

## **Research Report**

*Joint EFEE-ETUCE project 'European Social Partners in  
Education promoting Environmental Sustainability in School  
Learning, Teaching and Management'*

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## Abbreviations

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EC	European Commission
EES	Education for Environmental Sustainability
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
EGD	European Green Deal
ESSDE	European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLA	Peer Learning Activity - Conference in each of the four participating countries involved in this Project to deliberate on EES
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

## Introduction

Education for Environmental Sustainability is of crucial importance in supporting schools all over Europe in their efforts to be a significant force in stemming the effects of climate change and global warming. However, the implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability in schools across Europe differ from country to country. Therefore, it is important that opportunities are provided to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experiences and views among educational stakeholders. A crucial role in this process needs to be played by national and European social partner organizations, representing the views of education employers and teacher trade unions in the format of collective bargaining. This successful collaboration found its fruit in the joint project entitled: *‘European Social Partners in Education promoting Environmental Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management’* coordinated by the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) in cooperation with the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) funded by the European Commission. The project allowed the European Social Partners to take stock of their joint work in the national and European level. Through events, like Peer Learning Visits (PLVs) and a final conference, as well as the development of a survey spread out to EFEE and ETUCE’s membership, policy recommendations and guidelines, this project facilitates a social dialogue on this matter. The events provided opportunities for the participants to be inspired to benefit from the sharing of new ideas and to collaborate in drawing up recommendations, which in turn empower in the implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability at European, national and local levels. This research report seeks to take stock, and analyse the deliberations, conclusions and recommendations arising from the project.

## Executive Summary

### Context

*“A green Europe requires green skills- better knowledge about climate change and sustainability, new skills and a change in behaviour. Making Europe green is a substantial challenge for the education systems in the Member States, which calls for a strategic common approach.” Gabriel, Mariya, (Commissioner for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) (2022) “Education for Climate Coalition Policy Forum: bringing green skills into the classroom”.*

This report records and analyses the deliberations, and views of European and national social partner organizations from across Europe, provides recommendations and conclusions arising from these deliberations: The project entitled **“European Social Partners in Education Promoting Environmental Sustainability in school learning, teaching and management.”** is coordinated by the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) in cooperation with the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE).

The planet's rapidly rising temperature is primarily attributed to the sharp increase in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, largely resulting from the burning of fossil fuels to power industrial activities. Various studies have pointed to the calamitous effects of this global temperature rise, including rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events. The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) 4 and 13, state that education is the best tool for creating responsible and critically-thinking citizens with awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of the climate emergency and other environmental problems, as well as providing them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to find solutions, to change consumption models and to transform society towards a more sustainable way of living. It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in the field of education are aware of the seriousness of the climate crisis and environmental breakdown. In addition, that they are empowered to be proactive in school learning, teaching and management to counteract this challenge.

As indicated in the Joint European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education ([ESSDE Work Programme 2022-2023](#)), ‘EFEE and ETUCE being *education social partners should be leading these discussions*’ and ‘*uniting their efforts towards ensuring the successful design and implementation of education for environmental sustainability on the national level*’. Therefore, this project seeks to address this commitment and answer to the question: How can the social partners in education contribute to promoting environmental sustainability in school learning, teaching and management?

In particular, the project aims at stimulating national and European Social dialogue on the matter of environmental sustainability, to raise awareness on climate change; environmental breakdown; social changes related to environmental conditions; the needed support for teachers, academics and other education personnel necessary to become a driving for mentality change; and the efficacy of the collaborative effort between social partners and other education stakeholders.

## Project objectives

As the European Social Partners in Education, EFEE and ETUCE set out the following objectives to be achieved through this project. The aim of this project can be achieved through a conscious effort on the part of the social partners in education to work together in a spirit of collaboration. Both social partners in education firmly embrace the implementation of the EES through the social dialogue agenda. Our aim is to promote the inclusion of this theme on the agendas of national level collective bargaining schemes. All these efforts are aiming to strengthen the on-ground implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- To collect first-hand data on existing and emerging practices and strategies which promote Education for Environmental Sustainability in the teaching in the classroom. These may include innovative curriculum design for pupils, raising awareness in schools, teacher training programmes supporting staff in addressing these themes with their students,
- To aggregate innovating managerial and school leadership practices making each school environmentally sustainable organization saving vital resources for the functioning of the school (energy, water, heat, electricity).  
To examine how the social partners in education can promote the long-term fostering of environmental sustainability in schools. In practice, this point wants to analyse what exactly is being done in the classrooms and whether there are any systemic solutions being implemented by the social partners?
- To formulate a set of Joint Recommendations for effective implementation of EES.

## Project methodology

As part of the framework of the project, four peer learning visits and a final conference were organised. The PLVs took place in Kinsale (Ireland), Warsaw (Poland), Madrid (Spain) and Helsinki (Finland) and the final conference took place in Brussels, Belgium. In all events, participants had the chance to share examples of best practices, learn about the implementation of the EES in the various national contexts and how it is addressed by the local social partner. Moreover, to work collaboratively in the formulation of the project outputs. During the final

conference, participants could work together in defining Joint Recommendations for the implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability.

Besides the events, the project also had a research phase with desk research and an online survey which was conducted among ETUCE and EFEE members which collected national social partners views and practices on the role of Education sector in the promotion of Environmental Sustainability. This phase contributed significantly for the elaboration of the policy recommendations.

## Project findings

The activities of the project outlined above lead to the following set of conclusions concerning the Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES):

- A “**cultural shift**” is needed as a crucial element in the implementation of the EES to empower young people who are not only scientifically knowledgeable but also empowered to advocate and interrogate public policy as citizens of Europe as they seek to implement the Green Transition.
- The term “cultural shift” refers to the priority of adopting a pedagogical approach that is: **transformational** rather than instrumental; and teaching and learning is organised on a **cross-curricular** basis.
- It is imperative for the education authorities to recognise their critical role in supporting Education for Environmental Sustainability by making the **necessary resources, funding and CPD available to schools**.
- **Teachers need: autonomy; opportunities to collaborate; initial and continuous training; and space and time** to practice and become familiar with the pedagogical “cultural shift” that the successful teaching of environmental sustainability demands.
- There needs to be increased awareness of the positive impact of “**student voice**” in the pedagogical approach.
- EES is most effectively taught as part of a cross-curricular approach.
- It is of the utmost importance that every student has **access** to Education for Environmental Sustainability through experiencing a pedagogy that is robust and effective.

## Chapter 1 - Project context and objectives

The immediate context of the joint EFEE-ETUCE *European Social Partners in Education promoting Environmental Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management* Project is provided by the realisation that fostering environmental awareness represents a crucial goal and a challenge in contemporary school education. There is an undeniable need for cultural and social change in the way environmental sustainability is addressed. This situation requires a response at the political and decision-making levels, as well as at the individual and community levels. In this regard, education is a critical forum for sharing knowledge, understanding, and coping with environmental challenges.

Nevertheless, there appears to be a lack of data available when it comes to ascertaining how well schools implement environmentally friendly learning in their systems and the challenges which the schools may face. Taking this observation into account, EFEE and ETUCE jointly set to investigate how education employers and education trade unions can engage in social dialogue in a spirit of partnership with the aim to implement Education for Environment Sustainability (EES) in a manner that bears in mind several essential aspects, including the requisite support for teachers, academics and other education personnel, and a full embrace of the collaborative effort. All parties involved in this joint EFEE-ETUCE project were encouraged to reflect on how social dialogue and collective bargaining can enhance the quality of EES in schools in Europe in a manner that effectively deals with the impact of environmental challenges.

In addition, this project was designed to continue and to reaffirms the commitment of EFEE and of ETUCE in promoting a green and resilient transition through school education in line with the objectives of the [European Green Deal](#), the [European Climate Pact](#), the [European Education Area](#), the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), as well as the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#), in particular Goal 4 and 11. As part of the European Green Deal, the project particularly acknowledges [GreenComp](#), the European Sustainability Competence Framework. Moreover, the project aimed to actively contribute to implementing and promoting the current [Work Programme of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Education \(ESSDE\)](#), the selected theme “Education and the Environment”.

