
- *Allow students to earn academic credit through environmental volunteering*

The Ministries of Education in both countries should adopt regional pilots based on these models.

6. Improve local recycling infrastructure and awareness

Local problem: Many neighborhoods lack accessible recycling points, and existing bins are often contaminated due to lack of clarity. Schools and apartment blocks are not integrated into formal collection systems. Waste separation behavior remains low, and myths about what happens to recyclables are widespread.

Our recommendation:

Launch a city-wide youth-led recycling campaign with two components:

- *Infrastructure: Install smart bins with visual sorting instructions and QR codes that offer recycling tips and feedback on community progress*
- *Education: Conduct gamified recycling sessions in schools, with class challenges, tracking tools, and collaboration with sanitation workers*

Municipalities should commit to transparent reporting on where recyclables go, and allow youth groups to tour recycling centers and report publicly.

7. Install free filtered water refill stations

Local problem: High bottled water consumption contributes to plastic waste. Many young people bring disposable bottles to school or sports activities due to lack of access to clean, free water.

Our recommendation:

Install refill stations with built-in filters in:

- *Parks, school yards, sports areas, bus stops, and train stations*
- *Each machine should display how many bottles it has helped save*
- *Users should be able to report maintenance issues via SMS or app*
- *Launch a refill awareness campaign with youth-made videos and posters*

This project could be co-financed by local water utilities, health departments, and EU cohesion funds.

8. Plant more flowers and pollinator-friendly spaces

Local problem: Pesticide use, monoculture lawns, and urban expansion have dramatically reduced habitats for pollinators like bees and butterflies. This has knock-on effects for local food resilience and biodiversity.

Our Recommendation:

Start a “Bee-friendly town” certification program where:

- *Schools and community groups receive kits to plant native flowers in strategic public areas*
- *Abandoned or unused municipal lands are converted into mini-wildflower meadows*
- *Rooftop and balcony garden competitions promote private-sector involvement*
- *Data from pollinator counts are collected by students and reported annually*

Recognition can be given to neighborhoods and schools achieving the most impact.

9. Promote accessible and sustainable youth mobility

Local problem: Many young people are dependent on cars due to unsafe or nonexistent cycling infrastructure, infrequent buses, and cost barriers. Walking and biking are underused due to real safety concerns, particularly at night or on poorly maintained sidewalks.

Our Recommendation:

Introduce a Youth green mobility package, which includes:

- *Free or discounted access to electric buses with dedicated student passes*
- *Creation of “Green corridors” — protected walking/biking routes between schools, parks, and housing areas*

- *Youth-designed safety audits of traffic zones, presented in city hall with follow-up monitoring*
- *Electric scooter parking and usage training sessions*
- *Mobile app-based carbon footprint tracker with individual and school-wide challenges*

Public transport upgrades should prioritize reliability, safety, and evening access.

10. Install more trash bins in public areas

Local problem: Litter accumulates near schools, public squares, and along riverbanks due to lack of available and well-maintained bins. Overflowing bins attract animals and reduce the aesthetics of community spaces.

Our recommendation:

Conduct a crowd-sourced bin mapping and install:

- *Triple bins for paper, plastic, and general waste in high-foot-traffic areas*
- *Tamper-proof, animal-safe models in parks and river areas*
- *Youth-led bin art competitions to raise awareness and civic pride*
- *Digital feedback buttons to report bin status (full, broken, misused)*

Maintenance should be monitored in partnership with school eco-clubs and residents' associations.

11. Install energy-efficient LED street lighting

Local problem: Outdated public lighting contributes to high municipal energy bills and increases safety risks in certain neighborhoods. Poorly lit paths discourage walking or cycling, especially after dark.

Our recommendation:

Modernize all street lighting through:

- *A phased replacement of sodium lights with low-energy LEDs*
- *Smart lighting systems that dim during low-traffic hours and brighten when motion is detected*
- *Public dashboards showing energy savings in real time*
- *Youth workshops to identify underlit zones and develop nighttime safety proposals*

This initiative saves money, improves safety, and aligns with EU energy targets.

Our commitment

We pledge to:

- Act as responsible stewards of our environment
- Educate our peers and families about sustainability
- Collaborate across borders to tackle shared environmental issues
- Challenge apathy and advocate for justice, equity, and nature protection

This is not just a declaration. It is a call to action!

We are not the future. We are the present. And we are ready!