

# Education Trade Unions addressing sustainable environmental development

Training workshop, Rome, 29 April 2022

*Report*



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# Introduction

The first training workshop of the ETUCE Project "[Education for Social Change: The role of Education Trade Unions in addressing sustainable environmental development](#)" took place on 29 April 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, the **European Director Susan Flocken** highlighted that it is crucial to address the topic of environmental sustainability in education, given the urgency of environmental issues and the consequences of climate change, also in the context of soaring energy, gas and fuel prices against the backdrop of the war on the Ukraine, and European government's sanctions and embargos including on oil and gas from Russia. She also reminded about the centrality of the topic for young people who are taking their disappointment to the streets demanding answers from governments, authorities and global companies. Susan Flocken pointed out that this training workshop is an opportunity to address the implementation of the education for environmental sustainability through the sharing of experiences and practices by trade unions, as well as through discussion on the challenges that education personnel face due to environmental sustainability issues and measures.



## 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*

# Italian context: Education trade unions

**Graziamaria Pistorino, FLC-CGIL, Italy**, explained that according to Italian Constitution (Article 3), school represents the first institution which should aim towards the intellectual building of the citizens, therefore the school curriculum as a whole is marked by an articulated view of knowledge that overcomes traditional barriers. For this purpose, the subject of civic education was included in the national educational curriculum, giving space to the topic of environmental sustainability in schools. However, no investment or additional funding was dedicated to the purpose of providing the educational sector with the suitable tools to advance this subject, nor extracurricular time was given to teachers for specific initiatives on environmental development. Ms Pistorino argued that the world of education can provide fundamental support in the direction of a sustainable and a better world to live in, as the lives of workers and students are certainly connected to the environment and its health.

**Francesca Ricci, UIL-Scuola, Italy**, focused on the need for concrete activities dedicated towards environmental sustainability and the consequences of climate change within the schools, as we cannot afford any more delays in this respect. The educational sector must act towards building responsible citizens: it is not possible to think of a change related to the climate emergency that does not also pass through a social change, thus schools have the duty to form the critical thinking of students, who should embrace the principles of environmental sustainability. Moreover, this project cannot be left to the good intentions of individual teachers, since this leads to inequality in learning. Instead, the ministry of education and decision-makers should provide the educational sector with the suitable tools and infrastructure, aimed at advancing progresses in environmental development, while at the same time respecting the professional autonomy of teachers in the learning process and methods.

**Salvatore Inghima, CISL Scuola, Italy**, argued that as the UN Agenda 2030 has included environmental sustainability among the 17 SDGs, it should be pursued through environmental protection, sustainable infrastructure, food security but also the creation of equal opportunities for workers. At trade union level, a lot can be done to ensure a positive change in this respect: CISL faced the theme of climate change and the importance of environmental sustainability in school seminars and initiatives, pushing for the improvement of the learning methodologies. However, legislators and stakeholders should make a difference at the decision level, following Art. 9 of the Italian Constitution, the Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Green Deal, in order to provide the educational sector with targeted funding and sustainable investment dedicated to this crucial topic.

Francesca Ricci, UIL-Scuola, Italy, Graziamaria Pistorino, FLC-CGIL, Italy, Salvatore Inghima, CISL Scuola, Italy







# First in Europe: Sustainability education in the national curriculum in Italy



**Lorenzo Fioramonti, the former Minister of Education, University and Research of Italy,** presented how during his mandate in 2019, Italy became the first country in the world to make the teaching of sustainable development mandatory for everyone. In fact, while other countries merely dedicate some sporadic lessons or seminars, Italian pupils have a specific subject dedicated to environmental development in their curricular programme, one hour per week. This reform gave the opportunity to university students as well, through the special bureau dedicated to environmental sustainability. This one hour is dedicated to projects and initiatives where students would become active citizens and become aware of what the local communities could do to change the environment. As a result, young people could become role-players in their everyday life and even change their parents' behaviour.

Mr Fioramonti explained that in 2019, the parties in the Italian Parliament realised that this new model could be an important step forward in the national curriculum, therefore the law was voted unanimously. Once this objective was reached, the minister had the authority to develop the policy, but it was decided to give the local schools a freedom to adapt the model in the best possible way depending on their specific situations. In this context, support was given to schools in form of training, run at the national level and dedicated primarily to the schools' environmental coordinators, as well as school leaders and primary and secondary teachers. Nevertheless, schools do not receive specific funding for the creation of labs, or any other extra-curricular activity dedicated to environmental sustainability and climate issues. Therefore, there is a lot of space for progress at the political and school level, for a sustainable change in education.

