

# Education Trade Unions addressing sustainable environmental development

Training workshop, Copenhagen, 2 June 2022

*Report*



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# Introduction

The second training workshop of the ETUCE Project "[Education for Social Change: The role of Education Trade Unions in addressing sustainable environmental development](#)" took place on 2 June 2022 in Rome.

Building on the ETUCE Resolution "[For a sustainable future of Europe: the role of education trade unions in Europe in addressing education and environment for social change](#)", ETUCE recognises the education for environmental sustainability as fundamental to educate committed, critical-thinking and active citizens and providing a sense of belonging and opportunities for active participation for all learners, especially for those disadvantaged and marginalised. Therefore, ETUCE and its member organisations are committed to showing the way to a sustainable future for Europe and leading, in solidarity, on the social reforms and changes necessary for a society based on principles of democracy, social justice, fairness, and sustainability.

The conference participants expressed their call for peace and an end to the war on the Ukraine, sharing their solidarity with fellow trade unionists and the people of the Ukraine who were suffering from the impact of war in their country and that was forcing many to leave their country in the search for shelter and safety;

Opening the meeting, **ETUCE Vice-President Dorte Lange** highlighted the role of education trade unions in taking the lead on environmental sustainability, recalling the ETUCE Resolution and the EI World Congress of 2019 in Bangkok. Trade unions are not merely environmental fighters, but they pursue sustainable aims for social change, defining the future of our society through educating children to make responsible choices in everyday life. Moreover, she noted that it is crucial to support ETUCE member organisations on how to introduce and pursue environmental sustainability objectives in education, and to cooperate among trade unions, with national governments and education employers. In this context, ETUCE works with the European Federation of Employers in Education – EFEE within the framework of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education (ESSDE).





## Training workshop objectives:

- to discuss national findings identified in the online survey conducted among ETUCE member organisations on the challenges faced by the education sector and education workers in regard to the climate emergency and sustainable development, and on the role of education trade unions in addressing these challenges;
- to enrich the project research with specific country cases, including a more in-depth look at the Italian national contexts.;
- to offer space for education trade unions to share good practices on supporting and building the capacity and knowledge of their affiliates to address the environmental issues and sustainable development in education, as well as on addressing the impact of environmental problems on education institutions and teachers, academics, and other education personnel;
- to discuss in small working groups the key elements of the role of education trade unions in addressing education and environment for social change and sustainable development as a social partner in education with the view of preparing the guidelines for education trade unions on addressing the environmental issues and sustainable development.







# The Project

Climate emergency and environmental issues require a drastic social change, including individual and collective changes in our mentality, behaviour, lifestyle. In this context, education is a crucial tool for ensuring sustainable development and addressing environment issues. Education trade unions have a key role in ensuring that not only education about sustainable environmental development is integrated into all levels and aspects of education systems, but also that it is accompanied by sustainable and adequate technical, financial and staff resources and that education staff receive the sufficient professional support.

Therefore, the ETUCE project on the “Education for Social Change: The role of Education Trade Unions in addressing sustainable environmental development” aims at building the capacity of education trade unions to prepare their affiliates to address environmental questions and climate emergency for sustainable development in education and training through social dialogue and collective bargaining with the view to address the impact that climate emergency and environmental sustainability measures have on the education sector in the European region.

With this two-year project (2021-2023), co-funded by the European Commission, ETUCE engages for a more central role of education trade unions in implementing the European Green Deal and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Fostering the topic of education for environmental sustainability within the Social Dialogue in Education, the project seeks to ensure a coherent and robust integration of learning about sustainable approaches to the environment in education policies and to promote concrete education trade union measures and practices in addressing the environmental issues and sustainable development in education and in addressing in social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels the impact of environmental problems on education institutions and teachers, academics, and other education personnel.

Besides the training workshops (the first one taking place in Rome, the second one in Copenhagen), the project is composed of several activities:

1. A two-day online [Kick-off Conference](#) that took place on 22-23 April 2021, started the project by identifying current practices and policies related to addressing the environmental issues and sustainable development in the education system at national level and the challenges education trade unions are confronted with regarding the impact of environmental issues on the education sector. The conference also informed about the research and project activities on priority areas that are to be addressed as regards to environmental awareness, education on climate emergency and sustainable environmental development, the impact of climate emergency on the education sector, professional development and support on these topics for teachers, academics, and other education personnel, and addressing sustainable environmental development in internal policies of education trade unions;
2. Research including literature review combined with an online survey carried out among ETUCE member organisations. It provides important findings to identify the major challenges the education sector and education workers face regarding the environment, climate emergency and sustainable development, in different national and local contexts in Europe. The research also studies the role of education trade unions in addressing those challenges through social dialogue and collective bargaining and will include recommendations for national and EU policymakers.
3. Practical guidelines for education trade unions as policy outcome of the project, the guidelines aim to carry

out further strategic discussions and decisions on education trade unions' capacity to address education and environment for social change and the impact of climate emergency on education; support teachers, academics and other education personnel in implementing environmental sustainability education; and secure their place in the design and assessment of the implementation of national and European climate strategies.

