

Education Trade Unions addressing sustainable environmental development

Closing Conference, Brussels, 27-28 October 2022

Report



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Introduction

The Closing Conference of the European Trade Union Committee for Education's (ETUCE) Project on "Education for Social Change: The role of Education in Addressing Sustainable Environmental Development" took place on the 27th and 28th of October in Brussels.

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 that education for environmental sustainability is fundamental to creating educate committed, critical-thinking and active citizens. It further provides a sense of belonging as well as opportunities for active participation for all learners, especially for those who are 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.



Opening the Closing Conference, **ETUCE president Larry Flanagan**, emphasised the importance of the event in light of the upcoming COP27. Referencing a recent interview given by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, he highlighted the significance of progress being made to address anthropogenic, or human induced, climate change since despite numerous intersecting crises, it poses the single biggest threat to planet earth. Education trade unions, as progressive organisations, need to look to contributing to the solution to overcoming the climate crisis. This can occur through firstly looking after members when working on issues related to sustainability and secondly through educating individuals on the importance of protecting the planet.



ETUCE European Director, Susan Flocken emphasised the importance of considering the current context of intersecting crisis when understanding education for environmental sustainability. To address these multiple crises in a way that meets the needs of today without compromising on the requirements of future generations, it is important to consider the need for structural change as neoliberalism seeks to exploit people and the planet for profit. More specifically, to combat the climate emergency through education, it is crucial that governments reject austerity measures that are inherent to neoliberalism and make sustainable investments in quality education that addresses the most pressing global issues. If, and when this occurs, the attractiveness of the teaching profession will strengthen due to the recognition that the teaching profession educates individuals today for a better tomorrow.

Closing Conference Objectives:

- Discuss the key findings and outcomes of the project among education trade unions and with European stakeholders and policy makers in education and climate change and environmental policies;
- Consider the key findings and outcomes of the ETUCE project, including the [Research Report](#) and [Film Documentary](#);
- Understand the state of education for environmental sustainability in Belgium;
- Discuss and validate the practical guidelines for trade unions on addressing environmental issues and sustainable environmental development in the education sector;
- Explore the venues for addressing environmental sustainability in social dialogue and in cooperation with other stakeholders.





The Project

The climate emergency and environmental issues require a drastic social change, including individual and collective changes to our mentality, behaviour, and lifestyle. In this context of anthropogenic, or human induced, climate change, 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. It is further important that education staff receive sufficient professional support for this green transition.

Therefore, the [ETUCE project](#) on the “Education for Social Change: The role of Education Trade Unions in addressing sustainable environmental development” aimed to build the capacity of education trade unions to prepare their affiliates to address environmental questions and climate emergency for sustainable development in education and training. This was seen to be realised 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.

Within this two-year project (2021-2023), co-funded by the European Commission, ETUCE has worked to promote a more central role for 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 has aimed to ensure a coherent and robust integration of learning about sustainable approaches to the environment in education policies. It also looks to promote concrete measures and practices for education trade unions in addressing environmental issues and sustainable development in education. It does this to address in social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels on the impact of environmental problems on education institutions and teachers, academics, and other education personnel.

Besides the Closing Conference, 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. Two [training workshops](#) in Rome and Copenhagen where ETUCE member organisations had the opportunity to discuss the outcomes of the online survey and enrich the survey report with specific country cases, as well as undertake preliminary discussions to prepare the guidelines for education trade unions on addressing the environmental issues and sustainable development. Furthermore, the training workshops offered the opportunity to share good practices on supporting and building the capacity and knowledge of affiliates to address environmental issues and sustainable development in education. It also served as a space to address the impact of environmental problems on education institutions and teachers, academics, and other education personnel.

3. [Research report](#) 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. A [factsheet](#) and [executive summary](#) further accompany the research report, highlighting its core findings. The factsheet is available in English, French, Spanish and Russian, whilst the Executive Summary has been translated into all the languages previously noted as well as German.
4. [Practical guidelines](#) for education trade unions 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. It further outlines how to 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.
5. 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, was completed throughout the project. The documentary highlights best practice from Belgium, Italy, and Denmark, demonstrating the transformative impact that education for sustainable development can have on students.

