Youth Perspective for the Purposes of the Voluntary National Review 2025

Purpose of the Survey

The young generation has been an important actor in the preparation of the 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR). The aim of involving youth was to provide this generation with the space to express their views on issues related to sustainable development, as we consider their perspective essential and believe their voice should carry significant weight, especially in this area of public policy.

We drew inspiration from international examples where active youth involvement in the VNR process is already being practiced and has proven to be greatly enriching for the review. The Czech Republic had already included the perspective of young people in the previous review in 2021; the current VNR features more extensive data collection.

Methodology

To understand the views of young people on sustainability-related topics, a series of roundtable discussions was organized with representatives of the younger generation. The target group was defined as secondary school students who are already aware of societal challenges and are forming strong opinions but who still have very limited opportunities for official public participation and space to express their views.

The aim of the data collection was to cover as broad a spectrum of the population as possible and to create a representative sample within the defined age group. For this purpose, the roundtables were held in different regions of the Czech Republic and involved respondents from various types and fields of secondary schools.

- December 11, 2024, Prague – 10 participants

- January 13, 2025, Ústí nad Labem – 11 participants

- January 15, 2025, Pelhřimov – 8 participants

- February 6, 2025, Olomouc – 18 participants

In total, 47 respondents from 19 secondary schools participated in the roundtables. Among the respondents were 22 girls and 25 boys. The overall sample included: 5 grammar schools, 3 business academies, 4 technical secondary schools, 2 public administration secondary schools, 1 hotel school, 1 medical school, 1 Waldorf lyceum, 1 technical apprenticeship program, and 1 service-oriented apprenticeship program. All years of secondary education were represented.

Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. At the beginning of each session, participants were introduced to the purpose of the survey and engaged interactively with the basic principles of sustainable development. Afterwards, several predefined cross-cutting topics of the VNR were discussed with the participants, including social inequalities, decarbonisation, and societal resilience. At the end of each session, respondents had the opportunity to choose a topic of personal interest—one they felt a need to comment on.

The goal of the survey was not to test the participants' knowledge, but to map their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Nevertheless, many participants demonstrated a broad understanding of sustainability, and overall, attitudes towards sustainability among the young generation were very positive.

Subsequently, the findings from the roundtables were verified through a questionnaire, which quantitatively mapped the views of young people across a broader population. The questionnaire was distributed through the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education, the Czech Council of Children and Youth, and the social media of the Department of Sustainable Development.

After 14 days of data collection, 72 completed questionnaires were received. Two were excluded from the analysis due to respondents not falling within the target age group (15–28 years). Among the valid responses, there were 43 women, 25 men, and 2 respondents who selected "other/prefer not to say." Respondents came from all regions of the Czech Republic, mostly students or graduates of grammar schools (32 in total) and secondary school programs with final exams (32 in total). There were also 4 students from apprenticeship programs, and 2 respondents stated they had not attended secondary education.
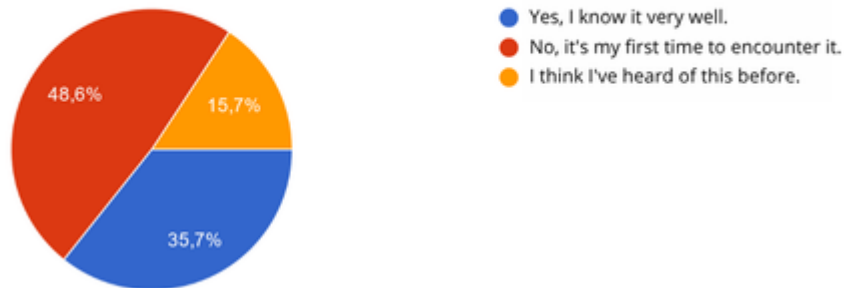
Key Findings

Sustainability in General

For most participants of the roundtable discussions, sustainability was not a new concept—they already had some basic awareness of it. A few participants had not encountered the topic before or did not have a clear understanding of its meaning. This was also confirmed by the questionnaire survey: 91% of respondents had already come across the term sustainability/sustainable development, 7% were unsure, and for 2%, it was a new concept. A slightly lower, yet still considerable level of awareness was shown regarding the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (see chart).

