

The Role of Future Generations in Environmental Matters

What are the legal obligations of the state and local communities toward future generations? How are the fields of children's rights and environmental protection connected? Are there good practices we could apply? What challenges do decision-makers in Slovenia face when involving children and young people in environmental and climate matters, and how could these challenges be addressed?

These were the key questions we explored at the training held on 22nd of October 2025 at the National Museum of Slovenia – Metelkova in Ljubljana. The training, primarily intended for representatives of national and local authorities who work with children and young people, was carried out as part of the ENRICH project.

In the first part of the training, experts and decision-makers shared their knowledge with the audience:

- **Doc. dr. Maša Kovič Dine**, Chair of International Law Department, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana;
- **Martina Ivanović**, Expert in Community Affairs, Municipality of Postojna;
- **Tina Kobilšek**, Lead climate negotiator, Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy;
- **Dr. Nataša Demšar Pečak**, Chair of the Cross-sectoral Working Group, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- **Luka Štrubelj**, Lawyer at PIC – Legal Centre for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment.

At the outset, **doc. dr. Maša Kovič Dine** presented the legal framework for the protection of the rights of children, young people, and future generations arising from international and European documents (Paris Agreement, Aarhus Convention, European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which highlights the protection of future generations in the preamble, etc.). She emphasized General Comment No. 26, issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which addresses the intersection of children's rights and climate and environmental change.

She stressed the importance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on state obligations regarding climate change, which clarified that climate protection is not a separate field of international law but is linked with other areas such as the protection of human and children's rights. She presented fundamental environmental principles, such as the prohibition of causing harm and the precautionary principle (the state must not refrain from preventive action when there is a risk of serious environmental damage), and highlighted the importance of intergenerational justice—managing resources in a way that ensures future generations can also use them.

She also discussed landmark climate cases in which children and youth acted as plaintiffs, emphasizing how crucial it is to use an approach that places the rights of children and future generations at the forefront (e.g., Neubauer v. Germany). To improve the protection of future generations, Dr. Kovič Dine proposed introducing various legal mechanisms that would integrate long-term thinking into policies and measures. She mentioned establishing national mechanisms and institutions for protecting their rights, such as an Ombudsman for Future Generations, and requiring assessments of impacts on future generations within regulatory impact assessments where policies may affect them.



The next speaker, **Martina Ivanović**, presented her experience with involving children in policy-making at the local level. The Municipality of Postojna systematically includes children and youth in decision-making processes because it wants young people to be actively involved in changes they see as important. The municipality has adopted a Youth Ordinance, is preparing a new Local Youth Programme, has established a Youth Affairs Commission and a Youth Council, and offers various subsidies, scholarships, and support for employment and entrepreneurship. Postojna is also a UNICEF Child-Friendly City, devoting special attention to the health and well-being of young people, including through the Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

One of the key projects in this field is the Children's Municipal Council, active since 2016 and involving children from three primary schools. Children elect their own mayor and deputy mayors, gain democratic experience, and provide very concrete and mature proposals—from safe routes to school, recreational infrastructure, to peer violence issues. Sessions are attended by professional staff, the mayor or deputy mayor, and the director of municipal administration, who discuss the children's ideas directly with them. The municipality works actively with youth organizations and plans to continue these efforts to build a youth-friendly community. A key recommendation for other municipalities is establishing a Children's Municipal Council and regular meetings between decision-makers and young people at least once or twice a year.

The following presentation focused on national-level activities, specifically the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy (MOPE) and its work on involving children and youth in climate policy. **Tina Kobilšek** emphasized that it is important for young people to have a say in climate policymaking, as climate issues rank high among their priorities. MOPE organizes the Youth Climate Delegate Program in cooperation with the National Youth Council of Slovenia. Each year, a delegate aged 18 to 29 is selected to engage with youth and the Slovenian delegation, organize consultations, collect the views of young people, and present them at international events, including COP climate conferences.