Project objectives

1. Map out and analyse the key 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 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

Project research findings: The impact of climate emergency on education and training and education trade unions policies in the European region

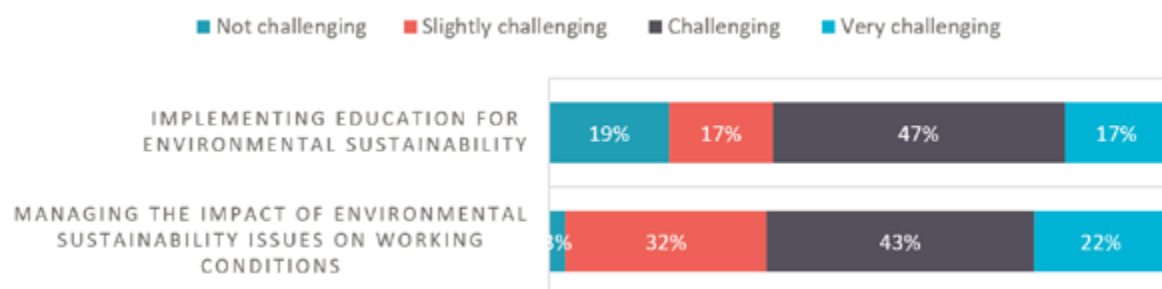


Iselin Berg Mulvik, project researcher, presented the results of the research study that focused on the impact of the climate emergency on education and trade union policies in the European region. The research questions, created to shed light on the topic, investigated the challenges that teachers, academics, and other education personnel face due to changes in the environment, and focused on innovative practices of trade unions.

The study relied on four sources of information: international policy literature; scientific academic literature; insights from a non-representative online survey with 44 ETUCE member organisations in the autumn of 2021; as well as an analysis of experiences and concerns shared by ETUCE member organisation representatives in two international workshops in Rome and Copenhagen.

The study identified four major types of challenges that trade union members face either due to the direct threat of climate change or due to working process changes and new demands for education during the climate emergency. These challenges include increased workload and health problems, a need for better training opportunities, poor curricula and professional autonomy and lack of political vision and investment.

FIGURE 6. DEGREE OF CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS, ACADEMICS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL IN RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES



ETUCE Online Survey October-December 2021. N: 44.



The study further reflected on three major areas of trade unions' responses and actions to the challenges which were revealed to be developing policies and priorities, increasing day-to-day activities, and strengthening the unique tools of unions.

The study finally gave a series of recommendations for European and national policy makers. These clarified that in order to address the intersection between education and climate change, policy makers at a variety of scales, should: strengthen social dialogue; provide clarity on how to teach and assess education for environmental sustainability (EES); accompany education reform on EES with adequate public funding and support; ensure consistent and high-quality training opportunities; accompany change with trust; prepare evidence-based visions and strategies and promote professional learning communities.

Overall, the study reveals that there is a lack of urgent priority and strategic action within the trade unions on environmental sustainability. As a result, there is a need to further increase the number and frequency of actions to have more influence in this area. This does not have to be done quickly and needs to be carried out alongside the development of expertise within the ETUCE member organisations to bring about convincing actions.

Conference participants, in response to the study, noted that there needed to be clarity on the use of technical terms that refer to climate change whilst others highlighted the importance of listening to student voice when acting on the climate. Conversation also touched on best practice for educating teachers and students on environmental sustainability. Participants specifically referred to the examples of new curriculums mandating education on environmental sustainability coming into force in Ireland, as well as at university level in France.



International perspectives on education for environmental sustainability: how to prepare actors for social change?

