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European Union

Raising awareness on
climate change

**AND ENERGY
TRANSITION IN SERBIA**

Research methodology

- The research was conducted using online (CAWI) survey and focus groups.
- The research is part of the project "Raising awareness on climate change and green transition" implemented by the Association RES Serbia with the support of European Union and WWF Adria.
- The survey was conducted between November 21 and December 25, 2024.
- The sample consisted of 525 young people who were surveyed and 16 young people who participated in focus groups.
- The research included a population of young people aged 18 to 30 from all over Serbia.

Structure of research respondents

The structure of the survey respondents included an equal representation in several categories, in accordance with the data from the last census.

Gender of respondents:

- Female - 49%
- Male - 51%

Age structure:

- 18-21 - 32%
- 22-26 - 32%
- 27-30 - 36%

Regional representation:

- Vojvodina - 26%
- Belgrade - 25%
- Western Serbia & Šumadija - 27%
- Southern & Eastern Serbia - 22%

Participant structure of focus groups:

The participants of the first focus group were young people aged 18 to 30, while the participants of the second focus group were young people working in the field of renewable energy sources, who are employed in sectors such as corporate, scientific, non-governmental and media.

There were eight participants in each focus group, and the discussion lasted 90 minutes per group.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The first association on climate change, according to young people:

Climate change is one of the world's biggest challenges, with many negative impacts. Accordingly, young people in the research also had different first associations at the mention of this term:

- **Global warming;**
- **Warm nights;**
- **Greenhouse effect;**
- **Bad weather;**
- **Adaptation.**

"Intergenerational justice, that is, in what way, depending on which generation we belong to, we can use resources and be responsible for future generations."

~ F, 21 years old

The biggest sources of climate change in Serbia, according to youth:

In terms of the impact that leads to the development of climate change in Serbia, young people have singled out several primary associations. In their opinion, these are:

- **Thermal power plants;**
- **Outdated methods of industrial production;**
- **Individual fireplaces;**
- **Wild landfills;**
- **Agriculture.**

Young people have recognized that the sources of various environmental pollution that also encourage the negative development of climate change come from different sectors. The biggest impact comes from industrial sector, and primarily heavy industry, which refers to thermal power plants, but also to other industrial production facilities.

The negative impact of fossil fuel use on the development of climate change:

Young people to a large extent (69%) notice the existence of a negative correlation and cite as a reason that the use of fossil fuels is one of the **MAIN CAUSES** of the development of climate change. Nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of respondents, or 24%, point out that there is a link, but that fossil fuels do not have much impact on the development of climate change. These percentages indicate that young people generally have an attitude that fossil fuels in the greatest possible way it is characterized as a negative source of energy. Although the largest percentage of young people recognize the existence of a negative link, it is also interesting that close to $\frac{1}{3}$ of young people collectively believe that fossil fuels have too much or no impact on the development of climate change.

What is the impact of climate change on the daily lives of young people?

Respondents say that climate change is **MOSTLY** affecting their daily habits. With an average score of **3.53**, young people position climate change as a factor that significantly affects the shaping of their daily lives. Individually, the largest number of respondents give a score of 3 (37%), while a slightly smaller number give a score of 4 (31%). Focus group participants believe that climate change has a greater impact on their daily lives – most of them say that they feel the impact on a daily basis, while a smaller number believe that changes have an impact only at certain times of the year. This is especially true during the warmer seasons. However, even in colder periods, such as autumn and winter, young people feel that they have lost their characteristic features, and that they cannot enjoy them as before.

"I used to ski regularly in the winter, but because of climate change, I can now only afford 2 to 3 days on the slopes."

~ F, 29 years old

The negative effects of climate change that will have the greatest impact on young people in the future:

The largest number of young people, 47%, recognize **HIGH TEMPERATURES** as the effect of climate change that will have the greatest negative impact on future generations of young people in Serbia. In contrast, for 19% of young people, the greatest negative impact will be **DROUGHTS**, followed by **HEAT WAVES** for 14%, and **HEAVY RAINFALL** for 13%. Although other effects are less represented in percentage terms in the responses, the focus group participants provide an explanation. For them, high temperatures are intertwined with the other impacts mentioned and this in no way diminishes their consequences, which we will all, "unfortunately", feel if the situation does not change soon on a global level.

Likelihood of climate change consequences on future generations of young people in Serbia:

Young generations believe that climate change will have a **GREAT IMPACT** (55%) on young people in the future. In addition, another $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents believe that climate change, in addition to having consequences in the future, is now very present. Focus group participants emphasize that climate change will bring risks to the health of citizens, as well as the emergence of new viruses and diseases. According to respondents, climate change already affects when we wake up, how productive we are at work, how much time we can spend outdoors, but it also leads to additional living costs.