By facilitating and encouraging the exchange of knowledge, challenges, and good practices, EFEE and ETUCE aimed to find answers to a key question: *How can social partners*

*in education contribute to promoting environmental sustainability in school learning, teaching and management?*

More practically, the project aimed to:

- examine how the social partners in education can promote the long-term fostering of environmental awareness in schools.
- collect first-hand data on national education social partners' views when it comes to:
  - existing and emerging practices and strategies undertaken at national, regional and local levels.
  - challenges and opportunities which hinder or foster sustainable teaching and learning methods.
- present and analyse the results of the research activities in a research report.
- promote social dialogue in education and training by sharing good practices and fostering peer learning among European, national and regional/local social partners in education on environmentally sustainable teaching and learning methods.
- develop Joint Recommendations concerning the promotion of environmental sustainability in school learning, teaching and, management and leadership in Europe.
- share the project outcomes with ESSDE delegates to achieve further strengthening of the relationship between social partners.

The present research report was developed following a review of the relevant literature, considering data collected through an online questionnaire distributed to all EFEE and ETUCE member organisations, and input gathered at the various Peer Learning Visits (PLVs) in the framework of the project. The exercise sought to gain an insight into the present state of play regarding the role of social dialogue and other perspectives in implementing and promoting environmental sustainability in school teaching, learning, and management. This report is not a definitive way forward for every country. Rather, it is intended as a support to be adjusted to suit the particular conditions pertaining to how each country implements programmes for Education for Environment Sustainability.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### “Cultural Shift” in Education

According to Schute (2022: 1), to cope with the anthropogenic issues of the present, young people “will require a level of democracy, citizenship and altruism that is lacking in our current education system”. There is an onus on education systems to develop a sense of citizenship in young people. These values pertaining to citizenship education are often in conflict with the “performative demands of our neoliberal education systems” (p. 2). Schools are called upon to play a vital role in empowering students and in turn, students’ communities to focus on issues such as environmental breakdown. The PLVs and discussions associated with this project about Education for Environmental Sustainability clearly voiced the need for a “cultural shift” to take place in the education field to promote an education that is transformational and interdisciplinary.

This project is grounded in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda is represented by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 (Target: 4.7) is the fundamental guiding theme throughout the Project’s work as aspects of teaching, learning and school management and leadership in relation to EES. SDG 4 (Target: 4.7) states:

*By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainability.*

Schute (2022) asserts that this Target 4.7 challenges education systems to address the needs of humanity (individuals and societies) through ensuring that humankind is educated to possess the skills and knowledge to cope with environmental breakdown. This will necessitate students’ empowerment with political literacy enabling them to question the power and economic structures that thwarts progress on the environmental sustainability front.

Olssen (2003) is of the opinion that market-driven economics and freedoms conflict with EES as the marketisation of education shifts the meaning of education “from a public to a private good” and “from a service to a commodity”. Kumi et al. (2014) and Rodrigues (2003) argue that a critical discourse of literature in relation to the SDGs proves a reduction of social

and sustainability challenges to mere economic problems. This, in turn, highlights the necessity for a transformational approach to EES. This aspect was particularly well set out at all project PLVs, but at the PLV which took place in Kinsale Community School (Ireland), where the presentation of Stephen O'Brien advocated for teaching EES through the lens of Development Education. Development Education, simply described, is educating for a more sustainable and just world. O'Brien began with the premise that EES is essential to increasing the awareness and understanding of complex issues facing an ever-changing world. EES incorporates topics, such as, poverty, social injustice, gender inequality, racism, humanitarian crises, climate change, power imbalances and, exclusionary structural and ideological patterns within society. It is incumbent on educational institutions to cultivate the critical thinking culture. This can be nurtured through transformative teaching, which means connecting education with real world events; educating for greater social justice and equality; modelling participatory democracy; and encouraging students to ask "big questions" "A reform of current educational approaches is necessary to educate students in a transformative manner, so they prepared to cope with the inevitable anthropogenic and climate challenges.

### **Teacher and Youth Priorities for EES**

This aspect of EES was explored in the study paper: "Teacher and Youth priorities for Education for Environmental Sustainability: A Co-Created Manifesto" by Dunlop et al. (2022). The research brings together the perspectives of teachers and young people (adolescents 16-18 years of age) with particular emphasis on "inclusion, participation and co-creation" (p. 966). By voicing their concerns regarding EES, the teachers and students from schools across the UK challenged the current education policy context.

The authors asserted that a focus of EES only on individual citizen action can be problematic for the following reasons. Firstly, economic constraints can often hinder individual action, for example people may not be able to buy or source sustainably grown food due to lack of financial resources. The time factors prevent teachers from developing their own teaching resources and methodologies. The identified barriers included teachers' workload alongside the accountability/assessment structures that are based on performativity and competition, which do not seem to encourage critical thinkers in embracing EES. Secondly, the actions needed to cope with climate change and environmental breakdown. While this cannot be achieved by

individuals working in isolation, to maintain the progress, a societal response going beyond the school building is crucial. This implicates teamwork, schools' networking and linking institutions with their respective communities. School policies and cultures should be reimagined to successfully support such a pedagogical approach.

The third aspect deemed to be problematic is the desirability for education and politics to interact. When the individuals are meant to handle climate change issues solely on their own, it minimises the role of governments. It absolves authorities of their responsibility in seeking political solutions that are based on societal participation and agreements. By off-loading to individuals the responsibility for solving the serious consequences of climate change and environmental breakdown, governments renege on their responsibilities to their respective electorates. This is called “depoliticization” where governments fail to shoulder the appropriate political responsibility. Authorities are urged to govern and initiate policies that seek to progress the essential systemic change for dealing with environmental breakdown. There is an onus on Departments of Education to be proactive in initiating environmental sustainability policies through collaboration with the key stakeholders.

This direction of government policy and action regarding environmental sustainability through adopting a systemic approach, in turn percolates down to formulating curricula and developing pedagogies for EES. EES cannot be foisted exclusively on school management and leadership, teachers and young people to take a lead on this. The leadership of the EU authorities and national governments is vital for systemic societal change to emerge. A key element in ensuring that appropriate leadership supports the implementation of EES in educational institutions is through the provision of adequate time, space, funding and resources.

The following is a synopsis containing key points pertinent to this project's study:

1. Classroom: actions requiring support from teachers (e.g. content, pedagogy, encouragement, professional development, and role modelling)
2. School: actions requiring support from school leaders (e.g. making and monitoring decisions about energy, food, transport, and waste as well as education)
3. Community: actions requiring support from organisations other than schools or government (e.g. to enable networking, intergenerational education and accreditation for sustainability actions)

4. Policy: actions requiring support from government to create an enabling environment for education for environmental sustainability (e.g. through curriculum, assessment, inspections and school funding)

For the above to be achieved, the researchers make specific points which coincide with the joint recommendations of this project:

- To provide students with the space and time to learn about environmental sustainability, which is not linked to grade assessments and competition.
- To encourage teachers of all subjects to undertake CPD in EES to instil confidence.
- To ensure that EES features in all school decision-making bodies.
- To consider environmental sustainability in all procurement policies.
- To nurture the link between the quality of the school environment, mental and physical health.
- To place student voice and agency at the core of EES.
- To develop a sustainable community network and curriculum for groups and parents involved in education.
- To foster schools as local hubs for sustainability.

### **Education for Environmental Sustainability – Pedagogies**

Papenfuss et al. (2019) bemoan the fact that many EES programmes adopt a pedagogical approach that is transmissive and instrumental. They assert that the implementation of EES demands a pedagogy that will transform and emancipate students, enabling them to become innovators and advocates to challenge the status quo regarding environmental breakdown. Transformative learning helps learners to “transcend the given, the ordinary, and the routine” (p.4) and has the following strands (Dirkx, 1998 as cited in Papenfuss et al., 2019:5)

- **The emancipatory:** this strand is drawn from the work of Freire (2007) who developed a theory of transformative learning which he called “conscientization” meaning consciousness-raising through critical reflection. This enables the student to transform “social systems through emancipation, political liberation and freedom from oppression” (Dirkx, 1998 as cited in Papenfuss et al, 2019 p. 5).

