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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 16 June 2022

on learning for the green transition and sustainable development

(2022/C 243/01)

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

1. Across the Union, while many Member States have made good progress in the implementation of policies and programmes of learning to support the green transition and to promote learning for sustainable development, there is nonetheless a need to continue and step up efforts in that regard. Policy and practice for this kind of learning should be further stimulated and supported. It is necessary to recognise the need for interconnected learning across the environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainable development, while placing a specific focus on the environmental pillar.
2. The European Green Deal ⁽¹⁾, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 ⁽²⁾, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) strategy Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 and the related United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) work ⁽³⁾ highlight the key role of schools, higher education and other education and training institutions in engaging with learners, parents, educators ⁽⁴⁾ and the wider community on the changes needed for a successful, just and inclusive green transition. In its conclusions on 'Biodiversity – the need for urgent action' ⁽⁵⁾, the Council stressed that investing in education, among other areas, is key in gathering the best data and finding the best solutions in this regard. The EU Youth Strategy identifies a sustainable green Europe as a goal and calls for all young people to be environmentally active and educated.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2019) 640 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(2020) 380 final.

⁽³⁾ Including the new framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030.

⁽⁴⁾ For the purposes of this Recommendation, the term 'educators' includes teachers, trainers, youth workers, teacher educators and all professionals in formal, non-formal and informal education.

⁽⁵⁾ 12210/20.

3. Learning for the green transition and sustainable development supports learners of all ages in acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to live more sustainably, in changing patterns of consumption and production, in embracing healthier lifestyles and in contributing – both individually and collectively – to a more sustainable economy and society. It also contributes to building the skills and competences increasingly needed in the labour market. It promotes understanding of the interconnected global challenges we face, including the climate crisis, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, all of which have environmental, social, economic and cultural dimensions.
4. The Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, notably Target 4.7, call for all learners to acquire by 2030 the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development ⁽⁶⁾.
5. The Communication on the European Education Area ⁽⁷⁾, the European Pillar of Social Rights ⁽⁸⁾, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) ⁽⁹⁾ and the Communication on a new ERA for Research and Innovation ⁽¹⁰⁾ call for education and training policies and investments to be geared towards inclusive green and digital transitions for future resilience and prosperity.
6. The key competences, as defined in the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning ⁽¹¹⁾, aim to support people across Europe in gaining the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, successful life in peaceful societies, health-conscious life management and active citizenship in a time of rapid and profound change.
7. The European Skills Agenda ⁽¹²⁾ announced support for the development of a core, green skills set for the labour market with a view to creating a generation of environment-conscious professionals and green economic operators, integrating environmental and climate considerations into general education, higher education, vocational education and training as well as research. Europe needs highly competent professionals to support the green transition and to be a world leader in sustainable technologies.
8. The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience ⁽¹³⁾ and the Osnabrück Declaration recognise the VET sector as key for the digital and green transitions.
9. The European Climate Pact invites individuals, communities and organisations to participate in climate action and building a greener Europe by offering opportunities to learn about climate change, develop and implement solutions, and connect with others to multiply the impact of those solutions. The Education for Climate Coalition aims to create a community led by students and teachers, together with their schools and networks and other educational actors, to learn from as many relevant experiences as possible, and bridge fragmentation between education sectors, domains and people.
10. The Digital Education Action Plan ⁽¹⁴⁾ provides a vision for high-quality, inclusive and accessible European digital education and training and underscores the importance of digital technologies as powerful enablers for the green transition whilst, at the same time, facilitating a move towards sustainable behaviour in both the development and use of digital products.

⁽⁶⁾ UNESCO, *Education for sustainable development: a roadmap*, 2020.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2020) 625 final.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 10.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

⁽¹⁰⁾ COM(2020) 628 final.

⁽¹¹⁾ Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.

⁽¹²⁾ COM(2020) 274 final.

⁽¹³⁾ OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.

⁽¹⁴⁾ COM(2020) 624 final.