"I always remember life in Studenjak at a time when there was no air conditioning, one summer it was so hot that I had the feeling that the air was blinking."

~ F, 25 years old

The first association with the term green transition for young people:

The term green transition initially associates research participants with the following:

- **Use of renewable resources;**
- **Sustainable development;**
- **Solar panels;**
- **Environmental protection;**
- **Electrical vehicle ;**
- **EU regulative;**
- **Just transition;**
- **Balance of all energy sources.**

Based on the responses, young people have shown that on this issue they have a primary association with the energy domain, more narrowly speaking, with renewable energy. Although it is undeniably primarily related to energy, this term for young people also has a broader scope. Thus, the associations are also the environment and sustainable development, which leads to the conclusion that young people connect numerous terms from these areas with each other and see certain similarities and overlaps in them.

The biggest energy problems in Serbia, according to young people:

In relation to the green transition, young people also answered questions about what the biggest energy problems in Serbia are. In their opinion, these are primarily:

- **Old inefficient;**
- **Problems on the network;**
- **Dependence on non-renewable sources;**
- **Uncertainty of supply;**
- **Regulations.**

The answers to this question show a wide range of different problems that are intertwined. For young people, these are problems with the methods of energy production, while on the other hand, problems are the functioning and quality of energy availability.

"Energy inefficiency is compatible with energy poverty because there is a social vulnerability of citizens, which can be seen in the example of when they have to pay their electricity bills."

~ M, 27 years old

Primary source of information on climate change and green transition for youth:

In getting information about climate change and green transition, young people in Serbia rely on **SOCIAL MEDIA** in slightly more than half of their responses (52%), while 22% use internet portals as a source of information. Overall, as many as $\frac{3}{4}$ of young people use modern digital media to get information about these topics. Such responses are expected, because young people today rely on modern rather than traditional media, such as the press and TV, for many social topics. It is interesting that a significant percentage of young people (15%) rely on their environment for information, i.e. on conversations with family members, friends, acquaintances and other members of their environment.

"Our generations are far more informed through modern media and therefore have a greater degree of access to information, but this does not necessarily mean that the information is of complete quality."

~ M, 19 years old

Availability of information on climate change and RES to young people in Serbia:

The research shows that young people believe that information on climate change and renewable energy sources is **NOT SUFFICIENTLY ACCESSIBLE** to them. They are divided, and thus emphasize that information is mostly available (34%), or that information is mostly unavailable (46%). The polarization of attitudes is also evident among young people in focus groups. Young people believe that there has been an increase in reporting on these topics compared to the period 10 years ago, but that this has not necessarily led to an increase in the quality of content and a greater development of awareness among citizens themselves. Incidentally, today there are far more sources of information, but many of them, primarily modern digital sources, are used mainly by young people, which leads to an uneven development of the population's awareness.

"Environmental awareness can be seen in a gradational way, it is the basic ecological knowledge, from which environmental awareness derives, which affects our ecological behavior."

~ F, 27 years old

The relationship between the operation of thermal power plants and their impact on the environment in Serbia, according to young people:

Young people have a clear opinion about the operation of thermal power plants in Serbia; on the one hand, they inevitably provide energy, but they are also major polluters of the environment. This is the opinion of the largest number of young people, namely 71% of the research participants. In addition, another 16% of young people point out that these plants do not provide enough energy in Serbia, but that, incidentally, they create pollution through their work. Based on the answers, a total of 87% of young people define thermal power plants as major polluters in Serbia. Such a high percentage of negative views of thermal power plants by young people was characterized at the very beginning of the research. Thermal power plants were recognized as one of the first associations of young people when it comes to sources that influence the development of climate change in Serbia.

Support of the youth to the transition to higher production of energy from renewable sources in Serbia:

Providing support for the commitment to transition to a higher level of energy production and consumption from renewable sources is the position of young people in the research. Such a decision is fully supported by slightly more than half, 53% of respondents, while another 37% support it mainly. Young people support the transition to renewable sources, which only further confirms the position on the previous question, according to which thermal power plants are characterized as major environmental polluters in Serbia.

"In our country, private companies invest more than the state in new renewable energy plants."

~ M, 24 years old

The impact of the development and use of renewable energy in response to climate change as assessed by young people:

In line with the previous question, young people have an almost identical view of the role and impact of renewable sources. Namely, 39% of young people in the survey believe that the development and use of renewable energy sources has a very positive impact on preventing the further development of climate change. A slightly larger number of young people (44%) think that renewable energy sources have a mostly positive impact. This shows an almost complete overlap in the views of young people who support the transition to greater energy production from renewable sources, and therefore the links in terms of the positive impact on addressing the consequences of climate change. The difference compared to the previous question is the percentage of 10% of young people who pointed out that the development of renewable sources actually has a neutral impact on preventing the consequences of climate change.

