

ECO-UNESCO

Ireland's Leading Environmental Education Youth Organisation



ECO-UNESCO'S Young Environmentalist Awards

INSPIRATION PACK



WELCOME TO THE YEA INSPIRATION PACK

Congratulations on taking the first step towards making a positive impact on our environment! This inspiration pack is designed to inspire your group on your Young Environmentalist Awards (YEA) journey.

In this pack you will find:

- An overview sheet with some environmental topics to help you get started, especially if you are yet to decide on an award category!
- A page for each of the 11 award categories, featuring trends, topics, and thought-provoking questions. It's not exhaustive, but a starting point to spark ideas.

YEA
Categories



Biodiversity



Climate Change



ECO-Art
& Design



ECO-Community
Development



ECO-
Entrepreneurship



ECO-Health
& Wellbeing



Energy



Food



Transport



Waste



Water

Remember, every small action counts, and together, we can create a more sustainable future for all. Let's get started!

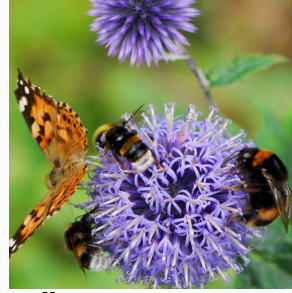
ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS



Renewable Energy



Vegetarian and Vegan Diets



Pollinators



Palm Oil



Fast Fashion



Plastic Pollution



Deforestation



Composting



Sustainable Podcast



Eco Tourism



Reduce, Reuse, Recycle



Rainwater Harvesting



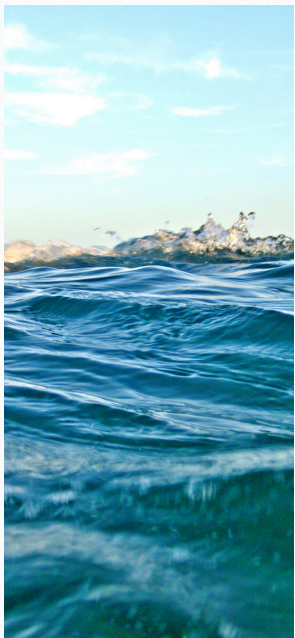
Fairtrade



Air Quality



Active Travel



Sea Level Rise



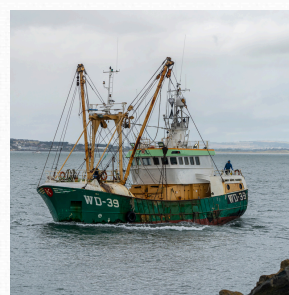
Energy Reduction



Water Pollution



Food Waste



Overfishing



Wildlife Conservation

BIODIVERSITY CATEGORY

Projects that look at researching and protecting different types of plants, animals or ecosystems.

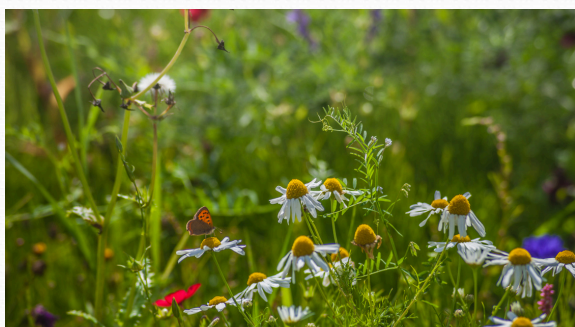
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2023-2030

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) has five different objectives to be reached by 2030. The NBAP takes account of the wide range of policies, strategies, convention, law and targets at a national, EU and global level and is upholding the global agreement of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Biodiversity is facing some challenges. Studies show that 85% of our EU-protected habitats are in unfavourable status, and 30% of bee species are threatened with extinction.

Food for Thought

- How can we advocate for the rights of nature?
- Is there a way we could make biodiversity decline more of a recognised issue?
- Could similar action plans from successful countries be used with a local to global initiative?



CLEAN COASTS PROGRAMME

The Clean Coasts programme works with communities to help protect and care for Ireland's waterways, coastline, seas, ocean and marine life.