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Have you ever heard of the Sustainable Development Goals?
70 responses

- Yes, I know it very well.
- No, it's my first time to encounter it.
- I think I've heard of this before.

48,6%   15,7%   35,7%

Participants in the roundtables generally defined sustainability, for example, as:

- *"A type of development or way of functioning on Earth that does not harm the planet in the long term."*

- *"An approach that can be applied over the long term without negative consequences."*

Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), roundtable participants most frequently identified SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; SDG 2 – Zero Hunger; SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being; SDG 4 – Quality Education; and SDG 13 – Climate Action as the most important.

This result was consistent with the questionnaire survey, in which the same SDGs were most commonly cited, except for SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, which received relatively lower support in the questionnaire responses.

Social Inequalities

Participants in both the roundtable discussions and the questionnaire survey were very much aware of existing inequalities and were able to identify a wide range of them, including those that do not directly affect themselves or their surroundings. Some roundtable participants also shared their personal experiences with inequality. According to the questionnaires, 67% of respondents reported having encountered inequalities in their immediate environment—most commonly in the form of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals or racism.
 Both roundtable and survey participants generally agreed that they feel disadvantaged due to their age, perceiving weaker political representation, a need to fight harder for societal recognition, and that their voice carries less weight compared to that of older generations. The questionnaires also highlighted strong concerns that the current young

generation faces far more difficult conditions in securing housing and financial stability than previous generations.

Roundtable participants shared observations such as:

- "There is no political party that appeals to young voters. The focus is on seniors because they represent larger age cohorts. There isn't as much space for the young."
- "If there were more young people in politics, it would be more motivating for us, as we'd feel we also have a chance to get somewhere."
- "Sometimes people don't take my opinions as seriously as they would if someone older said the same thing."
- "Pension indexation was ultimately approved, and as a side effect, there's not enough left for education and young people."

Both the qualitative and quantitative surveys reflected an awareness of gender inequalities in the Czech Republic and globally. One of the groups in the qualitative survey chose this topic for further discussion. While they perceive gender inequality as present in the Czech Republic, they do not feel it impacts them directly. They are especially aware of this issue in developing and culturally distant countries. In the Czech context, they see a strong generational divide in attitudes. They are aware of inequalities in the labor market, with some even having family experiences of this. Several female participants shared experiences where older men denied them access to information in technically oriented fields, based on prejudices about women's skills and understanding in those areas. However, they believe that inequalities will naturally decrease over time, as the younger generation is less influenced by such prejudices.

The topic of Ukrainian refugee integration was also raised during the survey as an area of social inequality. Roundtable participants acknowledged that some inequality may arise, particularly due to language barriers and the need to adapt to a new environment. Nevertheless, they generally expressed positive attitudes toward their Ukrainian peers and described mostly positive experiences with the integration of Ukrainian refugees in their communities.

They also recognized broader societal impacts of Ukrainian integration, identifying economic benefits for the Czech Republic and cultural enrichment as the main advantages. On the negative side, they mentioned reduced availability of housing for Czech citizens in the context of the overall housing crisis, social division, and an increase in crime. These findings were echoed in the questionnaire responses, where most reported positive experiences, though some mentioned conflicts between Czechs and Ukrainians occurring or having occurred in their local areas.

Decarbonisation

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The qualitative research revealed that most participants perceive decarbonisation as a current and relevant issue and are familiar with its meaning and purpose. However, there was noticeable skepticism, especially regarding the feasibility of meeting the timeframes for transitioning to clean energy sources. This was also confirmed by the quantitative survey, in which 64% of respondents said they are familiar with the term "decarbonisation." A large majority perceive the goals and overall benefits of decarbonisation for the Czech Republic and the environment positively, but many are uncertain or disagree that the Czech economy can successfully manage the transition.

Particularly in the 8-year horizon, participants were skeptical about the country's ability to switch to renewable sources (54% disagree or partially disagree). Over a 15-year timeframe, however, some respondents were more optimistic, with 50% partially or fully agreeing that decarbonisation in the Czech Republic is achievable.