4. A film documentary (in English, French and Russian) showing good practices of addressing environmental issues and sustainable environmental development by educational institutions in various national contexts, is completed throughout the project.
5. Closing Conference in Brussels bringing together national education trade unions and other European stakeholders in education and climate change and environmental policies. The aim of the Closing Conference is to present the outcomes of the project and favour the reflection on the project topics. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss and validate practical guidelines for education trade unions on addressing environmental issues and sustainable environmental development in the education sector. The event serves also as the première for the screening of the film documentary on the educational institutions' good practices, prepared in the framework of the project.

## Project objectives

1. Map out and analyse the major issues and challenges in the education sector regarding the environment, climate emergency and sustainable development, in different national and local contexts in Europe, as well as examine the impact of climate emergency on education in the European region and education trade union policies;
2. Identify the key elements of the role of education trade unions in addressing education and environment for social change and sustainable development as a social partner in education;
3. Collect and share concrete measures, tools and practices of education trade unions, as well as develop guidelines on supporting and building the capacity and knowledge of their affiliates to address the environmental issues and sustainable development in education and notably in the social dialogue and collective bargaining, as well as on addressing the impact of environmental problems on education institutions and teachers, academics, and other education personnel;
4. Raise awareness on the importance of education on environment and climate emergency for sustainable development among European and national policymakers, education authorities, education employers, parents and other stakeholders in education, as well as in the society as a whole while embracing the students' engagement on the topic.





# Project advisory group

The project is led by an Advisory Group that provides guidance and field knowledge, assists in the design of the online survey activity, contributes to the project kick-off conference, training workshops and the Closing Conference as well as supports the production of the film documentary. The Advisory Group consists of four representatives from national education trade unions.



**Claudio Franchi,**  
*FLC-CGIL, Italy*



**Damijana Meza,**  
*ESTUS, Slovenia*



**Jacob Svejstrup,**  
*DLF, Denmark*



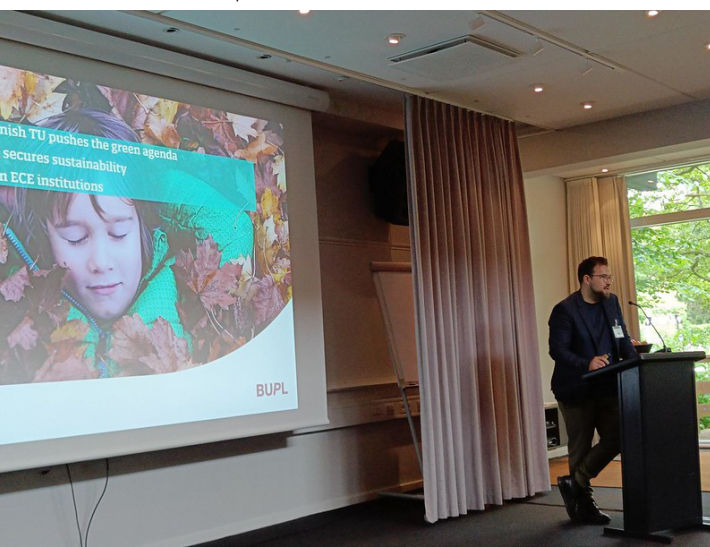
**Jean-Luc Barbery,**  
*ACOD-Onderwijs, Belgium*

# Denmark: addressing environmental sustainability in different education sectors

**Casper Arnsbo Poulsen, BUPL, Denmark** focused on primary education, underlining the need to prepare teachers and other education personnel for the green transition, environmental sustainability being one of the six themes to tackle in teacher training. He also highlighted the benefits of cooperating with trade unions in other sectors, such as construction, for example, in order to advance the objectives of environmental sustainability in multiple fields. In particular, education institutions often lack adequate infrastructure have poor air quality and environmentally unfriendly constructions. He pointed out that cross-sectoral cooperation among trade unions could provide education trade unions with a voice on how education institutions are built and with an opportunity to enhance environmental sustainability in primary and secondary education through raising awareness on this topic and securing funding for 'greener' infrastructure.