Clean Coasts is working to improve Ireland's coastal environment through:

- Beach clean-ups
- Marine litter surveys
- Think before you flush campaign

Food for Thought

- Are there simple ways that you could help protect local marine biodiversity?
- Can you get involved in citizen science and local initiatives?



URBAN GREENING

In crowded cities there are limited opportunities for urban greening and creating habitats for biodiversity. Rooftops are being seen more and more useful as spaces for creating habitats and also handling rainwater. Read more [here](#).

Food for Thought

- Are there any roofs in your community that could benefit from urban greening?
- What species do you think think an urban greenroof would attract?

CLIMATE CHANGE CATEGORY

Projects that identify and promote behaviour changes that will contribute to mitigate climate change and connect local activity with the broader effects.

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The Climate Action Plan commits Ireland to a legally binding target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions no later than 2050, and a reduction of 51% by 2030.

Through government support the target for reducing emissions by 2030 by sector are:

- Electricity: 62-81%
- Transport: 42-50%
- Buildings: 44-56%
- Industry/Enterprise: 29-41%
- Agriculture: 22-30%
- Land use: 37-58%

Food for Thought

- How can we support each sector in meeting their targets?
- Are there ways that schools/youth groups/communities can tackle a sector in their area that emits high levels of greenhouse gases?
- How can we spread awareness about the importance of meeting these targets?
- What small actions can we take to help reduce emissions in our daily lives?



CLIMATE ACTION FUND

The Climate Action Fund (CAF), was set up to provide assistance and financial support to projects which will help Ireland achieve its climate and energy targets. The CAF will provide at least €500 million in government funding up to 2027 towards this aim. The fund will support innovative initiatives which may not otherwise have been possible to accomplish.

The CAF will provide support for innovative initiatives such as:

- Schools Photovoltaic Programme
- Community Climate Action Programme
- EU Life Programme 2021

Food for Thought

- Can your school/youth group avail of one of the programmes?
- Could you think of innovative ways to use the CAF?
- How are other countries using the funds to mitigate climate change?



ECO-ART & DESIGN CATEGORY

Projects which demonstrate creative ways to inform people about the environment and promote positive action.

LÍNTE NA FARRAIGE PROJECT

The Línite na Farraille project brings the future into focus with striking light installations that visualise projected sea level rise. Starting at the Spanish Arch in Galway, these installations have now moved to other coastal areas across Ireland.

Twice daily, as the tides rise, the lights come alive to reveal the potential surge heights, sparking conversation about the looming impacts of climate change on our coastal communities.

The project is funded by the Creative Climate Action fund, supported by the Creative Ireland Programme. Read more about it [here](#).

Food for Thought

- What could you create to spark discussion about rising sea levels?
- What role does art play in communicating complex scientific information to the public?



Taken from <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/news/linte-na-farraige/>

WILDWALLS

Wildwalls is a nature-themed design competition for young people sponsored by Ecocem.

Young people are encouraged to design murals for their school that raise awareness of biodiversity issues and also include physical elements to support wildlife, such as nest boxes and pollinator-friendly plants.

Wall art can add brightness and colour, making it a vibrant focal point. By combining creativity with action, these murals can help transform schools into living spaces that actively contribute to protecting biodiversity.

Food for Thought

- How can you look at incorporating murals into your school, or local area?
- Can you create a living wall?
- How can this be a form of raising awareness?



Taken from <https://www.biodiversityinschools.com/wildwalls.html>

ECO-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CATEGORY

Projects which develop practical solutions to local environmental issues and involve local communities.

DIVERGENTLY TOGETHER

Divergently Together is a project that aims to involve disabled and neurodivergent communities in climate action using science and technology. The project works to include everyone and challenge stigmas around disability and neurodivergence. Artists have created experiences to show how the climate crisis affects these communities. Read more [here](#).

Studies show that climate change impacts disabled communities more heavily due to factors like hard-to-get information, physical challenges in severe weather, heat sensitivity from medications and less access to climate action funds.

Food for Thought

- How can you make an action project that is inclusive for everyone?
- What could you do to spark discussion about practical environmental solutions in the local community?



Taken from <https://www.disabilityaction.org/News/augmented-body-altered-mind-as-well-as-the-national-launch-of-divergently-together>

ECO-COMMUNITIES

Eco-communities are adopting several different ways to create a resilient community that is a low-carbon, sustainable living environment.

Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Tipperary is a pioneering sustainable community. Their design is focused on minimising environmental impact and promoting social cohesion. Some of the communities key ways of doing this include:

- Eco-friendly housing
- Providing many community facilities
- Using renewable energy

Cloughjordan highlights what can happen when a community comes together with a shared vision for creating a more sustainable world.

Food for Thought

- What inspiration could you take from Eco-communities?
- Can you make your local community/school more eco-friendly?
- Are there small sustainable practices your community can start implementing?



ECO- ENTREPRENEURSHIP CATEGORY

Projects that look at innovative products, technologies, services and processes that contribute to sustainable development.

TOO GOOD TO GO

Companies are creating new methods to fight food waste. According to the EPA, nearly 30% of household food is wasted, and the cost of this waste in Ireland comes to €1.29 billion every year.

Too Good To Go is an app that helps reduce food waste. Restaurants and stores list leftover food on the app at the end of the day, which users can buy at a lower price, sometimes even for free.

The app was created by young entrepreneurs who wanted to tackle food waste from buffets. In just eight years, it has grown to over 90 million users and 155,000 businesses in 17 countries. By saving more than 300 million meals, the app has prevented about 810,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions!

Food for Thought

- How can technology be used to develop environmentally friendly businesses?
- What role could we play in developing partnerships between local businesses and such food waste reduction initiatives?



Taken from <https://www.toogoodtogo.com/en-ie/about-us>

ECO-TOYS

Eco-toys are becoming a popular choice for people when buying toys for children. According to Plastics Europe, 90% of toys are made from new plastic, and 80% are made in China with transportation adding another 20% to their carbon footprint. Instead, eco-toys use materials such as responsibly sourced wood, recycled plastic and bioplastic or recycled/sustainable cardboard.

Buying eco-toys can help reduce environmental pollution, they're durable, long-lasting, made from more sustainable materials, and reduce plastic toy waste.

Jiminy eco-toys are a Dublin based eco-toy store that are inspiring a playfully sustainable world.

They offer a fresh alternative to toys with:

- Sustainable materials: Natural materials such as wood, bio-plastics, recycled cardboard, and paper.
- Low toy miles: Made in Europe with a maximum of 2,000 km 'toy-miles'.

Food for Thought

- What inspiration could you take from Jiminy eco-toys?
- Where else is there a gap in the market for sustainable material alternatives?



ECO-HEALTH & WELLBEING CATEGORY

Projects which explore the link between our health (physical and emotional wellbeing) and the environment we live in.

GREEN SPACES

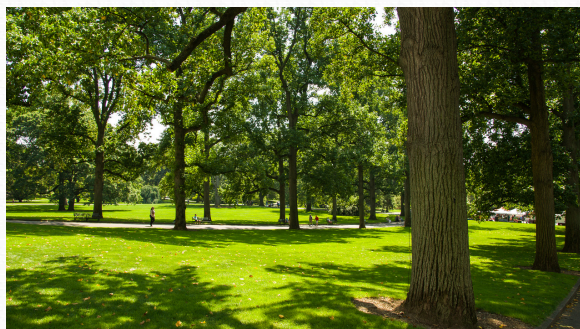
Green spaces are good for our health. For example, one large study in the Netherlands found that people with more green space within 1 to 3 km of their homes reported better physical health, better mental health and had fewer health issues than those with less green space.

Some explanations for this are that green spaces result in better air quality, support increased physical activity, provide a place for that brings people together, and because of the stress relieving properties of nature.

In Ireland, green spaces have become an important part of any new development. The HSE recommends prioritising green spaces in urban planning here.

Food for Thought

- Can you incorporate a green space into your school or local community?
- How can you raise awareness on the mental health and wellbeing benefits of green spaces?



CLEAN AIR

Air quality especially in highly populated areas is of concern and can negatively impact on our health.

People's health and the health of our environment is at risk due to the levels of pollutants in our air. Fine particulate matter from solid fuel combustion and nitrogen dioxide from vehicle emissions remains as our main pollutants. Read more here.