- **The critical-reflective:** this strand was developed by Mezirow (1978)<sup>1</sup> whose approach sought to transform the student through the learning experiences of the classroom which provide opportunities for reflection. The student experiences “meaning” through “knowledge, beliefs, value judgements, and feelings” (Taylor, 1998 as cited in Papenfuss et al., 2019: 6). The student experiences “perspective” through a “general frame of reference, worldview, or personal paradigm made up of a collection of “meanings”” (Ibid.: 6). When an individual’s experience cannot be integrated into their perspective, then, the individual must reject that experience or undergo a perspective transformation. Scholars consider it an essential aspect of environmental education for individuals to be afforded the opportunity to change their worldview.
- **The developmental:** the developmental strand (Daloz, 2015) focuses on personal change and self-actualisation, that is, the realisation of one’s talents, considered a need present in everyone.
- **The extra-rational:** the extra-rational strand (Boyd, 2003) focuses on the emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning. In this strand students become aware of aspects of themselves that were previously unknown to them.

The above treatment of educational theory sets out the theoretical basis for incorporating transformational pedagogy into EES.

### Cross-Curricular Approach

Savage (2011: 8) defines cross-curricular approach to teaching as being:

*characterised by sensitivity towards, and a synthesis of knowledge, skills and understandings from various subject areas. These inform an enriched pedagogy that promotes an approach to learning which embraces and explores this wider sensitivity through various methods.*

Savage (2011) further analyses the meaning of cross-curricular teaching as per the above definition. Cross-curricular teaching demands the embrace of a particular pedagogy that the skilful teacher adopts to enhance teaching and learning. It does not mean the weakening of

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<sup>1</sup> Mezirow, J., (1978) *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women’s re-entry Programs in Community Colleges*. New York, NY: Columbia University.

specific subjects; the expectation is that teachers will extend their knowledge beyond their own subject areas.

In terms of curricular approach for EES, this project understands that a two-pronged approach is a preference. This approach asserts the need for: 1) encouraging and supporting teachers to adopt a pedagogy for EES that is transformational rather than instrumental; and 2) adopting a variety of curricular approaches from that of cross-curricular to the provision of a dedicated curricular subject on EES to develop specific scientific, technical, technological, research, legal and ethical expertise.

In this cross-curricular approach, it is the practice whereby teachers of all subjects in the school setting, undertake key roles in EES within the teaching of their own subject areas. This methodology for teaching and learning embodies a close connectivity between the aims, objectives and aspirations of EES themes across the entire school curriculum. This pedagogical approach nurtures the development of critical thinking; political literacy; and, social and personal empowerment for students. There are numerous advantages of such an approach. Firstly, this initiative supports the holistic development of the student. Secondly, EES becomes the responsibility of the “whole school” community. Through the adoption of a cross-curricular approach, EES becomes the concern of all teachers; it becomes a “whole-school” project.

Thirdly, the cross-curricular approach necessitates the incorporation of EES curricular material into all other subjects’ curricula. There is an onus on education authorities to ensure that there are appropriate assessment methods in place to evaluate students’ progress in areas such as political literacy, analytical abilities and judgement capacities around the cross-curricular approach to EES. Fourthly, the cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning requires a teacher who is transformative and intellectually aware that the goal of imparting EES is about the careful nurture of students regarding their capabilities and abilities to interrogate the many questions posed by the ill-effects of climate change and environmental breakdown.

Savage (2011: 42) makes the case that the adoption of a pedagogy that engages with “cross-curricularity” opens a whole new powerful method of teaching and learning. Savage (ibid.) in discussing cross-curricular teaching places particular emphasis on its purposes:

- To encourage students’ learning through drawing on their life experiences.
- To make explicit links between individual subjects.
- To provide opportunities for students to learn by “doing”.

- To facilitate staff collaboration leading to dual benefits of curricular and professional development.
- To avail of the many teaching and learning opportunities that present in individual subject areas, across other subject areas and link to themes that are external to schools' curricula.
- To promote students' cognitive, personal and social development in an integrated way.
- To afford teachers' opportunities to be imaginative and innovative in curriculum planning.
- To facilitate a shared vision among teachers, school management and leadership through collaboration in areas of curricular design.

A report on “Cross-Curricular Themes in Secondary Education” by the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Europe (CIDREE) asserts that:

*Traditional school subjects are no longer sufficient to fully elaborate the forms of knowledge that a modern society needs. Rigidly constructed subject-based curricula tend to create a gap between education and the emerging needs of society (CIDREE, 2005:4).*

Savage (2011: 38, 39) extracted from this research several problems in the implementation of cross-curricular approaches:

- (1) The role of the teacher is key to the successful implementation of the cross-curricular approach. Many teachers lack confidence due to the scarcity of content knowledge and an inability to employ teaching methodologies appropriate to the pedagogy. Therefore, teacher CPD is a priority.
- (2) Often, it is the case that subjects taught within the cross-curricular domain require stronger academic tradition. This is also true for EES. While many traditional curricular subjects (in particular, Physics, Chemistry and Biology) are important elements of EES, nevertheless, it can be argued that EES is a relatively “new” subject in the school curricula of the modern era.
- (3) It can be challenging for teachers to depart from teaching from the dominance perspective of their own subject area to that of embracing cross-curricular teaching methodologies.

- (4) Teachers' cooperation and collaboration is a determining factor in the success of cross-curricular approaches.
- (5) The identification of appropriate assessment methods for cross-curricular approaches is important. Students express the view that if a subject (such as EES) does not have a clear evaluation system in place, it can be understood that the subject at stake is poorly rated and of little relevance to their lives.

It must be acknowledged here that the full embrace of cross-curricular teaching and learning for the implementation of EES will require resources and education staff CPD to support this non-conventional approach to teaching. This observation was articulated many times at this Project's final conference. Cross-curricular approaches demands a "cultural shift" in pedagogical approach, a "certain kind of teacher" to be *au fait* with new teaching methodologies and, an increased awareness on the part of key stakeholders that education is being reimagined to go beyond "teaching for the exam".

### Student Voice

The rights of students to participate in decision-making are recognised by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC asserts the right for young people to express their views freely and, to be afforded opportunities to be heard.

Lundy (2007)<sup>2</sup> proposes that for student voice to be affirmed, the following four factors need to be considered:

- Space: Young people must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Young people must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: Their views must be listened to
- Influence: Their views must be acted upon, as appropriate (Ibid.: 933).

Young people need the space, the opportunity to articulate their opinions and to be facilitated to voice their views. The "audience" aspect requires due weight to be given to the act of listening to views expressed. For the views of young people to have influence in the

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<sup>2</sup> Lundy, L., (2007) "'Voice' is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" British Educational Research Journal. Volume 33, No. 6, pp. 927-942

school setting, it is not just sufficient to listen, these views need to be embedded into the decision-making processes of the school.

Freirean pedagogy is helpful when seeking to interrogate the place of the student voice in the school setting. Freire (1998)<sup>3</sup> argues that educating for "technical efficiency" alone is not sufficient for engaging "in the process of becoming a citizen" (Ibid.: 94). Allowing students to voice their opinions and concerns in the school setting provides learning opportunities that support their future engagement as citizens in society. The democratisation of the student voice gives them "a taste for democratic practices" while in school (Freire 1996: 21)<sup>4</sup>. Pupils need to be involved in dialogical encounters that interrogate political and social issues that are conducive to the "re-creation of a kind of society that is both humane and just" (Ibid.). Both students and teachers need to be aware that "open, curious questioning, whether in speaking or listening, is what grounds them mutually - not a simple passive pretence at dialogue" (Ibid.: 81).

