

Climate change

Youth climate strikes to take place in more than 100 countries

Friday 15 March 2019, by [BROOKS Libby](#), [NESLEN Arthur](#), [TAYLOR Anna](#), [TAYLOR Matthew](#), [THUNBERG Greta](#) (Date first published: 15 March 2019).

Movement inspired by Greta Thunberg has snowballed, as Belgian workers join strike.

Hundreds of thousands of children are expected to walk out of their classrooms on Friday for a global climate strike amid growing anger at the failure of politicians to tackle the escalating ecological crisis.

Children at tens of thousands of schools in more than 100 countries are due to take part in the walkouts which began last year when one teenager – Greta Thunberg – held a solo protest outside the Swedish parliament.

Since then the climate movement has snowballed with schoolchildren on every continent except Antarctica taking part.

Friday's strike is expected to be the biggest yet as evidence mounts of the climate emergency facing the planet. Amnesty International has warned that the failure of world governments to tackle the crisis could amount to "one of the greatest intergenerational human rights violations in history".

Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International's secretary general, said: "It's unfortunate that children have to sacrifice days of learning in school to demand that adults do the right thing. However, they know the consequences of the current shameful inaction both for themselves and future generations. This should be a moment for stark self-reflection by our political class."

Young people are expected to take to the streets in cities across Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa and the US on Friday.

In the UK more than 10,000 children walked out of class last month and organisers expect Friday's event to be even bigger with about 100 events taking place involving thousands of schools across the country.

Anna Taylor, 17, who co-founded the UK student climate network, said: "Young people in the UK have shown that we're angry at the lack of government leadership on climate change.

"Those in power are not only betraying us, and taking away our future, but are responsible for the climate crisis that's unfolding in horrendous ways around the world."

Taylor said the UK had been relatively shielded from the effects of the crisis so far, adding that "those least responsible for contributing to climate change are already suffering the worst effects".

She added: "It is our duty to not only act for those in the UK and our futures, but for everyone. That's what climate justice means."

In Scotland, the Guardian is aware of strikes planned in 19 different locations, from South Uist in the Outer Hebrides to St Andrews on the east coast, with large gatherings expected in Glasgow's George Square and outside the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh.

One of the UK's most prominent school strikers, Holly Gillibrand, will be taking part, after staging a weekly action outside her school in Fort William, in the Scottish Highlands.

"It's going to be quite impressive," said Gillibrand of the School Strike for Climate movement, "and it's incredibly inspiring that it all started with Greta striking on her own".

Asked whether she feels optimistic about the potential of Friday's protest, Gillibrand replied: "I wouldn't say optimistic is quite the right word. It shows there are thousands of students out there who care very deeply about the environment and are willing to miss school to demand that politicians take this ecological crisis seriously."

World leaders may listen to the school pupils taking part in one of the largest global climate change protests ever, but the key test is whether they take action, said the 13-year-old.

According to the Scottish Green party, nine councils – which cover 16 of the 21 Scottish locations understood to have schoolchildren involved in protests – have indicated in response to letters from their MSPs that they will not pursue punitive action against young people taking part.

Méabh Mackenzie is organising a protest with about 30 fellow pupils from Daliburgh primary school on the island of South Uist, with the express purpose of standing in solidarity with other threatened island communities across the globe.

The 11-year-old explained: "I just wanted to share what I believe in. Uist is really lovely and I really love the place and don't want it to disappear."

Some friends are "not into it at all", she suspects because they do not want to go out in the cold – the forecast is for hail on Friday.

"I think all the striking around the world will let politicians and lawmakers know that they have to do something because it is falling down the list of priorities. They are arguing about things like Brexit but we need them to act now on climate change. because in 12 years we can't turn anything back."

In Belgium, thousands of workers will be striking to join the school students' protest in locations such as Antwerp, Bruges and Liège, before travelling to Brussels for a large demonstration.

Blue- and white-collar workers are being mobilised across the Flemish-Francophone divide, after an appeal from the Youth For Climate campaign, which has organised weekly demonstrations of up to 35,000 youths since January.

Gina Heyrman, a spokeswoman for the 1.6 million-strong socialist trades union ABVV-FGTB, noted "similarities" with the Paris protests of 1968.

She said: "This is the first time we have had a political strike together with young people. Maybe we're at the beginning of a new era. I hope so. Everyone talks about the climate now. Everyone is aware of it, thanks to the students."

The rival CSC Christian trade union is also planning a “massive mobilisation”, although some of its workers cannot strike because of a strike notification law.

The CFDT union in France is also calling for every member to participate in Friday’s climate action.

Earlier this year Thunberg, who started the movement, told a gathering of political leaders and billionaire entrepreneurs in Davos: “I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.”

Matthew Taylor, Arthur Neslen and Libby Brooks

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Think we should be at school? Today’s climate strike is the biggest lesson of all

We are among the young people striking against climate change in every corner of the globe - adults should join us too.

Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others

It started in front of the Swedish parliament, on 20 August – a regular school day. Greta Thunberg sat with her painted sign and some homemade flyers. This was the first school climate strike. Fridays wouldn’t be regular schooldays any longer. The rest of us, and many more alongside us, picked it up in Australia, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, New Zealand, Uganda. Today the climate strike will take place all around the world.