Clean Air Together (CAT) is a citizen science project where people voluntarily measure nitrogen dioxide pollution in their local area. The campaign has now been successful in Dublin, Cork and Galway. The clean air strategy is to move towards the World Health Organisation (WHO) Air Quality guidelines, which will have a positive impact on health.

Food for Thought

- What citizen science projects can you get involved with?
- How can your school/youth group/community reduce nitrogen dioxide and increase clean air in your area?



ENERGY CATEGORY

Projects which look at how to reduce the environmental impacts of our energy use.

REDUCE YOUR USE CAMPAIGN

The Irish Government has led a nationwide campaign called Reduce Your Use to encourage energy efficiency and highlights supports available for households and businesses. Read more [here](#).

Wind energy is one method that the government is using to lower our energy emissions. In January 2024, 36% of Ireland's electricity was produced by wind power. Meeting the Ireland's offshore wind energy targets could reduce emissions, cut electricity bills and create many employment opportunities.

Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland share the aim of generating 80% electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

Food for Thought

- Could you make your own energy saving resource for your school/community?
- Could you heighten awareness on renewable energy?
- How could you help win the debate on wind energy?



ECO-ENERGY PARKS

Large companies in industries like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and technology, have significant daily energy demands. To meet this need, Bord na Móna is developing Ireland's first Eco Energy Park on 3,000 hectares of land in Offaly, Westmeath, and Meath.

The Eco Energy Park aims to utilise renewable energy, like wind and solar, to create a sustainable energy ecosystem. Amazon Web Services (AWS) is set to be the first company to establish data centres in an Eco Energy Park, aligning with the Government's Principles for Sustainable Data Centre Development.

This initiative will help decentralise tech operations from Dublin, support sustainable industrial growth, and strengthen the national grid.

Food for Thought

- How can we help move energy intensive companies into eco parks?
- How can we support and encourage companies to make a green energy transition?
- Could we implement this in other parts of the country?
- How can we make sure this is a successful initiative?



FOOD CATEGORY

Projects that explore ways to achieve food security and improved nutrition by promoting sustainable agriculture and local products.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens are social spaces that provide outdoor environmental places of education where all members of a community can learn about gardening, food growing, food sovereignty, biodiversity, climate change and more.

Community Gardens Ireland work with government and non-governmental agencies across the island supporting and establishing community gardens.

Food for Thought

- There are economic, social and environmental benefits associated with building community gardens. Why is it important to consider these three pillars of sustainable development when talking about food?
- Is there a community garden in your area? If not, do you think one could be set up?



COMMUNITY FRIDGES

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that Ireland generated 750,000 tonnes of food waste in 2022. To address this issue, community fridges provide a practical solution.

A community fridge is a shared fridge where you can drop off food that's still fresh but won't be used, so others can take it instead and food waste is avoided. Right now, you can find these fridges in Northern Ireland, but they haven't popped up in the Republic of Ireland yet. Read more [here](#).

Food for Thought

- What lifestyle changes could people make to reduce their food waste?
- What would it take to set up a community fridge?



ORGANIC FARMING

Organic food is made using organic farming practices such as avoiding synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, not using genetically modified organisms, and ensuring high standards for animal welfare. The Organic Farming Scheme helps to support and encourage farmers to produce organic food.

Food for Thought

- How can farmers be encouraged to switch to organic farming?
- How can we sustainably produce food with minimal negative effects to the environment?

TRANSPORT CATEGORY

Projects which look at the impacts of the transportation we use, more sustainable means of transport, etc.

SUSTAINABLE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) is a state agency that provides sustainable transport infrastructure and services.

Recently, they created a new sustainability implementation plan [here](#).

This plan includes goals such as:

- Making it easier for everyone to walk, bike, and use greenways, with dedicated lanes to keep them safe from cars.
- Using more green energy to power our buildings and transportation.
- Encouraging more people to use public transport, with more low-emission vehicles on the road.

Positive improvements have already been made. For example, in 2023, the [National Transport Authority found](#) there was a 24% increase in the number of passengers using public transport.

Food for Thought

- What can be done to reach the TII sustainability goals?
- What do you think is most important when it comes to sustainable transport?
- What can be learnt from other countries regarding sustainable transport?