Jun Morohashi, Head of the Education for Sustainable Development Section of UNESCO, noted that according to a [study](#) undertaken by UNESCO, social dialogue was an effective means of achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. The study further suggests that partnerships among educational stakeholders is extremely important because it can support meaningful dialogue as well as create synergies that overcome some of the most pressing issues in education.

UNESCO has partnered with Education International to investigate these critical issues, specifically focusing on those that intersect with education including climate change and human rights. This included conducting a [research project](#) with more than 58,000 teachers from around 144 countries. A pertinent finding of the study is that whilst 95% of teachers surveyed thought that teaching climate change is important, less than 30% feel able to teach it. As a result, it is not commonly taught because teachers and other education personnel feel that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach it.

UNESCO has further initiated a [greening partnership](#) with other UN agencies. The greening education partnership was launched as a global initiative to deliver strong, coordinated, and comprehensive collaboration among stakeholders, including youth organisations, on climate change education. The initiative recognises that education should be seen as part of the solution to climate change, therefore, there is a need to jointly deliver coordinated action to support countries to realise this goal of lifelong learning to combat the climate emergency.

Deirdre Hodson, Policy Officer working within the school education policy team at the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), highlighted that the Commission had adopted a [recommendation](#) in mid-2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development. The Commission has also put forward a [Staff Working Document](#) that serves as a handbook. The handbook draws conclusions from all the workshops, surveys and public consultations that were run in the framework of developing the recommendation. It clarifies that a wholistic approach is key to bringing together teachers, leadership teams, parents, and students to co-create novel solutions to the climate emergency.

The Commission going forwards is working to ensure that green education is a part of Erasmus+ and will engage in the process of building bridges between different stakeholders, including UN agencies, on these issues. It believes it is important to report on the foreseen actions and work with stakeholders in forums such as the [EU working group](#) on learning for sustainability to work through issues that are of shared concern.



For education trade unions that would like to use tools already developed by the Commission, it has released a [resource](#) entitled "GreenComp: The European Sustainability competence framework," initiated an education for the climate coalition, put together an [online course](#) for teachers on sustainability in and beyond the classroom as well as supported a range of Erasmus+ [teachers academies](#).

Next steps to follow up Recommendation



Jiri Dlouhy, board member of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), outlined that EEB is a federation of around 180 environmental citizen organisations and networks from 38 countries working on sustainable protection and environmental justice. Highlighting that the beginning of COP27 in Egypt was only 7 days away and that despite the commitments made at COP26, countries are still not fulfilling their commitments to limit warming 1.5 degrees or even 2 degrees. This will result, and has already resulted in, catastrophic changes to the climate as well as an irreversible loss to biodiversity. In order to overcome these pressing challenges, social change must occur through integrating climate education into all national curricula. Education trade unions must be included in the construction of these new curricula to ensure that they equip teachers and other educational personnel to adequately address climate change.

EEBA is highly active in trade union work on the environment, promoting the collaboration between NGOs and trade unions at the national level. This could extend to a coordination between different stakeholders to create regional centres of expertise that could act as learning hubs for all.





Breakout groups debate on the findings of the project research report

The participants discussed in three breakout groups a range of pertinent questions that touched on the significance of the findings of the project's research, whether the research reflected individual country contexts and if there were good practices that should be shared.

In response to these discussion prompts, a wide variety of responses were stimulated. Participants firstly highlighted that stunted social dialogue is a core challenge to pushing for education on the environment. When social dialogue is strong, good examples of implementing robust educational reform that addresses the threats posed by anthropogenic, or human-induced, climate change has been observed.

Participants next spoke of the need, following on from the publication of the report, to create guidelines examine the link between education trade unions and industrial trade unions at confederation level. These guidelines should be implemented into national trade union policy that addresses education for sustainable environmental development and should consciously seek to cascade, through initiatives such as environmental representatives, to the branch level. This policy should further include provisions for adequate resourcing to realise members' demands as teachers time is already stretched. In this way, it is important to make sure that positions of responsibility are remunerated.