**Anders Pors, GL, Denmark**, talked about tackling environmental sustainability in upper secondary education in Denmark, focusing on the importance of teaching the critical perspectives on sustainable development, thus having a more explorative approach on what the solutions can be, as well as the importance of encouraging parents to act more sustainably, including through the school boards where parents have representatives. He shared some ideas on the approaches to be advanced in schools, including inserting the SDGs in school values, green purchasing, investment in roof top solar panels, reductions in the use of electricity, initiatives to engage with local communities, as well as school activities such as green study trips and biodiversity learning in the school yards. He also informed workshop participants about the political discussion in Denmark on where sustainability should be placed in the curriculum: as an 'add-on' in all subjects or 'naturally' placed in subjects and be part of the reflections, critical thinking and holistic view on teaching. Internally, GL has conducted a survey among their affiliates regarding the climate and green transition, and the majority of respondents reconfirmed that it is important for them to involve SDGs in teaching and to ensure that climate care is belongs to everyday operations at school. Moreover, GL has created a network for teachers who want to bring sustainability into their teaching where GL supports and encourages the sharing of good practices and addressing difficulties in relation to pupils, colleagues and school leaders, as well as facilitates the meetings with relevant stakeholders. At the political level, GL would like teachers to have more autonomy on the topic of environmental sustainability, supported by a strong cooperation among stakeholders. This is due to the fact that in Denmark, there is a strong tradition where the development is created bottom-up, meaning that trade unions have to take initiative and come up with ideas, while the government should give them the possibilities to choose 'green' (e.g. travelling by train and bikes).

Casper Arnsbo Poulsen, BUPL, Denmark, Anders Pors, GL, Denmark







# Project research: preliminary results



**Iselin Berg Mulvik**, presented the outcomes of the [online survey](#) carried out among ETUCE members from September to December 2021. The survey aimed to identify the major challenges faced by the education sector and education workers due to the environmental and climate emergency, as well as examine the impact that climate emergency has on education trade union policies and gather a collection of good practices of education trade unions on addressing environmental issues as a social partner in education and supporter of education personnel. 44 ETUCE member organisations representing 30 countries and all school levels across Europe participated in the survey.

The survey identified the following major challenges for facing education personnel in Europe either due to the direct threat of climate change or due to the changes and new demands facing teachers, academics and other education personnel during the climate emergency:

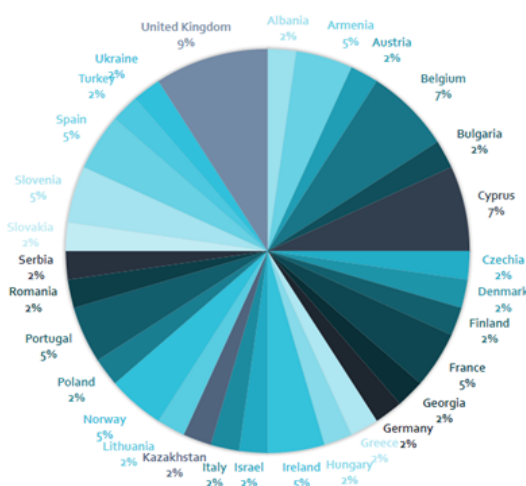
- increased workload and health problems due to the inclusion of environmental sustainability in education without considering the needs of the education personnel ;
- insufficient curricula and assessment frameworks on climate change issues and the impact of environmental education on the working conditions in the education sector ;
- the lack of financial resources and sustainable infrastructure at institutions, due to the overall lack of prioritisation of environmental sustainability at the political level ;
- the overall need for more accessible and relevant training opportunities, which would build the capacity of teachers and educators in environmental and climate change issues.



Regarding education trade unions' policies and priorities on addressing these challenges, the survey showed in particular that:

- despite an increased interest among education trade unions in alleviating these challenges, there is often a focus on traditional thematic areas (e.g., pay, health etc.) rather than revitalised discourse topics and education reform;
- More than half of the respondents who reported that their trade union does not have a comprehensive policy in place at all, do not engage in social dialogue on the topic and attribute this to environmental sustainability not being a priority by the union or leadership; This is due to the difficulty of prioritizing the topic in discussions with employers and the difficulty to fitting the topic in the traditional trade union's agenda (e.g., working conditions, labour rights, pay). Especially in the countries where social dialogue is very rarely occurring, it is difficult to prioritise education for environmental sustainability in the social dialogue over more traditional topics.
- Of those who engage in social dialogue, the focus is mostly on adaptation/mitigation of climate change rather than interdisciplinarity and skills.
- There is a lack of comprehensive policies on the issue of education for environmental sustainability and direct impact on trade union members (more than half respondents reported not having activities on this topic).
- Few respondents reported that the union provides training on climate change mitigation and adaptation;

Overall, the study identifies a positive tendency regarding the importance given to environmental sustainability within education trade unions over the last 4 years. However, there is still much space for improvement, through the sharing of good practices and cooperation among ETUCE member organisations, as well as regarding gaining expertise in this field and mobilising teachers, academics and other education personnel for environmental sustainability purposes.