There is a burden on schools to be "crucibles of democracy" (McQuillan, 2005: 641)<sup>5</sup> that prioritises teaching for critical literacy; this is particularly apt for EES as students need to be capable not only of understanding the scientific principles of climate change, but also to be empowered to discern between truth and falsehoods as future citizens. The participants in this Project, throughout the many discussions and debates were keen to emphasise this aspect of EES. That is, that the place of student voice should be acknowledged and affirmed in educational settings where the basic tenets of active citizenship are nurtured. In so doing, education facilitates "political and educational discourses [which] challenge the hegemony of economics over social, personal and political life (Olssen, 2010: 7)<sup>6</sup>.

A recent Input Paper by the European Commission (at conference on "Youth Engagement in Schools: Student voices, participation, and action in learning for sustainability") highlighted the relevance of the affirmation of student voice in progressing EES. The opinions expressed in this Paper mirrored the contributions and Joint Recommendations proposed by the participants of this current Project on EES. The schools represented at each PLV were keen to

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<sup>3</sup> Freire, P., (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom, Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. USA and United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>4</sup> Freire, P., (1996) *Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Continuum.

<sup>5</sup> McQuillan, P. J., (2005) "Possibilities and Pitfalls: A Comparative Analysis of Student Empowerment" *American Educational Research Journal*. Volume 42, No. 4, pp.639-670.

<sup>6</sup> Olssen, M., (2010) *Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Social Democracy: Thin Communitarian Perspectives on Political Philosophy and Education*. New York and UK: Routledge.

affirm their understanding and appreciation of student voice in furthering EES. The respective school managements and leaderships shared examples of how meaningful student voice happens in practice in their school settings. By doing so, they showed commitment and enthusiasm in their acknowledgement of how the full embrace of student voice is a *sine qua non* to the successful implementation of EES.

It is essential that the parameters of the Lundy Model (see above) are followed. Traditionally, it has been the practice for student voices in schools to be mere tokenistic; such an approach will not suffice in the context of EES. For student voices to be meaningful and conducive to good educational outcomes, there is a critical requirement for students to be involved in decision-making processes. Student voice means that young people should be afforded opportunities to participate in school projects and processes “not just as consumers but as key contributors to the direction and implementation of work carried out” (Ibid.).

The EFEE-ETUCE joint recommendations on promoting environmental sustainability in school teaching, learning and management presented with this report strongly affirm the promotion of student voice in the context of EES in the following way:

Under the heading “Supporting school management and leadership”, the social partners in education commit to: “supporting and encouraging teachers and school leaders in their mission to challenge and facilitate students to be critical thinkers enabling them to confidently address the threat of environmental change.”

Under the heading “Supporting learning”, the social partners in education commit to: “ensuring that [...] students are educated not only for employment, but also to be environmentally literate; critical thinkers; and capable of understanding the science, sociology and political impact of environmental change.”

Under the heading “Supporting teaching”, the social partners commit to supporting the promotion of student-oriented teaching where their wellbeing and, physical, social and psychological development is considered. This is best accomplished through acknowledgement and affirmation of the student voice.”

## Whole School Approach

A study (Mogren et al., 2019) conducted in Sweden about teachers’ perspectives in schools adopting a whole-school approach to Education for Sustainable Development

concluded that their school organisations had: “higher quality and coherence, with greater potential to support teaching and pedagogical work in practice” (Mogren et al., 2019: 508)<sup>7</sup>. This assertion was supported by the project’s participants who had observed first-hand an impressive array of whole-school approaches during the PLVs. It became clear that a whole-school approach is central to an effective pedagogy for EES. This conclusion is a further example of where a cultural change in educational institutions is demanded as EES challenges traditional education practices while seeking to foster in students an “awareness of the complexities and uncertainty of the surrounding world (Ibid.: 508).

The success of whole-school pedagogical approaches to EES is dependent on the efficacy of school organisation. This in turn impacts on EES implementation strategies. Mogren et al., (2019: 509) have identified four key aspects of school organisation that actively support the EES whole-school school approach: “collaborative interaction and school improvement, student-centred education, cooperation with the local society, and proactive leadership”. This study identified other strategies supportive of good school organisation in a whole-school approach to EES: 1) The promotion of a vision that is holistic and extended to teaching methodologies, planning and evaluation methods; 2) making opportunities available to staff for relevant CPD supporting knowledge creation, which allows schools to develop as “more transformative praxis-oriented organisations, incorporating aspects such as pluralism, collegial learning and student-centred approaches”; 3) The study indicated that with regard to accreditation/evaluation procedures that schools that adopted an internal quality approaches produced the better outcomes. Such approaches were deemed to be more effective in raising students’ sustainability consciousness through a “more praxis-oriented, bottom-up process”. An evaluation process that is top-down, externally regulated was considered less conducive to the development and support of education for environmental development.

### **Chapter 3 - EFEE/ETUCE perspectives on promoting EES**

There is a lot of potential for common work between social partners in education on this topic. EFEE and ETUCE have a clear commitment with it, and their main challenge is to agree on the issues and define a common action plan. There are several pressing issues that influence

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<sup>7</sup> Mogren, A., Gericke, N., and Scherp, H., (2019) “Whole school approaches to education for sustainable development: a model that links to school improvement” *Environmental Education Research*. Volume 25, No. 4. pp. 508 – 531.

their social partners' agendas, however, both EFEE and ETUCE understand that Education for Environmental Sustainability is a crucial and urgent matter.

## **EFEE**

*EFEE Statement on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability Brussels, 11 May 2021<sup>8</sup>*

### **General**

The mapping of EES from the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 in 2015 to the “acceleration of social, economic and cultural transformation” in society (caused by the COVID-19 crisis) and right through to the present, shows that there is a deficit in “sustainable literacy, skills and competences in the educational context” (p. 1).

Therefore, it is incumbent on educational institutions to provide education to deal with the demands of the economy but also “the moral and cultural Zeitgeist of this new era” (p.1). The EFEE statement notes that the EU Commission is intent on putting right the deficit in EES with a proposal for a Council Recommendation. EFEE, cognisant of its role as educational social partner, welcomes this initiative in seeking to provide quality lifelong learning at all “educational levels for present as well as future generations of learners” (p. 1). EFEE is deeply committed to the realisation of Europe’s Green Transition, invites the European Commission to take the following objectives into account in the furtherance of EES.

### **Objectives**

**Objective 1: *Integrate environmental issues in education systems, including at the level of curricula, teacher education, pedagogies and learning environments.***

EFEE recognises the need to adapt education systems across the EU so that there is an understanding of basic principles such as “green skills” and “sustainable mindsets” necessary to support EES. This is best accomplished through interrogation of issues such as: curricula; teacher education (ITT and CPD); pedagogies; and learning environments.

In seeking to integrate EES in national education systems, sufficient flexibility must be

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<sup>8</sup> [Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability](#)

allowed to account for the respective societal frameworks. It is of the utmost importance that “proactive reskilling and up-skilling” is made possible across all educational levels. In this regard, EFEE supports the EC in developing a European competence framework (GreenComp) under the auspices of the European Green Deal (EGD) which emphasises the assessment of knowledge and competences of learners regarding EES. The objective of delivering top quality programmes on EES is predicated on continuous dialogue which involves the sharing of opinions, ideas, practices and experiences among all stakeholders. Furthermore, EFEE encourages and promotes the cultivation of strong communicative links between educational stakeholders and their external networks, such as researchers, NGOs and government ministries.

***Objective 2: Support learners to move from awareness of environmental issues to an understanding of these issues, empowering them to act on a personal and community level.***

The empowerment of learners is based on EES implementation in such a manner that facilitates the attainment of knowledge and competences in the best way possible. Thus, learners are empowered to act in matters pertaining to environmental sustainability on a personal and community level. It is through awareness, understanding, and mastering of competences that students will be enabled to become active, informed citizens seeking to bring about change in their communities, countries and the world.

***Objective 3: Implement multidisciplinary and participatory approaches in education adapted to understanding and acting on environmental challenges.***

It is of paramount importance to adopt cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning across all educational levels. This enables students to recognise the links between different disciplines and curricula. These approaches will help foster the development of the following skills: problem solving; conflict resolution; consensus building; information management; interpersonal expression; and critical and creative thinking.