Participants finally clarified the importance of using an intersectional lens to understand climate issues in the classroom. It is important to realise that some of the challenges education trade unions are already facing, in terms of fully supporting the education of refugee and migrant children, will only be exacerbated by anthropogenic climatic change. To overcome this, it is important to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs, to engage in knowledge exchange and highlight good practice.





The Belgian case

Eleni Sinakou, PhD Candidate at the University of Antwerp, opened the discussion on the Belgian case of education for environmental sustainability by presenting the findings of her research on teachers' beliefs, interests and instructional practices in education for sustainable development. Specifically highlighting that teachers are important to increase student action when it comes to sustainable development issues. This is because instructional practices, when it comes to education for sustainable development, is dependent on teacher's beliefs and their interests. The purpose of the research was therefore to detect potential gaps between instructional beliefs in influencing interests and practices regarding education for sustainable development to reveal potential barriers.

The research reveals that a specific action orientation among teachers can be used to develop instructional practices and instructional beliefs. These interests in education for sustainable development (ESD) are measurable, therefore it is possible to outline two unique teachers' teaching profiles in ESD that can contribute to teaching for the planet.

Presenting the voice of Belgian education trade unions, **Muriel Vigneron, Community Vice-President at SLFP-Enseignement**, reported on three targeted campaigns implemented by SLFP to enhance the education for environmental sustainability in Belgium. These include a campaign to reimagine school playgrounds to transform them into green spaces, a programme to offer a subsidy to schools to provide free fruit and vegetables, and an initiative to organise food delivery of seasonal fruit and vegetables to schools. She further outlined that these environmental based programmes have proliferated into internal action to combat anthropogenic, or human induced, climate change through working to reduce single use plastic, energy consumption and the need to travel to the office.

Lies Van Rompaey, Coordinator in the editorial and research department at another Belgian education trade union COV, union for pre-primary and primary school teachers in Flanders explained that at the primary school level in Belgium, any teacher can teach any subject. As a result, climate and the environment can be integrated into all parts of teaching and learning. However, for this to occur, initial teacher training on sustainable environmental development must be of a high quality. In addition to this, it is important to provide opportunities for continual professional development since insights on climate change are in the process of continually being updated. To realise these goals, there needs to be more social dialogue on climate issues in education.

COV also believes that schools need to be future proof and take relevant action on climate and other social issues. There is currently a strong push at the European level for all entities that must procure products, which includes schools, to conduct adequate human rights due diligence in line with the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). This acknowledges that schools and education should be a broader societal project.

Le programme "Fruits et Légumes à l'Ecole 100% gratuits !"

Ce programme européen cofinancé par la Région Wallonne est totalement gratuit pour les écoles. Il octroie un subside aux écoles qui distribuent des fruits et des légumes à leurs élèves des classes maternelles et primaires.

Ce programme consiste à faire profiter gratuitement les élèves de fruits et légumes frais ainsi que faire découvrir et étudier ces produits aux enfants dans un cadre pédagogique.



 Wallonie



Project documentary: Education for Sustainable Future - Inspiring Practices from Europe


The Conference provided a stage for the première of a [film documentary](#) entitled "Education for Sustainable Future - Inspiring Practices from Europe," that was prepared in the framework of the project. The documentary highlights best practice from Belgium, Italy, and Denmark, demonstrating the transformative impact that education for sustainable development can have on students.

During the discussion following the screening, **María Gisèle Royo**, film director from **Jur & Jur**, highlighted the responsibility of teachers and other education personnel to remain inspired on the topic of teaching for sustainable development. There is a need to remember that teachers do not have a responsibility to produce a solution for everything, but to slowly stimulate change.

Ingrid Coenen and **Gertie Bergmans**, educational experts from the **Provinciaal Natuurcentrum Limburg** who participated in the filming, commented on the importance of training teachers to do more learning outside of the classroom, specifically, highlighting that everything that can be done inside the classroom can be done outside of the classroom. A forest is not entirely necessary, it is about understanding what nature is close to the classroom and accessing it. The same goes for evaluating students whilst doing these activities, the curriculum can remain the same and students can be assessed against the preexisting criteria defined in the national curriculum. Although, it was acknowledged that in light of teaching that prioritises assessments, teaching in outside environments can be challenging.