EMISSIONS IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

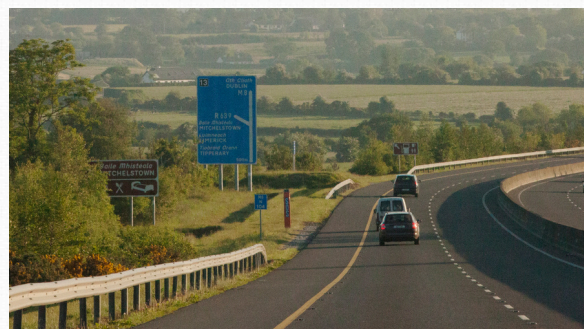
The Transport sector represents the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the Republic of Ireland. See more [here](#).

A high percentage of emissions in this sector come from car use. In 2022, nearly 70% of all trips were made by car according to the [National Household Travel Survey](#).

While most cars in Ireland are still fossil fuel-based, electric vehicle use appears to be increasing. According to [EPA's recent report](#), 23% of all new car registrations in 2023 were for electric vehicles.

Food for Thought

- How can we reduce emissions in the transport sector?
- How could the switch from fossil fuels to electric vehicles be made easier?
- What are the main reasons for private car ownership and how does this affect the need for a car?



WASTE CATEGORY

Projects that explore our consumption and production patterns, and how to reduce waste.

DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME

In 2024, Ireland introduced the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). This scheme incentivises consumers to return drink containers, so they can be recycled and reused for new containers. The DRS has been shown to increase recycling rates. Read [this](#) for more information.

However, some challenges have been identified in a [recent study](#) such as that some people feel they don't have time to return containers, and some are not sure how the scheme works.

Food for Thought

- How can we reduce confusion about the scheme?
- Is there a way we could make it more convenient for people to return used drink containers?
- Could similar schemes be adapted for other types of waste?



SINGLE-USE PLASTIC DIRECTIVE

The EU introduced the [Single-Use Plastic Directive](#) in 2021. Some measures under this Directive include:

- Single-use plastics like straws, cotton buds, cutlery, and plates are banned.
- Since July 2024, drink containers up to 3 litres must have attached caps.
- From January 2025, drink containers up to 3 litres must contain at least 25% recycled plastic.

Food for Thought

- How can we further reduce our plastic use?
- Could we explore any plastic alternatives that we could use instead?



FARM PLASTICS

Irish Farm Film Producers Group CLG aims to recycle and reuse plastics used on farms. However, currently a lot of plastic waste on farms is not recycled. Read more [here](#).

Food for Thought

- How could farmers be supported in taking part in the scheme?
- What changes in the scheme could be introduced to make it more effective?

WATER CATEGORY

Projects that look at issues such as impact of pollution in oceans or rivers, water scarcity or water waste.

WATER QUALITY REPORT

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) undertakes a full assessment of the overall quality and ecological status of Ireland's water every three years. The [2023 EPA Report](#), highlighted that water quality has not improved since the previous year. In a large proportion of our water bodies, nutrient levels remain too high.

Also, the biological health of rivers and lakes have shown small net declines. Agriculture and wastewater are the two biggest issues impacting our water quality.

In order to mitigate the run off from agriculture and wastewater into our water system, regulations and improved infrastructure needs to be put in place.

Food for Thought

- How can policymakers ensure that water quality regulations are enforced and adhered to?
- How can farmers reduce their chemical run off?
- How can this issue be highlighted more?



REFILL STATIONS

Every community should have access to free drinking water on the go. A company called [Refill](#) have launched an app known as 'the tap map' that shows you all of the places around Ireland where you can fill up your reusable water bottle for free.

This initiative allows any business with access to drinking water sign up to provide free refills to the public, by either filling the bottles on request or installing a self-serve refill station. To date, there are over 1,600 refill locations on the app. That amounts to 944,000 plastic bottles and over 83 million greenhouse gas emissions saved.

This initiative is mutually beneficial to both the business and citizen as it brings customer to businesses, increasing the footfall while also improving the company's sustainability goals.

Food for Thought

- Are there any refill stations in your area?
- How could you encourage businesses and other organisations around you to be involved in this initiative?
- Could your team become leaders of sustainable hydration?





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