Ensuring the objective of building more sustainable societies through EES requires hearing the voices of all education stakeholders as an essential prerequisite. This ensures that no disadvantaged students, such as migrants or learners with physical or cognitive disabilities, are left behind.

**Objective 4: *Promote a whole-institution approach where sustainability is embedded in all activities, including buildings and facility management, governance, partnerships and community relations.***

For EES to be successful in terms of offering quality and inclusive teaching and learning, it must be embedded in a whole-school approach. This demands that environmental sustainability should be embedded in all school activities, which further includes schools' learning environments both in enclosed and in open spaces; the management of energy utilities; the inputs of school management; the deliberations of school governance authorities; and the cementing of partnerships with local communities.

With regard to the availability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education, research shows that schools in northern European countries are ahead in having access to the internet and sustainable infrastructure while those in southern rural areas lack such access. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of how geographical location can inhibit the provision of a qualitative and inclusive EES and, furthermore, take the appropriate actions to alleviate such obstacles to learning and teaching.

EFEE encourages the EC to provide funds for EES on a needs-based approach. EFEE advises that due to the diversity of membership across 26 European countries and, the imperative of each school having the necessary sustainable infrastructure available that the Commission undertake a detailed economic mapping of the state of play. EFEE wishes to be involved with the EC from an early stage in this mapping procedure.

**Objective 5: *Set out common principles and a shared language on sustainability that could guide implementation at national level and support cooperation and exchange of ideas and best practice at EU level.***

In order for the EU to achieve its climate ambitions, it is necessary to set out a “shared language” and a shared understanding of key elements with regard to environmental sustainability. At present, this lack of a common language inhibits the promotion of EES. This would facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practice across all EU countries which in turn enhances the delivery of EES.

## **Objective 6: *Strengthen efforts and improve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.***

As a social partner with considerable experience in addressing (through dialogue) topics such as environment and climate, EFEE reaffirms its commitment to making progress regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The social partners in education will actively pursue and honour the principles set out in the SDGs at national and regional levels. Furthermore, the social partners, calling on their expertise, will set the groundwork for facilitating the sharing of best practices and peer learning visits across the EU.

### **ETUCE**

*ETUCE Document: “Education for Social Change: The Role of Education Trade Unions in Addressing Sustainable Environmental Development”<sup>9</sup>*

This ETUCE research conducted in 2021 -2022 focused on the challenges that teachers, academics, and other education personnel face due to the threat to the environment arising from climatic changes. The study also had a particular focus on innovative trade union practices. The study identified four significant challenges that education trade union members experience due to the threat of climate change. These challenges arise from: 1) the actual climate hazards being experienced which are dependent on geographical location; and 2) new demands for implementing concrete programmes on EES.

Challenges for teachers, academics and other education personnel:

- Increased Workload and Health Problems
- Need for More Accessible and Relevant Training Opportunities
- Insufficient Curricula. Assessment Frameworks and Professional Autonomy
- Lack of Political Vision and Serious Investment

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<sup>9</sup> Education For Social Change: The Role Of Education Trade Unions In Addressing Sustainable Environmental Development (2022) - European Trade Union Committee for Education (csee-etuice.org)

## **Increased Workload and Health Problems**

The study participants signalled that the most severe impact experienced by them arose from an increased workload due to their responsibility for implementing curricula and using teaching methodologies that are germane to EES.

The actual ill-effects of climate change affect the physical health and wellbeing of education trade union members. This is dependent on the specific climate zone. Some countries experience more frequent and intense climate hazards than others. Threats to physical health and wellbeing result from occurrences such as: landslides; flooding; forest fires; erratic weather conditions; etc.

The research also identified a particular cohort of teachers, academics, and other education personnel that are particularly vulnerable in this scenario of climate change, that is, those that are older, and come from rural rather than urban areas. These groups face more disadvantages due to their schools' location, working environment and prior working conditions.

## **Need for More Accessible and Relevant Training Opportunities**

The teachers, academics and other education personnel state that for effective teaching about environmental sustainability and for being equipped to comprehensively cope with the impact of climate change, it is of the essence that high-quality and accessible professional development and training are available. The contention is that a lack of CPD adds enormously to workload and causes follow-on problems.

## **Insufficient Curricula, Assessment Frameworks and Professional Autonomy**

It is posited that curricula and accompanying assessment frameworks are not yet in place to support the delivery of rigorous EES programmes. It is incumbent on educational systems across the countries of the EU that the skills and competences for the school learning, teaching, management and leadership with regard to EES are clearly defined, together with appropriate assessment techniques. There needs to be a realisation of the necessity for governments of EU countries-- to adopt comprehensive curricula, provide the necessary funding and allocate generous school time (for both teachers and students) to demonstrate their prioritisation of EES.

Teachers need guidance and support from the education authorities (governments, education ministries, education employers, etc.). Otherwise, they may have to resort to seeking direction and information from online sources which may prove to be unregulated and lacking in academic rigour.

For effective partnerships to work and achieve enthusiastic buy-in from teachers, academics and other education personnel, it is of the essence that, as key stakeholders, they are fully included in the decision-making processes. This research also concludes that national education systems should grant schools (teachers, management and leadership) the freedom and discretion to apply the curricula and community outreach as best suited to schools' local context.

It should be noted that there are glaring disparities in the levels of participation in programmes of EES in the different EU Member States.

### **Lack of Political Vision and Serious Investment**

The research asserts that EES is not a political priority. Politicians across the EU region are not responding satisfactorily to the climate emergency by taking definitive action to ensure that EES across the European countries is transformed in a manner that demonstrates a comprehensive plan. This would ensure that citizens are educated to develop adequate and sufficient skills to be able to cope with the ever-increasing challenges of climate change.

Strong political leadership is vital to the enablement of a holistic school approach becoming a reality. National education systems need to adopt policies that are linked to the Sustainable Goals (SDGs) and in particular to SDG 4 on education for sustainable development. It is noted that the extent of prioritisation of governments towards EES differs from country to country.

### **Trade Union Responses to the Climate Emergency**

#### ***Policies and Priorities***

This study asserts that there is “a lack of priority and strategic action” on the part of the education trade unions regarding environmental sustainability. More than half of the respondents to the survey attached to this ETUCE research indicated that their trade union does

not have a comprehensive policy on environmental sustainability in place, nor do they engage in social dialogue on the topic.

Therefore, it is posited that for education trade unions to be fully participant in promoting the topic of EES, cognisance has to be taken of the following: 1) sufficient human and financial resources; 2) cross-sectoral communication on the challenges presented to teachers, academics and other education personnel respecting the climate change; 3) an awareness of controversy from some quarters with trade unions deviating from their traditional role as negotiators for working conditions, remuneration, etc. to that of the “new” issue of climate change; 4) a means of collating sufficient data from affiliates on their views around the implementation of EES; and 5) a need to put right the weak state of social dialogue (on this topic) at the present time.

### ***Social Dialogue and Collective Bargaining***

With regard to social dialogue, only half of the participating ETUCE organisations engage in the topic of environmental sustainability. Collective bargaining is the least used form of social dialogue. The responses from the ETUCE survey to members provide an insight that social dialogue often takes the form of “information-sharing” which is deemed to be rather passive exercise. There is ample space and potential for the ETUCE member organisations to be engaged in a more powerful, strategic form of social dialogue.

The study reflects a concern that a general trend of a decrease in the use of social dialogue is evident across sectors. This situation needs rectifying; there is a call for action on the part of education trade unions and education employers to work at placing social dialogue on a surer footing.

### ***Trade Union Actions***

There is recognition of a need for ETUCE member organisations to increase their input with regard to the topic of environmental sustainability and to exert more influence in this area. This will happen alongside the development of expertise within the ETUCE member organisations which will enable concrete actions to be undertaken. Many of the respondents to the ETUCE survey indicated that they are in the preliminary stages of dealing with policy issues on EES. For a more concerted effort in this area, the respondents implied that more funds and dedicated staff are needed. Therefore, there is acceptance on the part of ETUCE member organisations to devote more effort so that appropriate investment of time and resources can be made to progress EES through policies, practices, collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Furthermore, ETUCE developed [Practical Guidelines for Education Trade unions on Addressing Environmental Issues and Sustainable Environmental Development in the Education Sector](#), proposing concrete and practical strategies for addressing education and environment for social change and the impact of climate emergency on education; supporting teachers, academics and other education personnel in implementing environmental sustainability education; and securing their place in the design and assessment of the implementation of national and European climate strategies.