They also noted that teaching outside can further stimulate discussion between teachers and parents. For this to occur, teachers can take pictures of activities outside and share these with parents through different social media channels such as Facebook.

Participants also noted that trade unions will need to advocate for funding for teaching for the planet in urban environments. There is a need for funding not only for infrastructure to retrofit school buildings, but also a need for time to get out of schools. However, it was acknowledged that it is also possible to make a change at the grassroots level with children and by that overcome the waiting time until politicians make decisions.



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
Inspiring practices from Europe



Reflections on the project, its impact and continuation

Claudio Franchi, Head of International Affairs at FLC-CGIL, and member of the project advisory group noted that the project had been fruitful but hard since educating for the environment was a novel topic for trade unions. The project, however, enabled bridges to be built between trade unions in Europe to explore what practice is occurring in the region. It allowed for an additional understanding of whether there would be space for action and negotiation on comprehending the relationship between the education, the environment and sustainability.

The project has further clarified the need within education trade unions to create an internal organisation dedicated to education for environmental sustainability that looks at implementation at both the national and local, branch level. This would facilitate the inclusion of sustainability and environmental sustainability within collective bargaining which could result in the positive modification of the national curriculum. These changes would not be easy to implement but would provide a good basis to begin combatting the climate emergency.

Jacob Svejstrup, DLF representative and member of the project advisory group, outlined that the DLF had been working to integrate environmental sustainability into the Union's work as soon as they joined the project advisory group. This is due to the recognition that education trade unions are continuously obliged to work for a greener and more sustainable future. The report produced within the scope of the project clarifies that there are a range of challenges for education trade unions in doing this. For example, some education systems do not have the resources to prioritise a green transition and sustainable development.

The project, through its two constituent workshops, additionally made it obvious that top-down and bottom-up approaches are just as important as one another. The outcomes of the workshop and therefore the project will legitimise that teachers can prioritise sustainable development. However, it is important that teachers are simultaneously supported to move environmental questions up the teaching agenda. DLF are working to do this at national level, but additionally recognise that it is difficult to reach teachers at the local level.



Jean-Luc, ACOD Deputy General Secretary and member of the project advisory committee, noted that it is important to talk about sustainable environments in solidarity with other education trade unions. The focus for education trade unions should be on the curriculum as some teachers face the challenge of understanding how to incorporate teaching on environmental topics into their subjects. Now, there is a particular focus within ACOD on contacting members who work on the national curriculum to make sure environmental change is incorporated.

Any work on education trade union's role in combating the climate emergency in the future should focus on the intersection between education trade unions and unions in other sectors due to the need for a just green transition.

Ercan Hoşkara, president of DAÜ-SEN, highlighted that environmental issues are global problems that have local impacts. As a result, local actions can also have a global impact. Following this logic, DAÜ-SEN has launched a member's club in Cyprus to increase the awareness of the UN SDGs. The theme of sustainability, that is the focus of the members club, was heavily inspired by the ETUCE project on education for sustainable environmental development. The club, will amongst other things, use the reusable water bottles produced in the scope of the project to promote sustainability within the milieu.

John MacGabhann, Assistant General Secretary at TUI, reported on the implementation of the joint project between ETUCE and European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) entitled "European Social Partners in Education Promoting environmental sustainability in school learning, teaching and management," as a member of this joint project's Advisory Group. He highlighted the key lessons from ETUCE project that will be fed into the joint project with employers. The project is structured around four peer learning activities, two of which have already occurred. There will further be a survey of affiliates of EFEE and ETUCE conducted within the confines of the project, of which it is extremely important for members to complete.