Roundtable participants were aware of the obstacles preventing a smooth and rapid transition to renewable energy in the Czech Republic. They mentioned, for example, high financial costs and structural barriers such as weak infrastructure and limited climatic conditions. They also recognized side effects such as potential job losses for large groups of workers and the need for their reintegration into the labor market. Participants acknowledged various alternatives, with nuclear energy receiving strong support among young people.

Statements from the roundtables included:

- *"It's good to get rid of coal because it pollutes. But the problem is that employment will drop when coal mines and power plants close."*

- *"Besides not having the finances, we also lack the tools. I don't think a few hydroelectric plants across the country can support that many households."*

- *"We in the Czech Republic can't build as many wind turbines and solar panels as, say, Germany."*

- *"I'm skeptical and don't see much point in it. I'm not saying the effort is wrong, but reaching this by 2033 seems unrealistic to me."*

- *"Personally, I see the future more in building nuclear power plants, which have a much lower carbon intensity than coal power plants."*
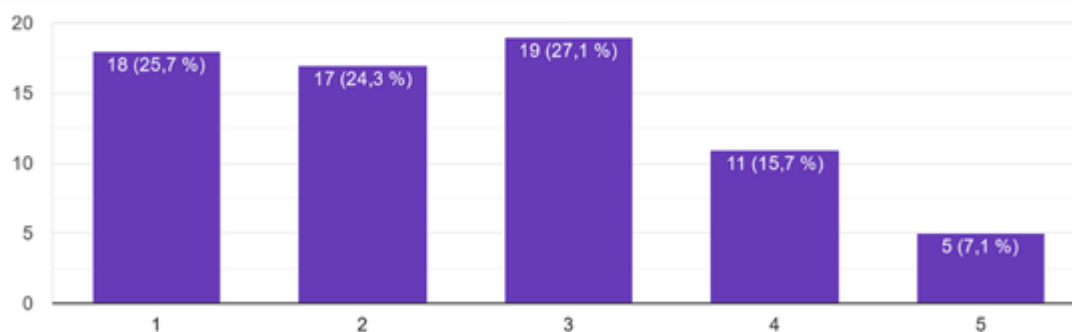
A repeatedly expressed view was that the efforts of the Czech Republic and the EU in decarbonisation are pointless unless similar efforts are made by other countries or continents that are significantly larger CO_2 emitters.

As part of the decarbonisation topic, participants were also asked about their attitude toward electromobility. Again, while the purpose was generally viewed positively, there was considerable skepticism and concern about the practical consequences. They perceived the EU's initiative as coercive and expressed a desire for the freedom to choose what type of car they could drive in the future. They repeatedly mentioned shortcomings such as limited infrastructure, problems with battery production and disposal, high prices, and inaccessibility for average households. Similar findings were reported in the questionnaire (see charts below).

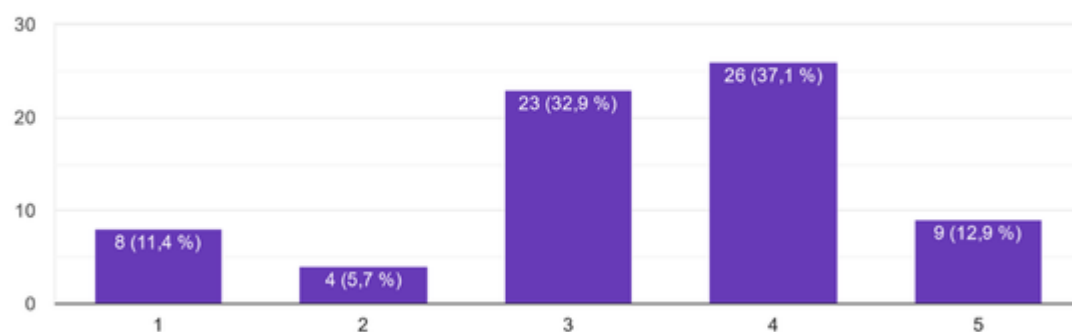*Note: On the scale, 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".*

I agree that from 2035 new cars with combustion engines should no longer be sold in the EU.
70 responses

I have a positive opinion on the development of electromobility.
70 responses

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Societal Resilience

Among the characteristics that contribute to societal resilience, participants in the roundtables and the survey most frequently mentioned democracy, access to information and information literacy, empathy and respect, determination, work or other opportunities for self-fulfillment, quality education, income and savings, health and safety, and the provision of basic needs.

Participants were also asked about the impact of social media on societal resilience. The topic of social media was clearly a pressing issue for them—they were highly engaged in the discussion, and one group even chose to continue exploring this topic at the expense of selecting their own discussion theme.

In general, participants in both the roundtables and the survey viewed social media somewhat negatively. While they acknowledged several benefits—particularly the quick access to information, opportunities for education, and communication with others—they pointed out significantly more drawbacks. These included the spread of disinformation or propaganda, the rise in hatred, loss of privacy, reduced ability to concentrate, the risk of addiction, and lower self-esteem due to constant comparison with others. Roundtable participants also referred to excessive consumption and the erosion of personal individuality caused by trends and product advertising. They also noted the risks of bullying or cyberattacks.

Participants are aware that social media negatively affects both themselves and the resilience of society, and therefore also overall sustainability. However, the vast majority of them still use social media. They justify this mainly by stating that not being on social media isolates individuals from the collective or from opportunities for public participation.

- *"If I were a psychologist and someone came to me with a problem, my first question would be – How much time do you spend on social media?"*

- *"I deleted all my social media for a while, for about three months. And it was wonderful, like a detox. But because of work, I had to come back."*

- *"If I wanted to start a business, for example, nowadays without social media, not many people would hear about it. It's a necessity these days."*

- *"Most people use social media, and I had to conform to the majority. Otherwise, they would have just forgotten about me."*

Participants are aware of the risks posed by disinformation and recognize how it divides society and undermines its resilience. As tools to combat disinformation that they personally use, they repeatedly mentioned verifying information from multiple sources or relying on trusted, verified sources.

When asked about the introduction of censorship, opinions were quite divided, as each participant may have a different idea of the ideal extent of such censorship. In general, however, they agreed that individuals should bear a certain degree of personal responsibility for their behavior online.

They are aware that some groups of the population are more susceptible to believing disinformation. They also suggested introducing an age limit for the use of social media, while acknowledging that in practice such conditions are often easy to bypass. They also emphasized the need to strengthen the influence of parents over their children's online behavior.
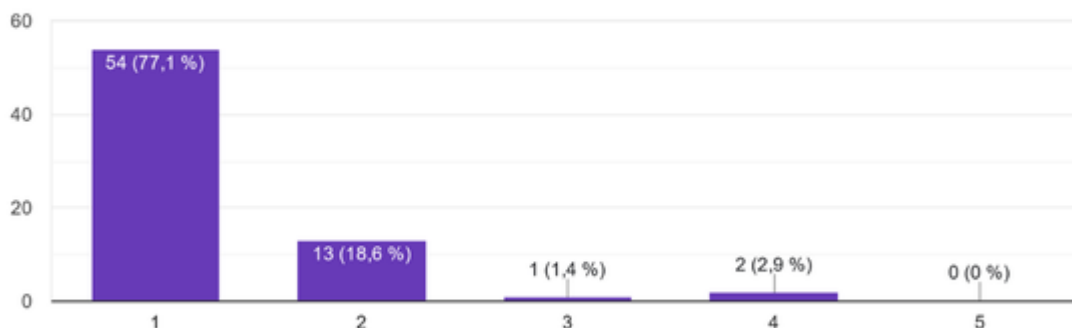
- *"Social media can be a big problem, especially for someone who is easily manipulated."*

- *"Some issues on the internet try to present themselves in a black-and-white way. They suggest it's either A or B, with nothing in between. It's not like in real life, where we can see some context."*

- *"I agree with introducing censorship, but only for certain things that border on the suppression of the rights of specific individuals or groups."*

- *"I wonder whether it might be more effective—not to censor or control disinformation—but rather to provide courses in schools or elsewhere that would educate people on how to behave properly online, instead of simply controlling what people post."*

- *"I think we should encourage younger people to go outside, join clubs, learn something, give them a book—even a comic book is fine—or get them involved in sports. For me, it's all about balance. Less phone time, more real life."*

The significant presence of false information on the internet is also confirmed by the findings from the surveys, in which the vast majority of respondents reported encountering disinformation online and expressed considerable skepticism about the truthfulness and reliability of the information presented (see graphs below). Respondents most frequently identified the groups most susceptible to believing disinformation as seniors, people with lower levels of education, those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, or generally individuals with lower media and information literacy.

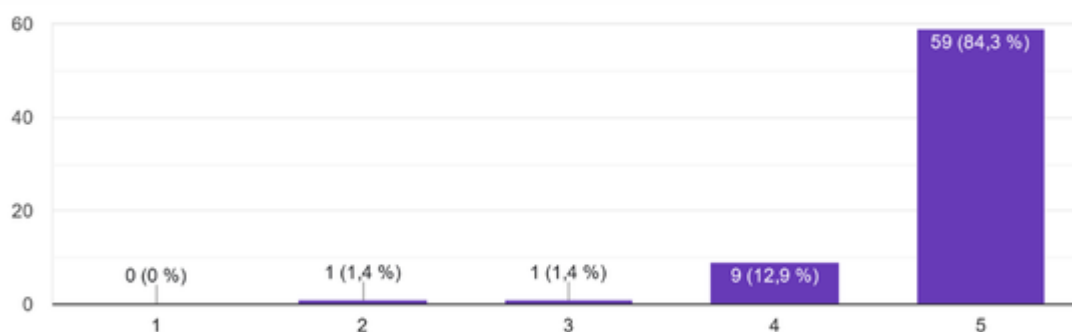*Note: On the scale, 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".*

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Social media provide only true and reliable information.
70 responses

I have encountered fake news or misinformation on social media.
70 responses

Topics Chosen by Respondents – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

In two of the roundtable groups, participants selected SDG 16 – *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions* – as their final self-chosen topic, along with related subtopics. The most frequently discussed areas included the protection of democracy, Czech Republic's sovereignty, competitiveness, defense and security policy, international relations, and threats of oligarchization and authoritarian ideologies. Participants generally expressed strong concerns regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

- *"Terrorist states threaten our European society and security. I'm talking, for example, about the Russian Federation and states that commit violence on the territory of others, without any justification."*

- *"We could do something about it, but we are democrats, so at the same time we also can't."*

- *"To have peace, we must simultaneously prepare for war—therefore we must constantly arm ourselves, be a strong country with a strong army, a country prepared for war with advanced technologies that allow us to compete with hostile states."*

Participants perceive peace and democracy as valuable principles that must be protected. They consider them essential for sustainable development. Their understanding of peace is broad.

- "Peace is a fundamental building block. For example, in Ukraine, they don't care about implementing climate measures because they don't have peace. That's the foundation in my opinion. The other SDGs are somewhat secondary."

- "I think peace isn't just the absence of war. It's also disrupted by societal divisions or the social status of certain groups, like when some people are discriminated against."

- "In my opinion, racism alone is enough to say we don't have peace."

Participants identified oligarchy as a major risk. They repeatedly referred to the influence of politicians or business figures over the media as a significant and current issue. They also pointed out that societal divisions pose challenges when introducing certain regulations and that truly necessary measures often meet with misunderstanding within society.

Conclusion

The series of roundtables and the follow-up survey provided a number of valuable insights—not only for the Voluntary National Review (VNR) but also for a broader understanding of the views and mindset of the young generation. It is clear that young people are interested in the topic of sustainability, climate protection, its impacts on society and the economy, and other related areas. They are aware of the broader context and are engaged with what is happening both locally and globally.

This tendency was particularly evident among participants from grammar schools and business academies, but all roundtable participants—regardless of their field of study or place of residence—expressed interest to varying degrees. Young people are not indifferent to issues that may not affect them directly at the moment (such as housing availability, labor market inequalities, energy prices), but they are well aware of the potential future impacts and risks associated with them.

The roundtables also brought significant value to the participants themselves—not only in terms of education about sustainable development but also in related areas such as

social inequalities, especially the integration of people arriving from Ukraine, climate change and decarbonization, societal resilience, disinformation, and more. Participants praised the roundtables highly, were glad to have taken part, and appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard. They also welcomed new tips for reliable sources of information and the overall broadening of their perspectives. Many participants stated that thanks to the roundtable and the chance to hear their peers' views, they now feel more hopeful about the future.

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