## **Chapter 4 - Good practices identified through peer learning visits**

### **Cooperation network**

For more than 15 years, the multilingual primary and secondary school *Colegios Zola Las Rozas* in Madrid has been working on initiatives and activities with the aim to connect what is taught in the classrooms to the outside world. To do so, the school established a cooperation network with other schools as well as with organisations such as [Teachers for Future](#) and [Ecoembes](#). Every week, they have a meeting, and produce a report with feedback and measurement rates to perfect the whole process. In addition, the school works with sustainable suppliers or, in certain cases, convince their suppliers to become more sustainable.

## **Second life project**

The second life project put in place by Colegios Zola Las Rozas aims at reusing objects that students have at home. In 2023, for instance, students created pencil cases and a mini-basketball pitch. The students' creations were then shown during an exhibition gathering different audiences. These activities also helped the students learn about recycling, as well as improve their English vocabulary skills in this area.

## **Collecting lids**

As part of a donation project aiming to cover expensive medical costs, Colegios Zola Las Rozas collected lids. Most students participated in this initiative and teachers linked subject matters to the initiative. For instance, posters about the initiative were created in tech class.

## **Environmental sustainability through arts**

The community secondary school *2 SLO im. Pawła Jasionicy oddział Solec* in Warsaw is convinced of the importance of teaching students about the properties of artistic materials and raising awareness about impact on the environment. In this context, the students learn about environmental sustainability through visual arts. Sharing the artwork and experience with the school community is also a form of involving everyone and raising awareness.

## **Hiking artistically in mountains**

Hiking artistically in mountains is an interdisciplinary project implemented by *2 SLO im. Pawła Jasionicy oddział Solec*. During this activity, which is led by the geography teacher, students go out into nature to observe landscapes that they have seen in a painting. This way, the students can compare how the landscape has changed from the time of the painting until now. This contributes to involving the students with the project also from an emotional perspective.

## **What does the environment mean to you?**

Through this project implemented by *2 SLO im. Pawła Jasionicy oddział Solec*, the students reflect on what environment means to them, which varies from pupil to pupil, as there

is no wrong answer to this question. The environment can for instance mean nature, the world around me, or beauty.

### **Green City Farm**

The Green City Farm is a unique learning environment at *Perho Culinary, Tourism & Business College* in Helsinki. The Green City Farm offers opportunities to participate in sustainable farming and food production. The farm provides a framework for understanding and learning more about responsible land management, biodiversity, ecological food production, short food chain and planetary diet. Moreover, the farm contributes to the ecosystem by supporting pollinators and soil microbes. Green City Farm also hosts community activities and welcomes co-operative partners from the working life to visit and volunteer by doing farm work.

### **Sustainability chaplain**

For several years, Kinsale Community School in Kinsale (Ireland) has had a school Sustainability Chaplain. The sustainability chaplain's role is to both teach sustainability and oversee a transition of the school towards a goal in which all stakeholders, staff, students, parents, and board of management are engaged in creating a whole school ethos of sustainability.

#### The sustainability chaplain's role include:

- teaching students the 'Youth for Sustainable Development' programme, giving the students an understanding of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and an awareness of their own impact on the environment, as well as building their confidence and capacity to lead. After completing the programme, the students will be mentoring the first-year students in the topic.
- facilitating a Sustainability Advisory Board which will steer the school towards reducing its overall carbon footprint, teaching students about organic food growing in the newly constructed greenhouse and planting hedgerows as wildlife corridors and wild flower patches for pollinators around the school campus.

- liaising with members of staff to visit their classes and give talks on sustainable practices and what changes we can all make to reduce our carbon footprint. The chaplain also organises links to local community groups.

### Good practices from social partners

Throughout this project, we observed a multitude of good practices, evident in both the Peer Learning Visits that took place in distinct EU countries and the final conference, in Belgium. Below are some of the examples.

The director of GO!, Isabelle Janssens shared the organisation's integrated approach to education. [GO!](#) **Is an educational network in Flanders, Belgium**, region which whose schools receive government endowments and education is free for all. GO! Has a strategic plan for 2030 that emphasizes personalised group learning, teacher-student relationship, and the concept of schools as hybrid entities. This concept states that schools are flexible, place-independent, and time-independent entities. According to the director, schools in Flanders strove to combine learning and European frameworks while pursuing quality, balance, and well-being.

Friso Lijftogt, a policy advisor at [MBO Raad](#), emphasized their collaboration with the [SDG Netherlands initiative](#), which brought together over 1300 public organisations. MBO Raad represents the **Dutch Association of Vocational Education and Training Schools** and thus, the organisation serves as a voice and advocate for such educational institutions. Mr. Lijftogt elaborated that their primary aim was to showcase initiatives undertaken by schools, fostering mutual inspiration towards sustainability goals, particularly emphasizing sustainability skills. Furthermore, the policy advisor disclosed the organization's efforts in evaluating the congruence between schools' physical infrastructure and sustainability objectives.

Iris Stantic Miljacki, a primary school teacher representing the **Teachers Union of Serbia (TUS)**, addressed the challenging landscape of sustainability education promotion in the country. Ms. Miljacki underscored the limited exposure of Serbian teachers to ecological studies, resulting in insufficient acquisition of necessary competencies. Furthermore, she noted that principals, who occupy decision-making roles, frequently fail to prioritize sustainability

initiatives. Despite these obstacles, Ms. Miljacki showcased a collaborative endeavour among teachers from Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria—members of their respective unions—to implement a [joint project focused on green schools](#). This joint project aimed at supporting primary teachers in providing quality environmental education in line with EC Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goal, namely “Development of environmental literacy among the younger generations; and Support schools in implementing the concept of green schools”. Among the goals of this project, is the inclusion of a methodology for organising and implementing a short qualification course for primary teachers in ecological education.

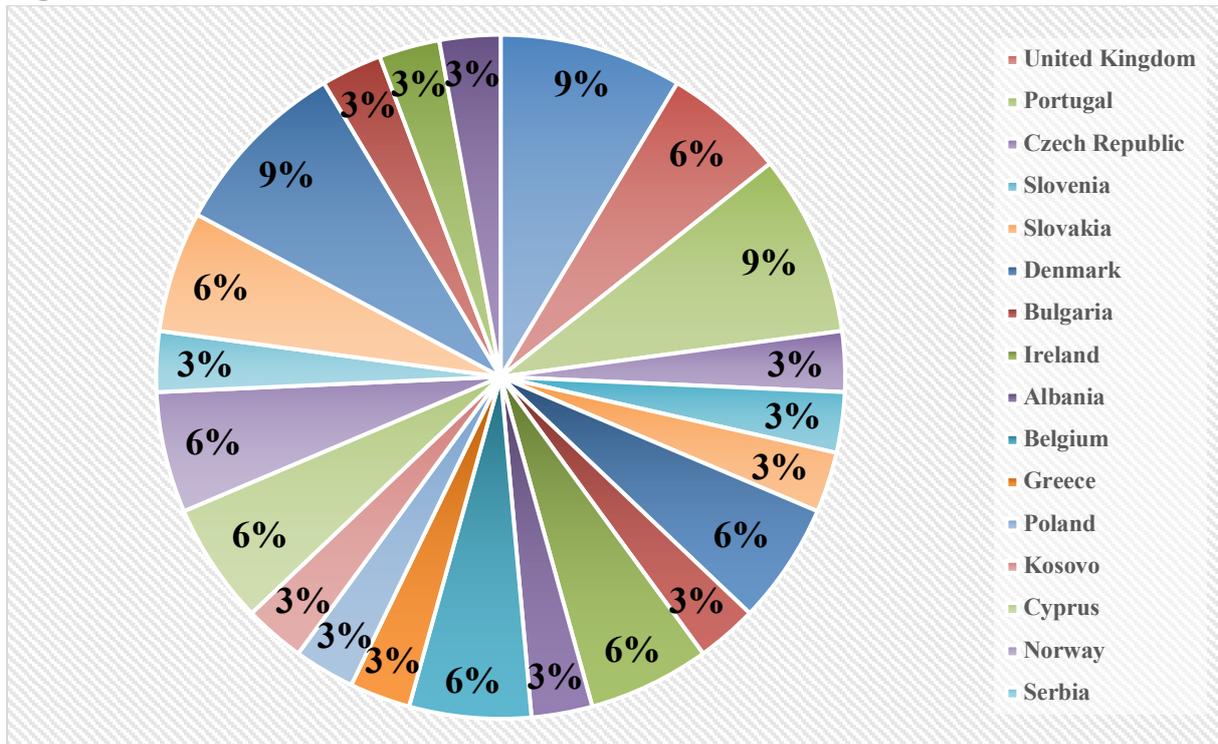
Finally, **John MacGabhann, the General Secretary of the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)** emphasized the importance of ensuring good conditions for teachers as one of the key factors in achieving sustainability in Irish schools. According to him, some schools in Ireland made small improvements, especially in renewable energy resources, transport initiatives, and sustainable school meals. Mr. MacGabhann added that Irish schools also focus on inclusivity, outdoor learning, interdisciplinary education and challenge the culture of disposability through reusing and repurposing. Moreover, TUI’s general secretary shared the [Out School 2022](#) initiative, seen as a commitment to sustainable development in Irish schools.