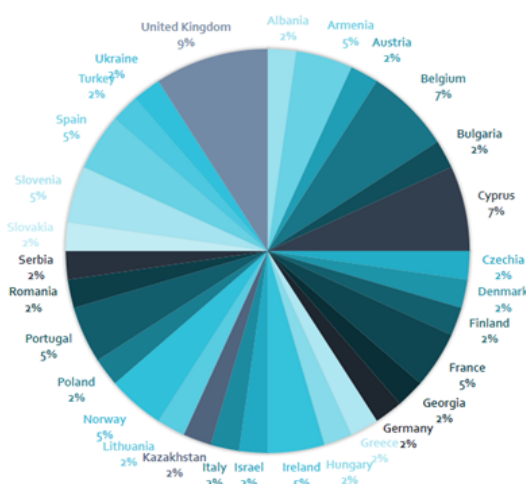


# Project research: preliminary results

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.

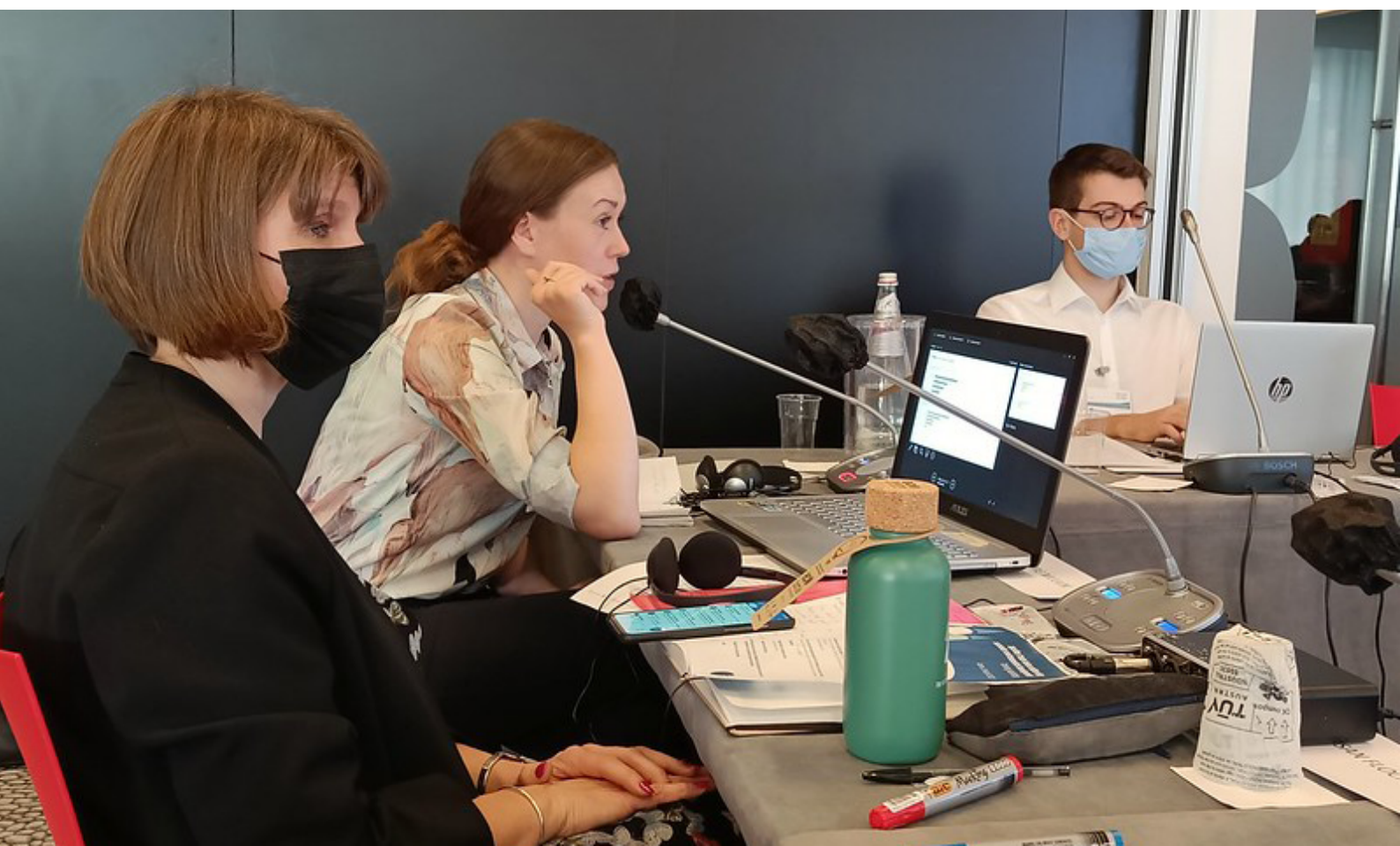




Regarding education trade unions' policies and priorities on addressing these challenges, the survey showed in particular that:

- 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 in particular air quality, asbestos and pollutions; recycling and infrastructure at education institution level; the issue of water; the issue of mobility (need to improve the carbon footprint and cut down on the transport for teachers and students meaning teachers and students should go to nearby schools). The lack of initial and continuous professional development for education personnel on the topic and clear guidelines; the lack of financial resources dedicated to environmental sustainability and development in schools, including to infrastructure; increased workload for education personnel without considerations for their working conditions; and the undervaluing of the work carried out by education personnel were named among the main causes of the challenges mentioned in the project research.