Panel discussion: The key role of the social dialogue in education for social change

Iselin Berg Muluvi, Project researcher, noted that according to the project research findings, social dialogue on the topic of education for environmental sustainability is quite low. When looking at the frequency of how often social dialogue was done by education trade unions, the study revealed that it often only occurs once a year through information sharing. Although, there are clear differences in social dialogue between the countries that participated in the research. The countries that did not have a strong social dialogue are diverse and a common challenge faced by these countries were difficulties in fitting the topic of education for sustainable environmental development into the union agenda. Furthermore, there was a lack of willingness from social partners to participate in dialogue which worsened during COVID-19 as the pandemic was used as an excuse not to engage in social dialogue.

Dr Jane Hindley, Senior Lecturer of Interdisciplinary Studies, and UCU Green Representative at Essex University, noted that within the UCU, the green representative role is a recognised position at the branch level that sits alongside the other key branch offices. There is, however, a lot of variation across universities in terms of how this is being adopted and taken up. At Essex University, an environmental subcommittee has been established which means that the green representative has a set of colleagues with whom green initiatives can be discussed. The committee was the initial space where discussion on whether it was feasible for a climate emergency to be declared occurred.

The green representative role further helps facilitate access to university decision making processes. At Essex University, there is a university sub-strategy on climate change that has taken the decision to integrate the target of reaching net zero by 2035 across all operations including estates. This shows how despite a democratic deficit at the national level in the UK, it is possible to collaborate with universities as well as local governments to highlight that a green transition involves degrowth, ensuring educators wellbeing and adequate working hours.

Alexandra Bojanic, National Secretary at SNUipp, education trade union for early childhood and primary education in France, outlined the actions and activities carried out by SNUipp, highlighting how they relate specifically to primary schools. The green and environmental transition has been a core issue for SNUipp for a long time. Since the 19th century there has been a revolution in terms of the organisation of infrastructure, however in the contemporary era, there is a need to have school buildings that can adapt to the unpredictable weather conditions that accompany anthropogenic, or human induced, climate change. This new architecture should promote inclusion, although the challenge is large as different authorities are meant to secure maintenance over these buildings. The task, therefore, is to create the most habitable schools through social dialogue between teachers, employers, and the government.





Breakout groups debate on the practical guidelines for trade unions on addressing environmental issues and sustainable environmental development in the education sector

Participants were consequently once again split into three breakout groups for a practical discussion on draft guidelines that clarify what trade unions can do to move discussion on educating for sustainable environmental development forward. Participants were asked to look at the document and to note their own opinions, what needed to be changed and how their own education trade unions could implement the guidelines.

In response to this, participants noted that the guidelines were broadly representative, although certain changes needed to be made to ensure their applicability. These changes include incorporating the impact of climate change on teachers and other education personnel's health and safety, outlining the position of education trade unions in engaging in wider industrial debate, creating internal trade union policy to feed into green deal policy developments, lobbying for retrofitting schools, building bridges between the local and the national and highlighting the link between social justice and climate justice.

The participants' suggestions were integrated into the document and will be presented to the ETUCE Committee.





Listening to the youth: addressing environmental sustainability and trade union renewal

Tatjana Babrauskienė, member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), presented the preliminary recommendations of the EESC [opinion](#) on “Empowering youth to achieve sustainable development through education,” outlining the importance of making sustainable development a core component of the educational curriculum. The EESC, because of the opinion on empowering youth to achieve sustainable development through education, committed to realising education for sustainable development. This means asking member states to review their commitments and to ensure that sustainable development is mainstreamed.

Additionally, non-formal education must be placed higher up educational policy agendas due to its role in driving the green transition. These new education for sustainable development policies that stimulate learning on green topics through creative pedagogies should be based on a direct approach that is constructed through social and civic dialogue. This could stimulate a new, rights-based education that focuses on local issues and cultural characteristics, giving flexibility. Although, some challenges could arise due to the increase in right-wing governments across the European continent.