## Chapter 5 - Survey results

### Participants' demographics

When presenting survey results it is essential to provide demographics about the participants to better contextualise the survey. In total, 48 organisations from 26 distinct European countries responded to the survey. Figure 1 shows in detail which countries participated and their frequency.

**Figure 1: Countries**



Following the research question “How can social partners in education contribute to promoting environmental sustainability in school learning, teaching and management?” and with the aim of identifying effective ways of implementing environmentally sustainable learning in schools is one of the main objectives of this project. In this sense, members and associated personnel of both EFEE and ETUCE member organisations participated in a online survey developed in the framework of this project to elaborate on their different perspectives about Education for Environmental Sustainability. Four main points were researched:

- ☐ *The impact of EES on education employers and trade union members along with their respective work practices.*
- ☐ *The experiences of education employers and trade union organisations’ with implementing EES.*
- ☐ *The training and professional development needs of the organisations’ members regarding the implementation of EES.*
- ☐ *The social dialogue practices and actions on the promotion and implementation of EES.*

## **Qualitative Research Questions and Responses - main findings**

In this section, the outcomes regarding the qualitative part of the survey are shared. The section is divided into three themes developed based on the survey participants' responses.

### **Social dialogue on Education for Environmental Sustainability**

Most participants declared that social dialogue on EES is not considered as a priority topic in their national contexts. On the teacher trade unions side, it has been underlined that in most of EU countries Education for Environmental Sustainability is not sufficiently recognized as a valid subject for collective bargaining negotiations. Nevertheless, according to our survey, in those countries where social dialogue mechanisms in education sector are effective, the social partners have been identifying possible initiatives on that matter. In practice, according to the survey results, the participants indicated that this cooperative work lead to the development of joint projects, conferences and workshops focused on raising awareness among education stakeholders in the school context. This cooperation resulted in the emergence of collaborations between educational personnel and environmental sustainability experts ensuring training to teachers, parents and pupils. In addition to this, education stakeholders participated in the organization of themed weeks (IE, NL, PL), in order to raise awareness among their communities. Finally, this ongoing pressure of national social partners contributed to certain curriculum changes to accommodate education for sustainable development across different subject areas. This has been confirmed by the social partners countries like Ireland, Poland, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Slovenia or Belgium. Hence, social dialogue that prioritises EES is likely to lead to a favourable response from the educational stakeholders thus enhancing the learning and teaching experiences for students and teachers. Through social dialogue, ideas were shared, planned and implemented to good effect.

Some participants expressed concerns that social dialogue has also brought drawbacks. In their perspective, there is a lack of a coherent strategy and conflicts between the parties have been observed. For instance, some participants suggested applying education for environmental sustainability is problematic when the school's infrastructure is unsuitable. However, it is important to note that these issues are not inherent problems of social dialogue itself but rather stem from a lack of prioritization by the involved parties. With proper attention and commitment from all stakeholders, these challenges can be effectively addressed.

A strong need for investment in the area of school infrastructure is has been confirmed by both employers and trade union organizations. In most EU countries, schools are located in large public buildings that require renovation in order to ensure lower consumption of vital resources like heat, energy, water. In practice, these improvements should be related to 1) energy efficiency including energy for lighting, heating, cooling, and powering electronic devices. Energy-efficient infrastructure, such as LED lighting, smart HVAC systems, and renewable energy sources like solar panels, can reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to this, construction materials, water usage, and land use contribute to the environmental footprint of school infrastructure. Sustainable building practices, such as using recycled or locally sourced materials, implementing water-saving fixtures, and minimizing land disturbance, can help reduce resource consumption and environmental degradation.

In addition to this, social partners underline the need to ensure decent indoor air quality, natural lighting, and thermal comfort are essential for creating healthy and productive learning environments. Designing schools with ample natural light, proper ventilation systems, and non-toxic building materials can improve indoor environmental quality and enhance student well-being. Furthermore, incorporating green spaces, such as gardens, courtyards, and green roofs, into school campuses can provide numerous environmental benefits. Green infrastructure helps mitigate urban heat islands, absorb stormwater runoff, promote biodiversity, and create outdoor learning opportunities for students.

Subsequently, schools generate significant amounts of waste from food, paper, plastics, and other materials. Implementing waste reduction strategies, recycling programs, composting initiatives, and sustainable procurement practices can minimize waste generation and promote resource conservation. Sustainable school infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance, monitoring, and long-term planning to ensure optimal performance and environmental stewardship. Regular building audits, energy monitoring, and lifecycle assessments can identify opportunities for improvement and inform strategic decision-making. In addition to this, School location, transportation options, and access to public transit have implications for environmental sustainability. Situating schools in walkable neighbourhoods, providing safe cycling routes, and promoting carpooling or public transportation can reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, and carbon emissions associated with commuting.

Finally, school infrastructure should serve as a platform for environmental education and sustainability initiatives. Throughout the project we have seen the need to prepare school infrastructure to support learning about the environment. With sufficient infrastructure, integrating environmental literacy into the curriculum, establishing eco-clubs or green teams, and organizing environmental awareness campaigns can foster a culture of sustainability among students, staff, and the wider community.

Although throughout the project, we have seen interesting innovations and practices that enhance learning on the environmental sustainability delivered by school leaders and teachers that are passionate about the topic, however, these actions require a systemic support in order to mainstream EES within the school contexts. The social dialogue is, therefore, crucial in order to advocate for further investment in infrastructure of educational institutions.

Such a conclusion can also be derived from the survey in which national social partners underlined a lack of dedicated time to the implementation or discussions on Education for Environmental Sustainability in schools and/or educational institutions. As a result, in many countries there is no direction or clear vision on how to implement the subject in the curricula or in the school context, in general. Therefore, apart from raising awareness about the issue there is a significant need to enhance initial and continuous teacher training on environmental sustainability. Teachers voice their specific needs, such as to acquire knowledge on EES in order to teach it for their students. However, when there are no teachers with such “voice” or time and space to discuss the matters in their schools, it's as if the topic doesn't even seem to exist. This can be signalled as “cultural behaviour problems”, that is, there is a lack of alignment or understanding regarding the importance of EES. Social dialogue plays a crucial role in changing this and other issues highlighted in the survey because it facilitates open communication, understanding, and consensus-building.

### **Challenges and positive experiences in designing and implementing Education for Environmental Sustainability programs (EES)**

Survey participants were asked to share their positive and challenging experiences with designing and implementing Environmental Sustainability programs and related topics in their educational institutions.