Furthermore, participants mentioned the following issues:

- There is a constant pressure on schools, which are too often seen as the only fora where environmental issues should be properly discussed. Instead, this should become a societal issue;
- Professional autonomy is coming under pressure: there is a clear understanding that this topic requires the attention, but the government is leaving it to schools to do the work without providing the necessary resources;
- In some countries, the volatility of electoral politics makes it difficult to have a sustained level of political support and funding; so trade unions need to insist on the funding envelopes which are not dependent on the political parties;



- The prevailing culture of competitiveness in the educational system can be a challenge: the focus is only on passing the exams;
- There is a need to ensure that education personnel get initial training on the topic of environmental sustainability so that they can enhance their competences afterwards and do not perceive this new topic as a threat;
- There is a massive portion of people who use personal cars to travel to schools and universities: the green mobility should be constantly promoted;
- All education personnel should acquire improved competences regarding environmental sustainability, through constant training and support, so that students do not face inequality in the distribution of quality learning of this topic.





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

**Alina Aura Rapa, FSLE, Romania**, presented the Green Schools project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ funds of the European Union and implemented by three education trade unions: FSLE (Romania), SEB (Bulgaria) and TUS (Serbia). The main objectives of this initiative are to support primary teachers in providing quality environmental education in line with European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to develop the environmental literacy among the younger generations, and to support schools in implementing the concept of “green schools”.

It was identified that teachers in Romania, like in several other countries, are not sufficiently motivated to promote the principles of environmental sustainability in schools. Therefore, in order to reach the objectives, the project employs a methodology for organising and implementing a short qualification course for primary teachers in ecological education, in order to build the capacity of teachers in the topic of environmental sustainability. These methods will focus on engaging pupils in practical/experiential activities, which foster their ecological awareness and environment citizenship skills. The expected outcome of this methodological approach is that it will contribute to fostering eco-systemic awareness and proactive environmental citizenship in learners in the long-term.





Rafael Páez, FECCOO, Spain, in his presentation explained that here are proven causes that are provoking this climate change: polluting transport, unsustainable energy consumption in buildings, high waste generation, unsustainable food system in agriculture and livestock farming, energy waste, deforestation. Individual actions can reduce the “pollutant footprint” we generate as individuals, but these often offer only testimonial results (e.g. recycling of plastics or sustainable, non-wasteful energy use in the home). Consequently, it is clear that the actions towards the improvement of this emergency cannot come from personal habits, the education sector and the trade unions exclusively. We education workers are especially aware of the current situation, because it is our children and young people who will inherit a planet that we are mistreating and annihilating. Therefore, the CC00 Education Federation demands that the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the regional Ministries of Education, within their areas of competence, develop legislative actions within a framework of comprehensive policies to help reverse this very serious situation. FECCOO demands that measures be taken urgently in the educational field, at least in the following aspects:

1. **Educational measures:** Education in respect and care for the environment, and training in renewable energies and in a new sustainable production model.
2. **Measures for a sustainable use of materials in schools:** Schools should make a rational and sustainable use of consumables, avoiding the use of single-use plastics, widespread photocopies or uncontrolled waste material.
3. **Measures for sustainable geographic mobility:** Reduction of geographic mobility of students, teachers and school employees
4. **Measures for the promotion of sustainable infrastructures and facilities:** Educational centers must be sustainable spaces in an integral way, especially in terms of energy consumption



# 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 not treated within the trade unions, who find themselves outside from the education institutions and their practices. It is important to change the trade unions priorities from the inside.
- Education trade unions need to ensure that their members are supporting the concepts of environmental sustainability both emotionally and intellectually, in order to mobilise the campaigns towards this issue.
- Education trade unions need another framework which would include environmental development priorities in the social dialogue and collective bargaining negotiations, in order to change the rules at the decision level.
- The topic of climate change topic should be analysed from a variety of perspectives : biological, energy, economic, and political, in order to create a social dialogue of proper quality.
- Education trade unions should reach out to municipalities to act on the topic for the local communities;
- Joining forces with other unions and Confederations is important and beneficial for the promotion of the topic of environmental sustainability;
- Education trade unions should impact the society through the media and political influence (e.g. during the elections);
- Education trade unions need to have a strong representation in the education institutions to take on the issues of environmental sustainability (e.g. 'delegates for environment');
- In a lot of jurisdictions, there is not yet political acknowledgement of the immediacy of the crisis so education trade unions need to 'help' governments to realise it; while in others, there is a governmental proclamation about the crisis, but it is not followed by the provision of resources or explicit recognition of the role of education in addressing this crisis; If education trade unions can bring the environmental sustainability to the collective bargaining tables, they can show that there is a distinct economic benefit in embracing sustainability agenda;
- Education personnel all around Europe is exhausted after the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is important to consider that when introducing environmental sustainability into the education curriculum: they need time and a lot of support.







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