

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!

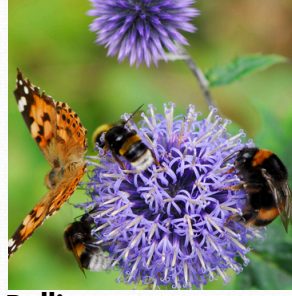
ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS



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



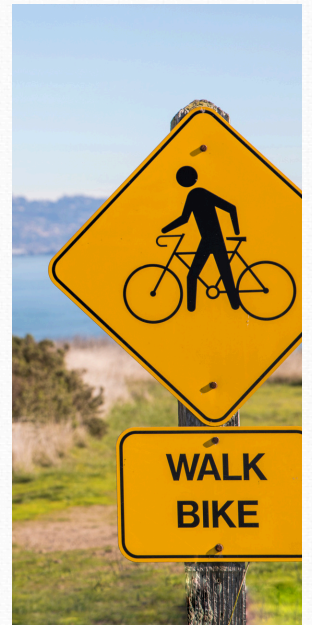
Sea Level Rise



Energy Reduction



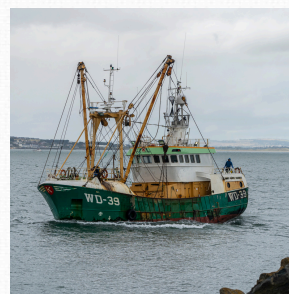
Water Pollution



Active Travel



Food Waste



Overfishing



Wildlife Conservation

BIODIVERSITY CATEGORY

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

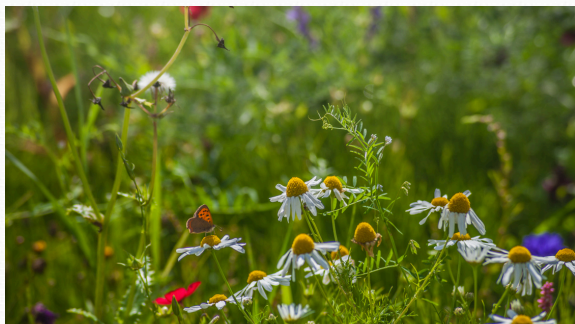
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2023-2030

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 90% 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 over 2,000 community groups 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 brought the future into focus with striking light installations that visualise projected sea level rise. Starting at the Spanish Arch in Galway, these installations also moved to other coastal areas across Ireland.

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

The project was funded by the Creative Climate Action fund, supported by the Creative Ireland Programme. Read more about it [here](https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/news/linte-na-farraige/).

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

Young people were 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 added brightness and colour, making it a vibrant focal point. By combining creativity with action, these murals helped 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, over 30% of wasted food comes from households, 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 ten years, it has grown to over 120 million users and 180,000 businesses in 21 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.toogoodto go.com/en-ie/about-us>

ECO-TOYS

Eco-toys are becoming a popular choice for people when buying toys for children. In an article by RTÉ, it was reported that 80% of all toys globally do not get recycled, and 5.5 million toys are discarded each year in Ireland alone. However, 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

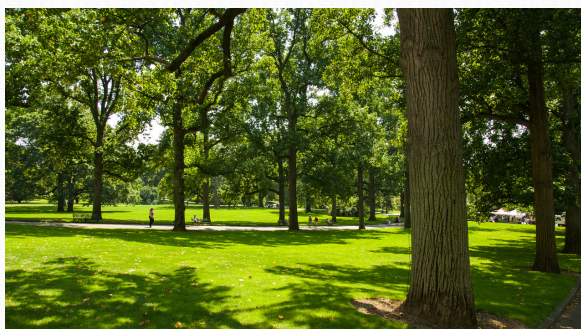
Green spaces are good for our health. For example, one large study in the Netherlands found that people with more green space within 1 to 3 km of their homes reported better physical health, better mental health and had fewer health issues than those with less green space.

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, Waterford 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](#).

There are many ways we can reduce our energy, but some ways are more effective than others! For example:

- Heating is the most energy intensive behaviour we do in our homes and schools by a significant amount, so reducing how much we use it can have a big impact.
- When it comes to electricity use, the electric shower is by far one of the biggest energy users in the home. In fact, just a 10 minute shower uses as much energy as leaving a modern LED light on for over 6 days!
- How we travel makes a big difference too. Cars use a huge amount of energy, so choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport where possible can significantly reduce the energy we use and our carbon emissions.

Want to see how public bodies and schools are performing in terms of their energy use and carbon footprint? You can check out their annual reports on [SEAI's website](#).

Food for Thought

- What one behaviour do you think we could change that would have the biggest impact on reducing our energy use?
- Do you think this behaviour is difficult to change? Why?
- What could encourage people in our homes, schools or communities to actually change it?

WATERWAY PROJECT

In early 2026, [Galway City Council](#) secured funding to install three small-scale hydropower systems along the canals in Galway through the European Urban Initiative's Innovation Actions programme. Galway is the first local authority in Ireland to receive funding under this programme, making it a huge success for both the city council and Galway's Climate Action team.

Through Galway City Council's [Living Lab](#) programme, members of the community will learn more about renewable energy and climate action while contributing their ideas. Galway City Community Network will also host regular engagement sessions to help increase community participation in the decision-making process.

This project not only promotes green energy in Galway city, but it brings in opportunities for education and engagement.

Food for Thought

- How can you incorporate education and engagement into current energy projects in your city?
- How could you use the information you've learned from previous lessons on sustainability to make informed decisions on climate policy and projects?



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?



REFRIDGE PROJECT

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that Ireland generated 708,000 tonnes of food waste in 2024. 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. Take a look [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.

MOVING TOGETHER STRATEGY 2026-2030

Ireland wants to change the way we travel. The Government's Moving Together Strategy 2026-2030 sets out a national vision for a more efficient, sustainable and accessible transport system in Ireland.

The strategy recognises that reducing congestion and creating a more sustainable system requires people to have realistic alternatives to travelling by car. This includes improving public transport, active travel and connections between different ways of getting around.

However, what works in one part of the country may not work in another. Rural and remote communities, for example, can face very different transport challenges from towns and cities.

Food for Thought

- What could applying the Moving Together Strategy look like in your area?
- What do you think is most important when it comes to sustainable transport?
- What can be learnt from other countries regarding sustainable transport?



REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES: SMARTER TRAVEL MARK

Rather than only looking at what governments can do, the Smarter Travel Mark shows how organisations can help people change the way they travel.

The programme recognises and celebrates organisations that support walking, cycling, public transport and carpooling, with the aim of reducing single-person car journeys. Organisations can work towards Bronze, Silver or Gold certification by putting measures in place to support more sustainable travel.

For example, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council was awarded the Gold Smarter Travel Mark in 2024 after installing 98 bike parking spaces, a bike wash station, maintenance stands, day lockers and a variety of bike stands for standard bikes, e-bikes, and cargo bike.

Food for Thought

- What could your school or youth organisation do to encourage more sustainable transport?
- What would make you more likely to walk, cycle or take public transport?
- Is it fair to ask people to drive less if sustainable alternatives aren't available?



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 2025 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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Habitual Actions

What are some behaviours or activities that you regularly engage in that might be negatively affecting our environment?

Take on a new sustainable practice such as using a keep cup 	Promote local shopping 	

Or....

What can you do daily and locally to have a positive impact on your environment?

- Take on a new sustainable practice such as using a reusable cup when buying coffee.
- Promote local shopping and try to shop in local independent shops.
- See if there are any swap shops around or maybe start one yourself.

Then have a contact us section?