From a positive perspective, some participants shared that implementing Education for Environmental Sustainability programs has changed their schools/educational institutions for the better. In these cases, there has been an improvement in schools' infrastructures, as well as a change in behaviour of education personnel and school employers. School employers, education personnel and other staff are more proactive and began sharing between them best practices on how to work with EES. In some cases, there has been a greater involvement from parents, which shows a broader acceptance of education for environmental sustainability topics among the community. Lastly, participants also referred to changes in the school's curriculum and an increase in awareness of Education for Environmental Sustainability topics. However, participants also encountered some challenges. Most issues stem from a lack of prioritisation by the government, insufficient knowledge about the topic of learning for sustainability, and restricted autonomy in designing school curricula.

An important aspect that has been highlighted in the survey is the way of teaching EES. Education for Environmental Sustainability is not a topic to be taught separately, as an isolated scientific subject. The global, economic, social and political dimensions of climate change and environmental aspects need to be recognised and EES requires a holistic approach. An Education for Environmental Sustainability would be better utilized if incorporated in the pedagogy of EES from the socio-ecological perspective and considering the global, economic, social and political dimensions.

The implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) programs has brought about significant positive changes in educational institutions. However, challenges persist, such as governmental prioritization issues, limited understanding of sustainable learning, and restricted autonomy in curriculum design. Despite these obstacles, there is still optimism about the transformative potential of EES programmes. In the future, joint efforts are needed to tackle these challenges and ensure the continued success of EES initiatives in educating environmentally conscious citizens and promoting a sustainable future.

In conclusion, when discussing the experiences with implementing EES, the teachers and other educational personnel who participated in this research's survey urge education authorities to support coherent strategies at the local, national and European levels. From their perspective, national governments are not committed enough with environmental sustainability projects in the field of education and instead, they push the topic off the political agenda.

## **Training and professional needs**

Participants were consulted to identify the most pressing training requirements for the successful implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability. The results highlighted a crucial need: a comprehensive grasp of the imperative for addressing environmental sustainability issues. In essence, educators, employers, and other stakeholders emphasised the critical importance of acquiring knowledge as the foremost training necessity at present. The essential training requirement for acquiring knowledge on EES is closely followed by the necessity for leadership training (e.g. teacher/ school leadership training on how to teach environmental sustainability issues across disciplines holistically, training on how to use innovative pedagogies, etc.) and finally, collaborative work (e.g. peer learning networks and collaboration on teaching with other teachers and other education personnel). It was possible to extract from the survey that EES is for many a new educational departure and a “cultural shift” in pedagogy will be required. Therefore, the urgency for training, not only to acquire the necessary knowledge (scientific, political, sociological, etc.) about the topic, but also to learn how to pass on the knowledge acquired in the classroom.

According to the existing literature on the teacher training on the education on environmental sustainability (EES), teachers and school leaders require further training on how to integrate environmental sustainability topics into existing curricula across various subjects. This includes incorporating relevant environmental concepts, issues, and case studies into lesson plans, projects, and classroom activities. Teacher training curricula need to be reformed to prepare and encourage teachers to adopt interdisciplinary approaches to teaching environmental sustainability, emphasizing connections between science, social studies, mathematics, language arts, and other subject areas. This helps students develop a holistic understanding of environmental issues and their implications.

Furthermore, according to the social partners, the teachers and school leaders need to be supported by professional development opportunities that emphasize experiential learning and hands-on activities related to environmental sustainability (experimental and project-based learning). This could involve field trips, outdoor education experiences, community-based projects, and environmental monitoring activities to engage students directly with nature and real-world environmental challenges. This innovative approach can be supported by

professional development workshops, seminars, and conferences focused on environmental sustainability education.

According to EFEE/ETUCE members, the proper implementation of the EES can be supported by fostering partnerships with environmental organizations, government agencies, and community groups to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development and collaboration. Encourage teachers to involve students in environmental service projects, citizen science initiatives, and community outreach efforts to address local environmental issues.

In addition to this, in order to ensure a systemic change stronger support is needed for teachers on how to assess student learning outcomes related to environmental sustainability effectively. This includes developing assessment tools, rubrics, and performance tasks that measure students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours toward sustainability.

Finally, this change needs to be considered as an ongoing path with opportunities for support, feedback, and resources allocated to teachers and school leaders, in order to support their professional growth in environmental sustainability education, encourage reflection, collaboration, and continuous improvement through communities of practice, peer learning networks, and mentoring programs.

In conclusion, the survey highlights a critical need for comprehensive training in Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES). There is a clear need to revise the curriculum for teachers, as the current emphasis on sustainability is insufficient. In addition, a particular emphasis on acquiring knowledge among educators, employers, and stakeholders is needed, as well as leadership training and collaborative work - crucial follow-up requirements. In addition, the staff lacks adequate preparation to effectively teach this vital subject matter. Additionally, there's a significant deficiency in teachers' and school leaders' preparation to effectively teach sustainability, indicating a need for curriculum revisions and improved staff training. The creation of an interactive tool by the EU to promote EES implementation is deemed imperative in addressing these challenges.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion**

The collective perceptions shared by the participants, representing the EFEE and ETUCE organisations, during the project various activities and joint discussions, highlight a clear consensus on the urge to draw actions and education policies for EES. Governments across the EU should be advised to work in collaboration with the social partners to advance the

widespread adoption of Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES).

Both EFEE and ETUCE fully acknowledge the challenges posed to education and training systems regarding implementing comprehensive programmes on environmental sustainability in schools across the European Union. It is important that schools and other education institutions place greater emphasis on the pedagogy for EES in a manner that is inclusive and equitable for all stakeholders. This places new demands on education management and leadership as well as on teachers, trainers, school leaders, and education support personnel. EFEE and ETUCE recognise the need for a joint social partnership approach to enhancing the delivery of EES.

In general, social partner organizations participating in this project underline need for a cultural shift that need to take place within the school context. Such a cultural shift will require time and space for all education stakeholders, in order to understand their role in this process. Such a change needs to be addressed by systemic solutions that should include the reform of the curricula implementing education for environment sustainability across different subjects. Furthermore, a strong support for teachers and school leaders is needed with necessary time for continuous development and training on the matter of the environmental sustainability to prepare them to be the agents of change. In addition to this, the school management practices (related to energy use, resources use, transport, etc.) needs to be revised to identify possible improvements limiting the environmental negative impact of the institution. Subsequently, significant investment in school infrastructure is needed to improve environmental neutrality of the educational institutions and foster environmental learning for the pupils. Finally, this systemic change can only be achieved in cooperation with social partners at local, national and European level. Employers and teachers voice can provide insights on the steps necessary to be taken on the path to promote education for environmental sustainability and making the education sector environmentally sustainable.

In a spirit of partnership, both organisations working within the framework of their joint project: “European Social Partners in Education Promoting Environmental Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management” have posited guidelines on how to promote the effective implementation of EES.

Sustainability remains a relatively new concept in numerous educational institutions. As a proactive measure, education social partners should explore ways to get EU support for integrating sustainability into the curriculum and school management practices. For instance,

the creation of an online tool could serve to assess the sustainability practices within educational institution, support development of practices related to the introduction of EES into curricula across different subject areas and identify training needs of teachers and school within this area. Such a tool could support school leaders and teachers to evaluate various aspects of sustainability such as waste management, air quality, resource consumption, school transportation, energy efficiency, and other related factors. Such tools could provide invaluable insights into the environmental sustainability efforts of schools. By implementing an environmental sustainability tool, social partners in education can actively promote and track progress toward more eco-friendly and resilient school environments.

## **Annex**

Kinsale, Ireland (6 May 2022) - [Peer Learning Visit 1](#)

Warsaw, Poland (20 October 2022) - [Peer Learning Visit 2](#)

Madrid, Spain (23 March 2023) - [Peer Learning Visit 3](#)

Helsinki, Finland (15-16 May 2023) - [Peer Learning Visit 4](#)

Brussels, Belgium (14-15 November 2023) - [Final Conference](#)