Taj Zavodnik, Climate Policy Expert at Focus in Slovenia, talked about the collaboration between youth movements and education trade unions in Slovenia. Education trade unions can be allies to young people who are engaged in climate movements in different countries to realise these necessary changes. In Slovenia after climate movement began, education trade unions were crucial to allowing students to attend Fridays for Future protests. These coalitions of young people and education trade unions can begin to prepare to change the structure of society to exist within planetary boundaries.

Jean-Francois Lankester, Communications Advisor at CGSP Enseignement in Belgium, noted that in October of 2022, around 25,000 people took to the streets of Brussels for a climate march urging decision makers to act. It is therefore important for education trade unions to begin employing all relevant means to start educating for the environment. This education should not be limited to daily actions, such as ensuring that waste is sorted for recycling, but should also extend to education trade unions working to challenge the current system. This could increase the attractiveness of the profession for young people through engaging with individuals during climate events.



Cooperation with key stakeholders in education as crucial element of social change



Caridad Alacron Sanshez, Board Member of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), highlighted that OBESSU represents students from all over Europe and as a result has a strong presence to drive change. Young people today are those that might not see the work of unions as being relevant to driving the change that is so urgently needed in society. Therefore, it is important for education trade unions to work in cooperation with other stakeholders to highlight that education can be used as a tool to drive this positive change.



Claudio Masotti, Ambassador at the European Parents Association (EPA), clarified that EPA is an association that spans the breadth of Europe. It was founded as parents thought that there was a need to have an association at European level to represent their interests. Aligned with the UN convention on the rights of the child, EPA asks that parents participate in education in every manner. Currently, EPA are involved in environmental sustainability through ensuring that children know where food comes from and taking small steps to foster learning on sustainable development in the home. The film documentary produced in the framework of the project will be a valuable tool for encouraging educators in the home to begin to push parents out of the current status quo.

Conclusions

Concluding the dynamic conference, education trade unions reaffirmed their commitment to fighting anthropogenic, or human induced, climate change through meaningful social change. To do so, there was a recognition of the strong need to dismantle the neoliberal capitalist system that exists to create profit at the expense of people and the planet. This is because profit-making approaches, that are driven by the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, undermine democracy, social justice, solidarity, and sustainability. They further result in extreme natural events such as intense floods and forest fires that will ultimately have a negative impact on education and health and safety of teaching in learning environments.

In this complex context, education has a crucial role to play in raising awareness of climate change and environmental issues through providing adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to realise these issues and develop a sustainable economy and society.

In most countries, teachers, academics, and other education personnel are aware of the importance of education for sustainable development. Education trade unions underlined that social dialogue continues to pose a core challenge to pushing for education on the environment. As a result, the [practical guidelines](#) produced in the scope of the project should be implemented into national trade union policy to realise constructive social dialogue that addresses education for sustainable environmental development. This social dialogue must be informed by an intersectional lens to realise social, environmental, environmental justice for all.

As a result of the recognition of the importance of education for sustainable environmental development, education trade unions outlined that the additional measures and practices that needed to be introduced into practical guidelines to address environmental issues and sustainable development in education include:

- Recognising the impact of anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss on teachers and other education personnel's health and safety.
- Outlining the position of education trade unions in engaging in wider industrial debate.
- Creating internal trade union policy to feed into green deal policy developments.
- Lobbying at the regional, national, and local level for retrofitting schools.
- Building bridges between the local and the national.
- Highlighting the link between social justice and climate justice.

List of abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
DG EAC	Directorate General for Education and Culture
CGSP-FGTB	Centrale générale des services publics
DAÜ-SEN	Eastern Mediterranean University Union of Academic Staff
DLF	Danish Union of Teachers
EEB	European Environmental Bureau
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EES	Education for Environmental Sustainability
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EPA	European Parents Association
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBESSU	Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions
SDGs	European Trade Union Committee for Education
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
UCU	University and College Union
SNUIPP	Syndicat national unitaire des instituteurs, professeurs des écoles et PEGC
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGPs	The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights



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