11. The New European Bauhaus brings a cultural and creative dimension to the European Green Deal, aiming to demonstrate how sustainable innovation offers tangible, positive changes in our daily life, including in school buildings and other learning environments.
12. UNESCO, through its Education for Sustainable Development programme, has been working to make education and training a more central and visible part of the international response to the climate crisis and to deliver on all Sustainable Development Goals, notably Target 4.7 on education for sustainable development. Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, parties commit to promoting and cooperating on climate change in the context of sustainable development in all dimensions, in particular on education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information.
13. There is a growing awareness and desire among young people to engage in sustainable development issues, particularly environmental and climate issues. The results of a Eurobarometer released in May 2022 indicate that young people in the EU consider 'protecting the environment and fighting climate change' to be one of the key priorities the European Year of Youth (2022) should focus on. OECD data ⁽¹⁵⁾ from 2018 already demonstrate a high awareness among 15-year-olds of climate change and the environmental crisis and the need to address it. However, the same OECD data show that far fewer students feel a sense of agency to make a real difference. The extent of the climate and environmental crisis can lead to learners feeling overwhelmed and disempowered, which can be exacerbated by inaccurate information and disinformation.
14. It is of great importance that education and training systems and institutions respond to the growing youth voice on the climate and biodiversity crises and involve young people in designing solutions related to learning for the green transition and sustainable development and taking action for a sustainable future. The 2022 European Year of Youth plays an important role in further stimulating youth engagement.
15. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our close links with nature and put renewed focus on education and training systems. Lessons have been learned about new possibilities for education and training, including blended learning approaches in different settings (including online), engagement and autonomy of learners and the links between formal education and the wider community. The pandemic also increased a long-standing concern for the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children, young people and adults.
16. Individual early childhood education and care centres, schools, higher education institutions, research organisations, VET providers and local communities are becoming increasingly active in relation to the climate and biodiversity crises. However, sustainability is not yet a systemic feature of education and training across the EU.
17. In many countries, learning for sustainability and equally viable concepts, such as education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, have been taken up in policies, strategies and curricula. However, educators need further targeted support, expertise, and training opportunities to incorporate the principles of the green transition and sustainable development in their teaching and training practices. They often feel insufficiently equipped to deal with eco-anxiety and eco-pessimism and to help learners engage with climate and environmental issues in a positive way.
18. Whole-institution approaches to sustainability incorporating all areas of activity are not always sufficiently present. Such approaches can include teaching and learning; governance; research and innovation; and infrastructure, facilities and operations, and should engage learners, staff, parents, and local and wider communities.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OECD (2020), Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World? PISA 2018, Volume VI.

19. The potential and opportunity to complement and strengthen other education and training agendas needs to be further explored. Teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development can fully support policies and programmes for health, well-being and inclusion; active and global citizenship; solidarity; student-centred learning; research and innovation; and the digital transformation, including artificial intelligence ⁽¹⁶⁾.
20. Integrating the education and training dimension systematically into other policies related to the green transition and sustainable development in a lifelong perspective can support implementation of those policies. It can also connect different sectors of society and the economy and embed sustainability effectively in education and training.
21. This Recommendation fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It recognises that the level of autonomy enjoyed by education and training institutions varies widely across Member States. In some Member States, education and training institutions, teacher education institutions, as well as teachers and trainers, enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The Recommendation will be implemented according to national circumstances and in cooperation with Member States.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES, in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and acknowledging varying degrees of autonomy of education and training institutions, according to national circumstances,

1. Step up and strengthen efforts to support education and training systems in taking action for the green transition and sustainable development so that learners of all ages and from all backgrounds can access high-quality, equitable and inclusive education and training on sustainability, climate change, environmental protection and biodiversity, with due concern for environmental, social and economic considerations.
2. Establish learning for the green transition and sustainable development as one of the priority areas in education and training policies and programmes in order to support and enable the sector to contribute to a sustainable future, embedded in a holistic understanding of education. Implement and further develop comprehensive and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development involving all relevant parties in the education and training system, and stakeholders from other relevant sectors.
3. Provide a range of learning opportunities in formal, non-formal and informal settings, so that individuals of all ages can prepare for and actively contribute to the green transition and take action for an environmentally sound, sustainable, circular and climate-neutral economy and just, inclusive and peaceful societies.
4. Consider the following measures at the level of the system:
 - a) Align, in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, strategies and plans in education and training with the green transition and sustainable development, including those related to curricula and assessment and educators' initial training and continuing professional development. Support implementation of national and other strategies and policies, including on related concepts such as education for sustainable development, through mechanisms for follow-up and monitoring.
 - b) Invest, where appropriate, in and provide training on green and sustainable equipment, resources and infrastructure (buildings, grounds and technology) for learning, socialising and recreation to ensure healthy, safe, inclusive, creative and resilient learning environments.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI), under the auspices of UNESCO, is the first global centre that addresses in its activities artificial intelligence, education and sustainable development.

- c) Raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities of learning for the green transition and sustainable development, and support formal and non-formal education and training institutions, including early childhood education and care, to make climate change, environmental protection, biodiversity and sustainability issues relevant to the daily lives of their learners and foster a culture of sustainability.
- d) Develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners of all ages to live more sustainably, promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, adopt healthier and more environmentally-conscious lifestyles and contribute individually and collectively to the transformation of our societies.
- e) Support and enhance teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development by providing infrastructure, digital tools and resources and supporting educators' digital competences.
- f) Involve all learners in meaningful and coordinated ways in proposing and co-creating approaches to what, how and where they learn about – and for – the green transition and sustainable development. Encourage a gender-balanced participation of learners from all backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities. Empower all learners to participate in and engage with decision-making at the level of their institution as well as their local and wider communities.
- g) Develop and support, in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, curriculum programmes and frameworks, allowing the time and space for learners to develop sustainability competences⁽¹⁷⁾ from an early age. Intergenerational learning and local examples, problems and responses can make curricula more relevant to learners, demonstrating that climate change, biodiversity, environmental protection and sustainability are local and actionable.
- h) Support cooperation and networking on sustainability, environmental protection and biodiversity, involving for example local authorities, youth work and youth organisations, centres of environmental education and training, centres of global learning, forests, parks, farms, museums, libraries, non-governmental organisations, research, consumer organisations and business, thus strengthening the links between formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- i) Support scaling up of good practices and pedagogical research on teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development at all levels and types of education and training.

5. Further support learners by considering the following measures:

- a) Provide learners, from the time they are in pre-school, with opportunities to understand, engage with and value the natural world and its biodiversity, create a sense of curiosity and wonder and learn to act for sustainability, individually and collectively.
- b) Strengthen, including through financial support in accordance with national financial support schemes, high-quality lifelong learning for the green transition and sustainable development, including traineeships, apprenticeships, volunteering, extra-curricular activities, youth work activities and other forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning and the links between them. Stimulate and recognise civic engagement actions and programmes in that regard.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The concept of 'sustainability competences' as described in GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework, covers the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by learners of all ages to live, work and act in a sustainable manner (including critical thinking, systems thinking and connection to nature). 'Green skills' relates to professional skills needed by all sectors and at all levels in the labour market for the green transition, including the creation of new green jobs.

- c) Facilitate learning methods and approaches that are collaborative, experiential, practically oriented and relevant to local contexts and traditions and support interdisciplinary and cross-curricular activities. This includes giving learners hands-on opportunities to observe and care for nature, and to reduce, repair, reuse and recycle, thereby helping them to understand the importance of sustainable lifestyles and the circular economy.
 - d) Provide fact-based and accessible information on the climate, environmental and biodiversity crisis and its drivers, as agreed under the Aarhus Convention ⁽¹⁸⁾.
 - e) Develop problem-solving and collaboration skills; foster critical thinking, media literacy skills and systems thinking; and support positive action, including volunteering, to confront and reduce the fear and disempowerment that learners might experience in the face of the planetary crises.
6. Further support educators to facilitate learning for the green transition and sustainable development by considering the following measures:
- a) Recognise that all educators, whatever their discipline or sector of education, are sustainability educators who need to support their learners in preparing for the green transition. Enable them to raise their learners' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. Include, consult and support educators on curriculum and programme development and other educational reforms related to the green transition and sustainable development and on the design of appropriate professional development.
 - b) Support integration of the green transition and sustainable development into initial teacher and trainer education programmes; in continuing professional development programmes; and in teacher professional standards and frameworks, in order to support educators' competence development with regard to sustainability.
 - c) Support mentoring schemes and professional development programmes at the level of the institutions. Support educators in using digital tools and technologies in their practice to enhance teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development.
 - d) Further develop and explore opportunities and incentives for educators to take part in professional development programmes related to sustainability, for example by considering them in career progression and development and creating roles for educators such as sustainability coordinator.
 - e) Support educators, including by providing the necessary time and space, in adopting pedagogies that enhance teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development in interdisciplinary ways and develop the socio-emotional aspects of learning, so that all learners can become agents of change and learn to reflect and act, both individually and collectively, locally and globally, for a more sustainable world.
 - f) Encourage and enable, where appropriate, transformative and interdisciplinary teaching and learning using both traditional and innovative learning approaches, including hands-on learning, the STEAM approach ⁽¹⁹⁾, hackathons, service learning and gamification.
 - g) Develop and make available resources to support educators, including regarding assessment. Support educators in using traditional and new tools and materials to teach and train for the green transition and sustainable development in a range of indoor and outdoor, and digital and non-digital, settings. Provide access to centres of expertise, including centres for environmental education and training.
 - h) Encourage the research and innovation community to engage with formal, non-formal and informal education and training providers to support educators in the green transition and sustainable development. Support participation in exploratory projects and research related to the climate emergency, environmental crisis and sustainability.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

⁽¹⁹⁾ The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) approach embraces the creative potential of connecting STEM education with the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences.

7. Continue to support formal and non-formal education and training institutions in effectively integrating, where appropriate, the green transition and sustainable development across all their activities and operations, by considering the following measures:
- a) Encourage and facilitate effective whole-institution approaches to sustainability which encompass teaching and learning; vision, planning and governance; active learner and staff participation; involvement of families; management of buildings and resources; partnerships with local and wider communities; and research and innovation. Support education leaders in managing organisational change with dedicated professional development and guidance for their roles.
 - b) Support education and training institutions in designing, monitoring and evaluating their sustainability strategies and/or embedding sustainability in existing processes and measures (e.g. school development plans, higher education mission statements and strategies). Recognise that this is a long-term process requiring small measurable steps which are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis, including through self-evaluation by the institution.
 - c) In accordance with their institutional autonomy, encourage and support early childhood education and care centres, schools, higher education institutions, VET providers, adult learning institutions and other education providers to take part in eco-label initiatives which can bring environmental, social, educational and economic benefits. Provide support structures for such schemes, e.g. agencies or bodies to support whole-institution approaches, mentoring and networking, templates and guidance, and financial support.
 - d) Focus part of the internal and/or external review and quality assurance mechanisms of education and training organisations on sustainability. Recognise effective engagement by higher education institutions through appropriate means, including, for example, funding mechanisms.
 - e) Further embed the green transition and sustainable development into programmes, syllabuses and modules in VET and higher education (in accordance with institutional autonomy and academic freedom), across a range of disciplines, including business studies, social sciences, pedagogical sciences, humanities, arts, architecture and engineering, land use planning and management. Make use of resources and materials developed by environmental and educational non-governmental organisations and other relevant bodies.
 - f) Support higher education, VET and adult learning institutions in the development of small and tailored learning courses on the green transition and sustainable development, that can lead, among others, to micro-credentials, in order to deepen, broaden and update professional competences.
 - g) Promote partnerships with all disciplines and actors, including business, the arts, farms, cultural heritage, sport, youth, research institutes, civil society organisations, the educational resources industry (including technology, publishing and other curriculum equipment) and educational research. Support the development of extra-curricular, summer and other programmes while providing support for internships in, for example, laboratories, businesses, research institutions and non-governmental organisations.
 - h) Support programmes that promote sustainability innovation and entrepreneurship. Strengthen higher education and VET institutions to establish or reinforce sustainability hubs that will enhance innovation and entrepreneurship for the green transition and sustainable development, the circular economy and biodiversity.
8. Where appropriate, mobilise national and EU funds for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase the resilience and preparedness of formal and non-formal education and training for the green transition, in particular Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Solidarity Corps, European Social Fund Plus, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, European Regional Development Fund, the Technical Support Instrument, Digital Europe programme, Horizon Europe and InvestEU.
9. Invest in monitoring, research and evaluation of the policy challenges and of the impact of these initiatives in order to build on lessons learnt and inform policymaking. This can include implementation of existing indicators and targets, including at international level.

