Collected short examples from all countries

ACTION

Acting for sustainability

One of the difficulties encountered with some of the interventions, especially those requiring the installation of equipment or devices, was that no provisions were made for repair and maintenance. This problem was clearly documented, for example, in the Romanian basic and high schools. Addressing this problem will require that the schools and universities allocate sufficient financial resources for this purpose, including systematic and regular monitoring and revision of the equipment.

Participants at one school highlighted how the principal's active personal involvement and formal authority helped initiate and sustain systemic changes in the school. In this case, the head's leadership was visible through direct participation in planning and clear support for the intervention, which in turn empowered the staff. Similarly, at another school, the school administration showed a proactive, long-term commitment to sustainability, coordinating resources and stakeholders effectively. This hands-on leadership created an enabling environment for the intervention. Conversely, where leadership was less present, momentum suffered. For example, some participants noted that while a deputy head actively engaged in the intervention, the head principal's limited involvement (and even unsustainable personal habits, like driving a turbo car) dampened the initiative's impact. Notably, even in schools with committed principals, there were calls to widen leadership beyond one person. In one school, the staff suggested the principal should involve more teachers to distribute responsibilities, underlining that broad-based leadership strengthens sustainability efforts.

Clear communication and outreach are enablers of sustainability. Progress in sustainability initiatives depends on actors' ability to translate complex content into accessible and motivating narratives. In several cases, communication breakdowns have undermined impact – people 'do not know about the campaigns', or find them 'embarrassing'. Where interventions were invested in outreach, visibility increased, and engagement followed. For instance, in one context, 'new options to recycle are not advertised enough to students', illustrating that even well-designed technical measures require communicative scaffolding to take effect.

Cooperation and negotiation skills. Several interventions required collaborating beyond the school or university, which adds another layer to these competences. For example, in a sustainable mobility project, it was necessary to achieve 'cooperation with the municipality... [and] the city transport agency' to install infrastructure (bicycle parking areas). Other cases mention collaboration with companies or external suppliers ('external contractors or suppliers' for sustainable technology). Interventions that managed to involve municipalities, organisations or external experts expanded their impact, whereas where this collaboration was lacking (e.g. when 'the city traffic office is not interested in cooperation', as cited in a case of failure) the project faced greater obstacles. Thus, the competences of communication and collaboration extend from the internal sphere (among direct participants) to the external (partners and environment).

Organisational and project management skills are needed to turn visions into reality. Transforming sustainability ideas into tangible outcomes requires competence in planning, scheduling, delegation, and coordination. Teachers who 'allow and encourage students to organise this' are not just empowering pupils – they are exercising project-management judgement. Similarly, institutions with designated committees to 'oversee the planning and implementation of the garden project' show the operational scaffolding needed for success. When 'faculty and staff [are] actively participating ... in green initiatives', they reflect integrated planning that aligns roles with responsibilities.

Several of the schools involved belong to or intend to join eco-school or green school networks. This gives them commitments that appear to be very useful for integrating sustainability into their activities. For example, some Romanian and Spanish schools associated with eco-school or green school networks are already committed to dedicating teacher hours to coordinating and ensuring compliance with sustainability goals. At the universities, this phenomenon does not occur to the same extent. In fact, some universities anticipate that, as a result of recent legislative reforms, sustainability principles will be included in many university courses in the future. At the Finnish university, for example, the ECF4CLIM project interventions took place at a time when the school's future curriculum was being redefined. This allowed these interventions to provide input to the design of the new curriculum, which will now incorporate a broader perspective on sustainability. However, the students doubted whether the new content items and ways of interpreting sustainability would ultimately be taught in classes. They anticipated that a discrepancy would persist between what the curriculum says and what teachers teach in the classroom.

At the participating high schools and universities, the participants stressed that because sustainability is a transversal topic, it can be learned and practised both within and outside of the school. This seemed to appeal to some students, who were already considering taking action in their neighbourhoods or cities. Links with actors outside the school were mentioned, too, such as efforts to share knowledge, information and practices with families and local communities. However, teachers and school principals regretted the scarcity of such connections with families – connections that would be needed if the schools were to contribute to transforming domestic and local environments.