The programme focuses on empowering young people, strengthening their skills, building networks, and spreading climate knowledge. Delegates organize at least one public consultation and a simulation of international negotiations, participate in events, and communicate results, while abroad they attend COP. The benefits are mutual: young people influence policymaking and state authorities receive consolidated ideas and concrete proposals in a written document that supports decision-making.

In line with the Climate Act, young people and vulnerable groups must be included in the climate dialogue. The first dialogue was held in October 2025, involving the youth climate delegate. Focus groups discussed sustainable food production, mobility, and a just transition. In the future, MOPE will seek stronger connections with schools and local communities.

Dr. Nataša Demšar Pečak presented the development of the National Programme for Children in the Republic of Slovenia and progress on the 2026–2031 programme. Current priority areas include equal opportunities, participation of all children, life without violence, and safety in the digital environment. The new programme is being prepared by an Interdepartmental Working Group with representatives of ministries, NGOs, and educational institutions. Children and young people were included in the process, for example through the “Say what matters to you” event, where they called for more practical skills such as financial literacy and crisis response.



The new programme will include seven priority areas and will aim to improve child well-being, including environmental goals. Special emphasis will be placed on children's right to express their views in environmental matters and on creating a supportive environment. Specific measures will be included in later action plans, which will define responsibilities and monitoring indicators. The importance of transferring these findings into practice was highlighted, with an emphasis that the needs of children should be reflected particularly in the school system.

After a short break, **Luka Štrubelj** presented the protection of future generations through participation of children and youth in environmental and climate matters. He highlighted three main systemic challenges faced by those trying to involve children in environmental and climate procedures:

- Limited resources, capacities, and expertise to involve children in environmental matters;
- Although children and youth are formally allowed to participate in public consultations on environmental regulations and policies, participation is ineffective due to the way information is presented;
- There are challenges in involving minors in civil initiatives, as the Environmental Protection Act allows participation of adults only.

He proposed several solutions:

- Address resource challenges through training, better communication between competent bodies, and a stronger role for civil society with hands-on experience working with children;
- Improve the effectiveness of participation through clearer communication of policy changes, dedicated consultations for children and youth, and clearer procedures for their involvement;
- Enable participation of minors in civil initiatives through legislative changes, and in legal proceedings more generally by interpreting legal standing more broadly to ensure direct participation.

In the second part, we held a roundtable with decision-makers on opportunities for involving children and young people in environmental and climate matters. Participants included:

- **Anita Bregar**, Directress General, Directorate for Family, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- **Mag. Mateja Pitako**, Head of the Climate Policy Sector, Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy;
- **Barbara Radovan**, Spatial Planning Specialist, Directorate for Spatial Planning and Building, Ministry for Natural Resources and Spatial Planning;
- **Robert Bolješić**, Directorate for Nature, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning.

The roundtable was moderated by **Luka Štrubelj**.

The participants emphasized the importance of raising awareness among decision-makers about the needs of vulnerable groups, especially children, and involving them in policy design. It is crucial to empower children, help them understand processes, and verify whether they truly understand the content they are being asked to comment on.

They pointed out that public consultations are held for policies and regulations, where children and youth may also participate. In spatial planning, it is vital to build knowledge about space



and the consequences of interventions, and to involve young people in a clear and accessible way. Ministries are trying to include youth organizations in environmental and nature protection procedures, but challenges remain in finding effective channels and formal representation of young people.

Systemic gaps were also highlighted—there is often an expectation that the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities alone should cover children's issues, which makes it difficult to create targeted policies that recognize children as holders of rights. Therefore, efforts are underway to strengthen cooperation between sectors, prepare guidelines for decision-makers, and involve children through the National Programme for Children and the Children's Council.

A strong emphasis was placed on the role of individuals—decision-makers themselves. Participants agreed that children and young people can strongly influence adults, but real participation requires feedback, respect for their proposals, and opportunities for gaining knowledge.

In conclusion, participants stressed the importance of better communication, institutionalizing mechanisms for future generations, conducting generational impact assessments of regulations, and continuously seeking new ways to co-create policies with young people.

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