HEREBY INVITES THE COMMISSION, WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY AND NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO:

1. Facilitate cooperation and peer learning among Member States and stakeholders on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, through:
 - a) The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) ⁽²⁰⁾, where education and training for the green transition is a key priority area.
 - b) Disseminating and encouraging the use of opportunities to promote, support and enable formal and non-formal education and training for the green transition and sustainable development within EU funding programmes, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, LIFE, European Social Fund Plus, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, Horizon Europe, including Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, the Development Education and Awareness Raising programme and the Technical Support Instrument.
 - c) Sharing good practice from Erasmus+ staff exchanges, projects and networks, including through the European Universities alliances, the eTwinning online community, the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, as well as the Centres of Vocational Excellence, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.
 - d) Identifying, documenting and sharing good practices, including through existing online platforms ⁽²¹⁾, and supporting the networking of national and other organisations active in education and the green transition and sustainable development in formal and non-formal education and training.
 - e) Involving young people in the implementation of the Recommendation, in particular through the European Year of Youth 2022 and the EU Youth Dialogue, to ensure that the opinions, views and needs of young people and youth organisations are fully taken into account.
 - f) Creating synergies with the Education for Climate Coalition and the New European Bauhaus.
2. Develop, share and make available, for voluntary use, resources, materials and research on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, in cooperation with Member States, including on GreenComp, the new European sustainability competence framework.
3. Support educators in teaching for the green transition and sustainable development by:
 - a) providing resources and support materials for voluntary use on the European School Education Platform, EPALE and the European Youth Portal;
 - b) recognising outstanding efforts in teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development through EU award schemes, including the European Innovative Teaching Award, eTwinning Prize and the European Vocational Skills Awards.
4. Monitor the development of green skills or attitudes towards environmental sustainability by higher education, VET graduates and early career researchers, without creating new reporting obligations or any additional burden for the Member States, through existing European surveys, such as the European graduate tracking initiative, for example by including questions about such attitudes in these surveys.

⁽²⁰⁾ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

⁽²¹⁾ This could include the Education for Climate Coalition, the forthcoming European School Education Platform, the Learning Corner, Science is Wonderful! Platform, the European Youth Portal, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), Scientix, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Pact for Skills.

5. Monitor progress on education for the green transition and sustainable development within the framework of existing reports on the European Education Area and the European Green Deal, without creating new reporting obligations or any additional burden for the Member States. This includes supporting the development of possible indicators or EU-level targets on sustainability as set out in the Council Resolution on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030).
6. Strengthen cooperation with existing international organisations, notably UNESCO and other UN bodies, including UNECE, to foster an approach to education and training for the green transition and sustainable development with policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders in and between Member States, which incorporates equity, inclusion and justice, in line with the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap 2030.
7. Continue to reinforce the green dimension of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, in both cases through sustainable mobility, online cooperation, green practices in projects and a strong focus on the green transition and sustainable development in cooperation between various education, training and youth stakeholders.

Done at Luxembourg, 16 June 2022.

For the Council
The President
O. DUSSOPT
