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Fostering Sustainable Mindsets in Secondary Education – Best Practices from the SysMind Project

As we mark a decade since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, fostering a sustainable mindset in the next generation has become a critical focus for educational systems worldwide, with an emphasis on education for sustainable development (ESD). This paper presents best practices from the Erasmus+ “Developing a Sustainable Mind-Set” (SysMind) project, which integrates sustainability content and competencies into secondary school curricula to cultivate environmental and social responsibility among students. This multi-country initiative (spanning Austria, Turkey, North Macedonia, