YFOEEMANIFESTO

WHAT WE STAND FOR
Young Friends of the Earth Europe (YFoEE or Young FoEE) is a volunteer network of young people and youth groups in Europe working collectively for environmental and social justice.

YFoEE was set up in 2007, and from the beginning it has served as a safe space and capacity building arena for young people. Over the past 10 years, our network has grown greatly, and we now have volunteers and member groups in more than 20 countries across the European region.

YFoEE is a radical voice within the Friends of the Earth family that is working towards achieving a more just and equitable society. We have been strengthening our work with other youth and social justice groups in an effort to build a collective response to the environmental, economic, structural and political struggles we face.

This manifesto, was developed by volunteers in the YFoEE network who came together to build an explicit statement of our values and principles as an organisation. It is a commitment to inform ourselves and our work, to challenge ourselves and one another, and to accountable and conscious in our efforts to be a part of the change we want to see in the world.

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WE AREN'T AFRAID
TO DEMAND TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE
for a future that is just: a future free from hunger, thirst, injustice, insecurity, discrimination, racism, sexism and all other forms of structural and economic oppression, a future where the world’s ecosystems as well as human lives are respected and supported to thrive.

WE AIM TO POLITICISE ECOLOGY TO POINT OUT THE REAL CULPRITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION AND INJUSTICE

WE AIM TO CONNECT ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE STRUGGLES AND THEIR ROOT CAUSES

WE AIM TO CHALLENGE EUROCENTRISM

a worldview centered on Western dominance. This ideology, which is rooted back to the European colonial period still has deep implications for our socio-economic, political and cultural systems.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Young Friends of the Earth Europe is a grassroots network of young people and youth organisations working collectively for social and environmental justice on a local, national and European level

WE KNOW OPPRESSIONS INTERSECT AND REINFORCE EACH OTHER.

Neoliberal capitalism is the root of the ecological crisis. Capitalism itself was built on colonialism, which was historically justified by racist doctrines and practices. Capitalism is also built on the gendered division of labor and patriarchy in general. Environmental issues affect vulnerable groups of people disproportionately, by generating and fueling inequalities, discriminations and systemic injustices on many levels.

We are committed to taking a system change approach, which centres on the belief that we must create alternatives, consciously dismantle the system and avoid the pitfall of a “we can fix it” attitude to neoliberalism. We must change the capitalist system, the essence of which is accumulation without end. Some of its components: consumerism, economic and political domination. We are aware that aspects of this are also the case in our network, which makes it even more important to check and challenge our privileges in order to have a truly inclusive movement where intersectionality (overlapping of oppressions, see key concepts) is a central value in all the aspects of our work. We do not separate the personal and the political. Systemic oppression is also expressed at the individual level, as well as being expressed at the level of our network, and dismantling these structures implies adopting reflective positions on our privileges, lived oppressions and biases.

WAYS OF WORKING

We are aware that the European environmental movement is still predominantly white, middle class and often male-led. We are aware that aspects of this are also the case in our network, which makes it even more important to check and challenge our privileges in order to have a truly inclusive movement where intersectionality (overlapping of oppressions, see key concepts) is a central value in all the aspects of our work. We do not separate the personal and the political. Systemic oppression is also expressed at the individual level, as well as being expressed at the level of our network, and dismantling these structures implies adopting reflective positions on our privileges, lived oppressions and biases.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO:

CHECKING AND CHALLENGING OUR PRIVILEGES.

INCLUSIVENESS, which implies accessibility and openness. We must all learn and unlearn structural oppression. We aim to create a non-judgemental environment that supports young people to learn and to grow - both within our own groups and networks, and beyond.

CREATING SAFER SPACES in all of our events, activities and actions both in physical and virtual spaces.

RESPECT. We respect speaking time and always aim to keep a reflexive position on the space we occupy and the pitfall of a “we can fix it” attitude to neoliberalism. We must change the capitalist system, the essence of which is accumulation without end. Some of its components: consumerism, economic and political domination. Elements that need to be changed: energy, food, political and financial power relations, production and consumption. Patriarchy should be addressed. Capitalism divides humans from nature. See also: http://www.shortenedlink.com

WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS OUR MORAL OBLIGATION, as European youth, to inform ourselves, continue to raise awareness and expose the impacts of Western corporations and policies on the most marginalised communities - particularly in the Global South, to actively hold our governments accountable for their (in)actions, and to stand in solidarity and amplify the voices of grassroots struggles and communities in the Global South.

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VALUES AND PRINCIPLES THAT INFORM HOW WE WORK IN THE YOUNG FOEE NETWORK

EMPOWERMENT AND PEOPLE’S SOVEREIGNTY

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, GENDER AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

COLLECTIVE ACTION

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

EQUITY

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

ANTI-FASCISM

SOLIDARITY

When discussing, we will listen carefully, and as an organisation we will make an effort to not occupy, in meetings, to step up or step back. We keep a reflexive position on the space we occupy, or do not occupy, in meetings, to step up or step back. We also aim to be reflexive on who takes up tasks and roles, and how this often reveals oppressive dynamics. We also respect each other through our use of language and use tools and exercises that support us to challenge ourselves and others in impactful and meaningful ways.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING DIFFERENCE. We understand that we all don’t experience the same things in the same way - and this spectrum of differences is what strengthens our network. Thus, we are striving to build an intersectional movement.

EMBEDDING THESE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES across all of our events and activities and through our analysis in our campaigns and actions.

INFORMING OURSELVES AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS. Everyone is responsible for their behavior, and all oppressive behavior - racist, sexist, ableist, classist, ageist, transphobic, homophbic, xenophobic. This behaviour will be challenged.

PRACTICING SOLIDARITY - within the European network, across our international federation and beyond. We aim to practice meaningful allyship with other movements beyond the environmental movement.

PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY. We use horizontal and consensus decision making where possible. Internal discussions enrich our work and are key to the best decision-making for everyone.

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This section tries to define some key concepts that are necessary to inform ourselves to deepen our understanding of power structures and systems of oppression which help us to better connect the root cause of environmental and social justice issues. We believe that understanding these concepts is crucial if we are to build a movement that will achieve system change. Young Friends of the Earth Europe acknowledges these concepts and the consequences they entail.

This is not an exhaustive list nor do we claim it to be, but rather we see this as a starting point and as a living document which we will continue to grow as part of a wider culture of learning and unlearning within and beyond our network. Concepts will be added/adapted as needed. If you feel that elements are missing don’t hesitate to contact us.

INTERSECTIONALITY

“The study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination”.1

Intersectionality is a concept coined by the African-American feminist writer Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how different forms of power and oppression interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. Intersectional studies show different categories (biological, social or cultural) such as gender, race, class, ability, age - must be taken into account when trying to understand how systemic injustices function. Crenshaw’s work cannot be separated from her own social position. As a Black woman in the United States, she experienced the systemic violence at the crossroads between race and gender. For this reason, the experience of black women is different from those of both Black men and white women. Intersectionality is important for two reasons. Firstly, it helps us to analyze how systemic oppression affects groups differently, so that we can better understand its mechanisms. Secondly, intersectionality can help us to understand how many different struggles for justice are interconnected and require solidarity between movements. Building an intersectional environmental movement means understanding the climate crisis and other environmental battles in relation to other social struggles, against racism, sexism, neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

INTERCULTURALISM

Interculturalism is a way of working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Interculturalism acknowledges and celebrates difference, rather than trying to pretend that ‘we are all the same’. It acknowledges the reality of racism and xenophobia and the need to create the conditions for equality through dialogue and action. It ultimately aims at achieving social harmony.2

We aim to create an intercultural movement which is aware and respectful of all the cultures. These cultures interact with each other and are not compared to each other.

PRIVILEGE

Privilege can be defined as a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific group - social, financial, political, racial, legal. Privilege must be understood in the context of different power systems, how they overlap and interact with each other. Privilege means enjoying the benefits from a certain system of power. Privilege does not mean your life is easy, it means certain aspects of your life are easier. It means you face less obstacles than other groups of people. Privilege is also the power to define society's norms: what is 'just', what is 'normal', which serves the purpose of presenting domination as normal, as the result of human history - therefore erasing the historical construction of injustice, and presents any action to dismantle this system as going against natural laws. This pervasive line of thinking gives tremendous power to dominant groups to preserve the status quo that benefits them.3

OPPRESSION

Oppression is systemic injustice, deeply embedded in our societies, via hierarchical social norms and values, prejudice, discrimination, the legal system.4 Oppression never goes both ways. “Reverse” oppressions do not exist. It is by definition linked to systems of power and institutional violence that disadvantage certain groups for the benefit of others; it does not compare to individual prejudice. Oppression is pervasive, it is visible throughout society in institutions as well as beyond our own consciousness. Oppression restricts people’s chances and opportunities throughout life, beyond the limits of their control.
KEY DEFINITIONS

EQUALITY AND EQUITY
Equality is the recognition that all human beings are of equal worth, deserving dignity, equal rights and equal access to resources, including resources to challenge and change inequalities. There are two different ways of thinking about equality.

One is equality of access - giving everyone exactly the same opportunities. However, an equality of access approach fails to recognise the concept of “fairness,” whereby discrimination based on “race,” ethnicity, class, gender, disability and geography can prevent groups in society from achieving equal outcomes, even when they are given the same opportunities. The concept of equity intends to remedy those issues by determining whether resources are distributed fairly among people.

In order to achieve real equality we must name and address discrimination. We must work in solidarity with discriminated groups to remove barriers to the equal participation of all. Often this means redistributing resources, in organisations, communities and society, to ensure equal outcomes for all.

RACISM
Racism is defined by the UN Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1969).

1. ANY DISTINCTION, EXCLUSION, RESTRICTION OR PREFAVOR, BASED ON RACE, COLOUR, DESCENT, NATIONAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN, WHICH HAS THE PURPOSE OF MODIFYING OR IMPAIRING THE RECOGNITION, THE ENJOYMENT OR EXERCISE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, OR ANY OTHER FIELD OF PUBLIC LIFE CONSTITUTES RACIAL DISCRIMINATION.

Racism has two “ingredients”: prejudice and social power. A prejudice is a (usually negative) judgement of people based on stereotypes, misinformation or false assumptions. All people can be prejudiced. Prejudice becomes racism with the addition of power - when the person or group who are prejudiced have the power to treat the people they are prejudiced against differently.

Racism can take different forms. It can manifest itself in a rather straightforward manner (for example neo-nazi attacks against refugees) or in more pervasive way (for example organisational ways of working that privilege white knowledge).

Particularly because of the historic injustices of empire and continued exploitation of the Global South by the North, there continues to be a white supremacist culture today. The majority of social power is held by white people, and both western cultural norms and ways of working dominate.

WHITE PRIVILEGE
White privilege refers to the situation whereby white, Western people have not earned their societal privileges. These automatic, inherent societal privileges can be social, economic and political, whereas non-white people may receive disadvantages under the same circumstances.

White privilege can sometimes seem hard to see for people who were born with access to power and resources – or who benefit from being “socially white.” However, it is very visible for people of color who have not been born with this privilege.

In her article, “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” Peggy McIntosh says white privilege is really “unearned power conferred systematically” – like other forms of privilege, white privilege is not something that is earned or achieved. Instead, it is something that is just given to those who are born into the dominant social power group.

XENOPHOBIA
The Oxford English Dictionary defines xenophobia as the “dislike of, or prejudice against people from other countries.”

Originally the word xenophobia stems from two Greek words: 1) xenos meaning the stranger and 2) phobos meaning fear. Literally, xenophobia can be understood as fear of the stranger, but usually the term is taken to mean hatred of strangers.

It is often difficult to differentiate between racism and xenophobia as motivations for behaviour.

Xenophobia and racism can and do sometimes overlap, but they are different.

Xenophobia implies behaviour based on the idea that the someone is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation. Racism usually involves a distinction based on physical characteristics, such as skin colour, hair type, facial features, etc. This is not always the case with xenophobia – behavior or attitudes.

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM
Environmental racism acknowledges the reality that minority populations around the world – intentionally or unintentionally – often face the worst impacts of environmental hazards, such as air pollution, and dumping of waste – including toxic waste. Studies show people of colour have higher rates of illnesses due to air, water and soil pollution. It also acknowledges that these communities are often denied the right to a healthy and good quality living space and amenities such as parks, and have the least access to resources and power to challenge this injustice.

SEXISM
Sexism is both discrimination based on gender and the attitudes, stereotypes, and the cultural elements that promote this discrimination. Given the historical and continued imbalance of power, where men as a class are privileged over women as a class (see male privilege below), an important, but often overlooked, part of the term is that sexism is prejudice plus power.

Thus feminists reject the notion that women can be sexist towards men because women lack the institutional power that men have.

However, this does not mean that women being prejudiced about men is acceptable. Men are undoubtedly affected by sexism, but because of their privilege they don’t experience it the same way that women do; this difference in experience is acknowledged through the distinction of sexism versus gender-based prejudice.

Furthermore, there are different kinds of sexism besides the most popular, mainstream one that is considered to be hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism, for instance, is quite widespread but it is often not recognised as such. There is also unintentional sexism which is an inevitable occurrence considering human nature – more often than not when one has not experienced something first hand they assume things that may be incorrect. Nevertheless, while intent isn’t wholly unimportant, it also shouldn’t be used an excuse not to examine one’s own behaviors.

In the end, though, the important thing to remember is that sexism is defined by the result and not the intent, so when people are called out for having said something sexist, it’s not a comment on their intent or character, but rather on the message that was conveyed.

MALE PRIVILEGE
Male privilege is a concept used to examine the social, economic, and political advantages or rights that are made available to men solely on the basis of their sex. (e.g. the use of male pronouns in language to refer to both sexes, the preference for sons in some cultures). A man’s access to these benefits may also depend on other characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, and social class. The tendency to use intent, rather than result, to measure whether something was offensive and inappropriate (and therefore sexist) is tied into male privilege and the way that it enables sexist practices to be seen as normal. Male privilege is often examined alongside the concept of patriarchy within the feminist movement, while many men’s rights activists dispute the existence of male privilege and patriarchy in modern western society.

ABLEISM
Ableism is a form of structural oppression, discrimination and prejudice against people who physically challenged or differently abled. Unlike other forms of oppression (racism, sexism etc) ableism is sometimes invisible, as it has less to do with hating people with different disabilities and more to do with associations about “normal” ability status. Ableism is further compounded by factors like gender, queerness, race, class, age, and colonialism; among other oppressions. It must be part of any conversation regarding intersectionality – and yet, even in social justice spaces, it often isn’t.
CLASSISM

Classism is prejudice against people based on their socio-economic status or their perceived social class. Classism can be described as ‘systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It’s the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.’

HOMOPHOBIA

An umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of the LGBTIQ community. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTIQ. The term is extended to bisexual and transgender people as well. However, the terms biphobia and transphobia are used to emphasize the specific biases against individuals of bisexual and transgender communities.

TRANSPHOBIA

Transphobia has been defined by the Crown Prosecution Service: ‘The fear of or a dislike directed towards trans people, or a fear of or dislike directed towards their perceived lifestyle, culture or characteristics, whether or not any specific trans person has that lifestyle or characteristic. The dislike does not have to be so severe as hatred. It is enough that people do something or abstain from doing something because they do not like trans people.’

As with all other prejudices, transphobia is based on misconceptions and negative stereotypes about a group of people (in this case the trans community or those who are perceived to be trans) that are used to ‘justify’ discrimination, harassment, and even hate crimes. Transphobia (or less commonly trans†-prejudice) is a range of antagonistic attitudes and feelings against trans-sexuality and transsexual or transgender people, based on the expression of their internal gender identity.

Researchers describe transphobia as emotional disgust, fear, anger or discomfort felt or expressed towards people who do not conform to society’s gender expectations, and say that although it is similar to homophobia, racism and sexism, those attitudes are becoming generally considered unacceptable in modern society; whereas some individuals still maintain transphobic views without fear of censure.

The transfeminist theorist and author Julia Serano (2007) argues in her book Whipping Girl that transphobia is rooted in sexism. She locates the origins of both trans-phobia and homophobia in what she calls “oppositional sexism”; the belief that male and female are “rigid, mutually exclusive categories, each possessing a unique and non-overlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities, and desires.”

Serano contrasts oppositional sexism with “traditional sexism”, the belief that males and masculinity are superior to females and femininity. Furthermore, she writes that trans-phobia is fueled by insecurities people have about gender and gender norms.

CIS-NET PRIVILEGE

The term cissender refers to when someone’s gender matches their birth assigned sex and, by extension, when a person’s gender matches the gender others perceive them as.

While cisgender refers to someone’s sex and gender appearing to align, cisgender privilege speaks to how perceived gender/sex alignment means not having to think or address topics that those without cisgender privilege have to deal with, often on a daily basis. It’s worth pointing out though that many gay, bisexual and lesbian people do have cis privilege and so this isn’t something that divides down lines of sexual orientation.

WHITE SUPREMACY

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that white supremacy is ‘The belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the black race, and should therefore dominate society.’ This term can also refer to the privilege that socially white people benefit from through a political or socio-economic system where people of colour from various different ethnic groups at both individual and collective levels. White supremacy exists in everyone and it can be difficult to tackle because people tend not to take responsibility. It is sustained by socially white people, whether consciously or subconsciously and is reinforced through patterns of language, thought, symbolism, humor etc. and exists across all areas of society (economy, education, media, law, politics, religion, etc.).

CAPITALISM/ NEOLIBERALISM

Capitalism is system characterised by the accumulation of profit through private property. The definition given the Oxford dictionary is of ‘an economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state’. Capitalism itself was built on colonialism, which was historically justified by racist doctrines and practices. Capitalism is also built on the gendered division of labour. Some of its principal components are consumerism, economic and political domination. Whereas capitalism is the most prevalent economic system in the world, it can take different forms, in which the market is more or less regulated. In that regard, neoliberalism is a liberal doctrine that favours free-market capitalism. Neoliberalism is often used to describe economic and social policies, that favour the privatisation of public services, such as water, energy, health, education & so forth.