How does the development of renewable energy sources affect the feelings of young people?

The development of renewable sources and the opening of new plants in Serbia predominantly evoke three emotions/feelings among young people. It gives young people hope, satisfaction, but also creates fear. **HOPE** refers to novelties such as turning to alternatives to the current predominance of coal-based energy production, but also to opportunities for future generations. **SATISFACTION** concerns positive changes that affect the creation of better conditions for the quality of life and new opportunities for young people. **FEAR** prevails when talking about renewable sources because they are not without certain drawbacks. In this regard, young people are most concerned about the impact of this development on biodiversity, while the quality of these investments in Serbia itself causes anxiety.

Renewable source with the most potential, according to young people, in Serbia for providing additional energy:

The research showed that young people divide the potential for providing additional energy from renewable sources into two groups. On the one hand, these are the potentials from water, sun and wind, which they believe have by far the most potential. **SOLAR** with 42% is by far the most prominent potential, followed by the potentials from **WATER** (22%) and **WIND** (19%) with a significantly smaller share. In contrast, young people do not recognize the potentials from geothermal sources, biomass and biogas as sources with too much potential in Serbia. The participants of the focus groups also cite as one of the reasons for such attitudes that they are not talked about much in public and that there are currently no major investments in these sources, compared to the first group, which is by far more present. Such a situation is also created by their perception of the answers, and they believe that this attitude is shared by a larger part of the population in Serbia.

Attitude of young people about the most dominant of the renewable sources in Serbia in terms of the amount of energy produced:

Compared to the question about the renewable source with the highest potential, young people recognize renewable sources in the same way when it comes to the current energy production in Serbia. Grouping them in an identical way, young people ranked **HYDRO ENERGY** with a high 54% as the most dominant renewable source from which energy is currently provided. It is followed by the energy that Serbia gets from **WIND FARMS** (14%) and the growing potential from **SOLAR POWER PLANTS** (15%). The remaining three sources were once again recognized as less dominant sources from which total energy is obtained in Serbia.

"When I was in school, hydropower was always highlighted as a renewable source from which we provide the most green energy."

~ M, 21 years old

The first association of young people on renewable energy sources in Serbia:

When it comes to associations with renewable energy sources in Serbia, young people distinguish the following groups of responses:

- **Solar panels;**
- **Sun;**
- **Djerdap;**
- **Wind farms / Wind parks in Vojvodina;**
- **Wind;**
- **Hydro power plants.**

Based on the answers, three sources are clearly distinguished on this question: wind, water and sun. This once again indicates that young people definitely recognize them the most and that they received the most information about them. Not only are they recognized as one of the associations, but young people also recognize individual objects from these sources as their primary associations in Serbia for renewable energy sources.

Opinion of young people on the impact of wind farms on soil fertility in Serbia:

Wind farms, or as the participants also call them windmills, primarily in Vojvodina, are one of the first associations of young people to renewable sources in Serbia. The largest percentage of young people, just over half of them (52%) believe that wind farms have a **NEUTRAL** influence on the fertility of the land on which they are located. That is, young people do not see problems with the operation of these facilities on the quality of the land itself. On the other hand, a little over $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents collectively believe that their existence actually has a very positive (12%) or mostly positive (26%) impact on fertility land. Except for the fact that they are associated with renewable energy in Serbia, wind farms for young people do not represent sources of particular problems.

Opinion of young people on further investment in renewable sources in Serbia:

Young people recognize the presence of investments in renewable sources in Serbia. A high percentage of young people, as much as 64%, believe that these investments will have only **POSITIVE** results in the future. In addition, a positive attitude towards these investments, but with limited significance, is held by nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents, or 32%. Comparing the responses to this question with the question about support for further transition to energy production from renewable sources, a high degree of coincidence is observed, where the percentage of young people who provide support, or have some kind of positive attitude towards investments in this sector, is almost equal. Development trends in this energy sector, especially in the last few years, have certainly influenced the development of awareness among young people on this topic.

Assessment of youth employment prospects in the renewable energy sector in Serbia in the future:

Young people recognize business prospects in the renewable energy sector as one of the surest employment opportunities in the future. This is also concluded based on the average score of **3.67**, with which young people in the survey indicate their expectations of this sector. This is further confirmed by the scores of 3, 4 and 5 that young people gave most often as their answers on this issue. In this sector, young people expect secure further investments, which will lead to the need for new jobs. A significant number of young people in the focus groups recognized that there is a possibility of dealing with the topic of renewable energy through various spheres such as science, the non-governmental sector, the media, but also by working in the plants themselves.

"The RES sector is very interdisciplinary, because it finds its application in other spheres such as banking, media and construction."

~ F, 25 years old



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