This movement had to happen, we didn’t have a choice. We knew there was a climate crisis. Not just because forests in Sweden or in the US had been on fire; because of alternating floods and drought in Germany and Australia; because of the collapse of alpine faces due to melting permafrost and other climate changes. We knew, because everything we read and watched screamed out to us that something was very wrong.

That first day of refusing to go to school was spent alone, but since then a movement of climate strikers has swept the globe. Today young people in more than 100 countries will walk out of class to demand action on the greatest threat humankind has ever faced.

These strikes are happening today – from Washington DC to Moscow, Tromsø to Invercargill, Beirut to Jerusalem, and Shanghai to Mumbai – because politicians have failed us. We’ve seen years of negotiations, pathetic deals on climate change, fossil fuel companies being given free rein to carve open our lands, drill beneath our soils and burn away our futures for their profit. We’ve seen fracking, deep sea drilling and coalmining continue. Politicians have known the truth about climate change and they’ve willingly handed over our future to profiteers whose search for quick cash threatens our very existence.

This movement had to happen, we didn’t have a choice. Last year’s UN Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change's special report on global warming could not have been clearer about the extreme dangers of going beyond 1.5C of global warming. To have any chance of avoiding that extreme danger emissions must drop rapidly – so that by the time we will be in our mid- and late-20s we are living in a transformed world.

The students who are striking in cities, towns and villages around the world are uniting behind the science. We are only asking that our leaders to do the same.

If those in power today don't act, it will be our generation who will live through their failure. Those who are under 20 now could be around to see 2080, and face the prospect of a world that has warmed by up to 4C. The effects of such warming would be utterly devastating. Rivers would flood, storms would wreak havoc on coastal communities and coral reefs would be eliminated. Melting polar ice caps would lead to dramatically higher sea levels, flooding coastal areas. Places on Earth will become uninhabitable.

Scientists have also shown us that burning fossil fuels is “the world's most significant threat to children's health”. Nine out of every 10 children around the world are breathing dangerous air. Our lives are being compromised before we are born. Toxic particles from exhaust fumes pass through the lungs of pregnant women and accumulate in the placenta. The risk of premature birth, low birth weight and cognitive dysfunction this causes is a public health catastrophe. Pollution from diesel vehicles is stunting the growth of our lungs, leaving us damaged for life. Toxic air from burning fossil fuels is choking not only our lungs but our hopes and dreams.

And the worst effects of climate change are disproportionately felt by our most vulnerable communities. This is not just about cutting down emissions, but about equity – the system we have right now is failing us, working only for the rich few. The luxury so few of us enjoy in the global north is based on the suffering of people in the global south.

We have watched as politicians fumble, playing a political game rather than facing the facts that the solutions we need cannot be found within the current system. They don't want to face the facts – we need to change the system if we are to try to act on the climate crisis.

This movement had to happen, we didn't have a choice. The vast majority of climate strikers taking action today aren't allowed to vote. Imagine for a second what that feels like. Despite watching the climate crisis unfold, despite knowing the facts, we aren't allowed to have a say in who makes the decisions about climate change. And then ask yourself this: wouldn't you go on strike too, if you thought doing so could help protect your own future?

So today we walk out of school, we quit our college lessons, and we take to the streets to say enough is enough. Some adults say we shouldn't be walking out of classes – that we should be “getting an education”. We think organising against an existential threat – and figuring out how to make our voices heard – is teaching us some important lessons.

Other adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But we don't want your hope. We don't want you to be hopeful. We want you to panic and we want you to take action. We want you to join us.

We've relied on adults to make the right decisions to ensure that there is a future for the next generation – surely we don't have all the answers. But what we do know is that we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground, phase out subsidies for dirty energy production, seriously invest in renewables and start asking difficult questions about how we structure our economies and who is set to win and who is set to lose.

And we are no longer alone. Tens of thousands of scientists from around the world have released statements in support of the strikes by children. The scientists have been very clear about what we need to do to tackle climate change. We are uniting behind the scientists. We are only asking that our leaders do the same.

It is so important that this happens now. The kind of changes that need to happen mean everyone recognising that this is a crisis and committing to radical transformations. We strongly believe that we can fight off the most damaging effects of climate change – but we have to act now.

There is no grey area when it comes to survival. There's no less bad option. That's why young people are striking in every corner of the globe, and it's why we are asking that older people join us on the streets too. When our house is burning we cannot just leave it to the children to pour water on the flames – we need the grownups to take responsibility for sparking the blaze in the first place. So for once, we're asking grownups to follow our lead: we can't wait any longer.

This movement had to happen. And now, you adults have a choice.

Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others

- Greta Thunberg is a youth climate strike leader in Sweden, Anna Taylor in the UK, Luisa Neubauer in Germany, Kyra Gantois, Anuna De Wever and Guest edited by school climate strikers Environmental activism Charlier in Belgium, Holly Gillibrand in Scotland, and Alexandria Villasenor in USA

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