# Working groups discussion :

## Challenges facing education personnel due to environmental sustainability issues and measures

During this working discussion, workshop participants were reflecting on the following questions:

- What other potential challenges besides those mentioned in the research report do teachers, academics and other education personnel face in your country due to environmental sustainability issues? What other challenges do they face due to integration of the education for environmental sustainability?
- What are the main causes for the challenges the project study has found (increased workload and health problems, insufficient curricula and assessment frameworks, lack of financial resources and good infrastructure at institutions, need for more accessible and relevant teacher training opportunities) in your country context?
- How, if at all, do the challenges you see for education trade union members differ in your region among teachers, academics and other education personnel in different regions, considering their gender, socio-economic status, or other background characteristics?



Regarding the pressing challenges for the education system and education personnel, workshop participants highlighted the following issues:

- The lack of strategies and planning at the governmental level, as well as the lack of supporting structures;
- The shortage of teachers in many European countries caused by unfair salaries and unsustainable workload, leading to the lack of prestige of the teaching profession;
- The issue of accessibility to the nature and the lack of transparency in terms of how the pollution is measured;
- The lack of competences in the education field regarding environmental sustainability and climate change topics, often caused by the lack of interest at the ministry/governmental level;
- The education trade unions and the teachers are not integrated in the green approach, often considered as a 'luxury' topic and not a priority in education;
- The inadequate quality and quantity of social dialogue regarding the green transition;
- In this context, the following possible solutions to tackle these challenges were identified:
- Trade unions need to be the promoters of the green transition through raising the awareness on climate change and the importance of sustainable development as integral part of the education curricula;
- Trade unions should take the lead in the narrative on environmental sustainability issues in the traditional and social media, in order to deliver a consistent message to positively influence the public;
- Education trade unions must cooperate with the Ministries of education and with other industry sectors, through the creation of common goals related to environmental sustainability, aimed at a compact social mobilisation towards this topic;
- Education trade unions should help teachers and students to follow the sustainability path starting from early-childhood education, as well as recognising student unions at secondary and post-secondary level as important stakeholders in this discussion.







# Education trade unions actions to support their affiliates facing the impacts of climate changes and implementation of education for environmental sustainability

**Sarah Lyons, NEU, UK**, presented the work of her union on climate crisis and environmental stability in education, arguing that young people are suffering from the climate anxiety and trade unions are expected to take the lead in approaching the aims and challenges of sustainable development. The two key areas that the NEU is addressing are quality climate change education for every student, and making the education buildings carbon neutral and adapted for extreme weather. The approaches adopted by NEU in these areas include engaging with the Department for Education on its Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy, as well as developing new networks (E.g. NEU Climate Network) and joint working opportunities (e.g. with campaigning groups representing young people (such as Teach the Future or SOS UK), other education trade unions, etc.). Moreover, NEU supports its members in understanding and acting on the climate crisis, e.g. by providing training and continuous professional education (CPD) and articles in their magazine Educate. Working at parliamentary level is a crucial activity pursued by NEU too.

**Veronica Persson, Lärarförbundet, Sweden**, highlighted several approaches on how education trade unions can deal with and make sense of the climate change. Firstly, a suitable approach to deal with this topic is to connect the local, national and global agenda, following the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as general guidelines. For instance, the Global Action Week, held on 25-29 of April 2022 was a concrete event representing global action for environmental sustainability. Secondly, the education trade union can ensure that the teaching material dealing with climate change follows the national curriculum, in order to achieve in-depth education on sustainable development. Thirdly, it may be helpful to invite speakers and experts who have deep knowledge and experience on this topic. Finally, Veronica Persson highlighted that education trade unions should 'practice what they preach', for example continue decreasing the CO2 emissions in their travels or preparing an annual sustainability report.

Veronica Persson, Lärarförbundet, Sweden - Sarah Lyons, NEU, UK





# Conclusions

Discussing the key role of education trade unions in addressing education and environment for social change, the seminar participants concluded that:

- In several cases, the topic of environmental sustainability is driven by industrial trade unions while education trade unions are on the periphery. Therefore, it is important to change the education trade unions priorities and to build the capacity of their affiliates on this topic.
- Education trade unions need to enhance their work on environmental sustainability together with their membership with a view to mobilise and campaign on climate emergency.
- There is a need to raise awareness not only among trade union members but also in the wider society, to create common goals for unions, and to collaborate across industry sectors with other unions and people with the interest and expertise in the area.
- Education trade unions should take the lead in the narrative: in the media, in the public profile, in the social media, etc.
- Teachers in primary and secondary education require the provision from governments of adequate means to advance environmental sustainability and climate change issues in education, including adequate training and compensation for the teachers' additional efforts. Therefore, educational trade unions should lobby education authorities and governments to ensure the free-of-charge provision of the relevant training and professional support:
- Trade unions should set common goals to assert that the sustainable development topic becomes a priority on their agenda, reflecting the global objectives highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring the consistency of message.







Education Trade Unions  
**For Sustainable  
Environmental  
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