

Young people take to the streets for climate: Who are they?

December 6 2019, by Marlowe Hood, Amélie Bottollier-Depois



The Fridays for Future student strike movement began last year with a lone 15-year old girl, Greta Thunberg, protesting on the steps of the Swedish parliament. Today millions of young people worldwide have joined in

Last year a 15-year old girl in pigtails decided to walk out of her

classroom and sit on the steps of Sweden's parliament every Friday with a homemade sign: "School Strike For Climate".

Since then, the Fridays for Future movement sparked by Greta Thunberg, now 16, has gone global.

In September, millions of [young people](#) on every continent poured into the street to demand action. Today they march in Madrid, where negotiators from nearly 200 nations at UN [climate](#) talks are feeling the heat of an increasingly angry and anxious world.

Some of these young activists spoke with AFP.

'Now I'm not alone' (Russia)

Arshak Makichyan, 25, graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in June a virtuoso violinist, but his career is on hold. When he returns to Moscow by train in mid-December, he will come before a judge to face charges, and likely punishment, for "organising an unauthorised strike" for climate.

"There is very little information in the Russian media about [climate change](#), so I started reading about it in English and discovered how serious the problem is. That is also how I learned about Greta Thunberg."

"After the global student school strike in March, I began protesting alone in Pushkin Square—in Moscow it is the only way to protest legally without a permit, which was never granted in any case."

"Now I am not alone, there are students in seven or eight Russian cities striking every week. In Moscow, we do it in a queue — one person stands with a sign, and then steps aside to let the next person in line do the

same. If two people do it together, they can be arrested."

"For years I practised my instrument every day, but I have taken a break. It felt really strange to play the violin while the Titanic is sinking. Also, it's complicated getting a job with an orchestra if you have decided not to fly."

"I came to Madrid mainly to meet other Friday for Future activists from around the world."



There is little information in the national media of many countries about climate change, say youth activists at the COP25 climate conference

'I had to fight' (Argentina)

When she realised that global warming is not just an environmental issue but a social one too, 18-year-old Nicole Becker, a first-year university student in Buenos Aires, switched from psychology to international law. Today, climate change is her top priority.

"I saw a video of Greta and asked myself: why are young people in Europe striking, while no one in Argentina is even talking about the problem?"

"I am in Madrid to represent Latin-American youth, and because it's where world leaders are deciding my future. I want them to hear me, I want to have a voice."

"There is a lot of poverty in Argentina, and it has a connection with climate change. When I understood that, and that my future is at risk, I knew I had to fight, and influence the decisions that my government makes. I dedicate my time to climate change now, also because I'm afraid."

"Those of us living in rich cities are not the ones most affected, so we have to care for those who are—this is a moral challenge. In Argentina lots of people say, 'First we have to improve the economy, then we can worry about the environment'. They don't understand climate change is making their economic problems worse."

'I know climate anxiety' (Tasmania)

For Chloe McCann, an 18-year-old high school student in Tasmania, Australia, global warming is not an abstract concept. Several years ago, her family home was consumed by wildfires that have become more widespread and intense as global temperatures rise.

"Lots of people suffer from climate anxiety, and maybe I'm one of them. We hear all these negative things, and it gets you down. Sometimes it's hard to have hope. That's one reason I'm here—to learn about what I can do."

"We have a lot of bushfires, it's a huge thing in Australia right now. When I was younger, we were very unlucky and lost our home. This is still a trigger for me—I look back and think 'You know what, climate change makes fires worse'."

"Of course we have to make changes at a personal level—taking public transport, avoiding plastic, consuming less. If everyone does a little bit, it can make a big difference. But a lot of people feel they have to do everything, and then wind up doing nothing—that's the worst."

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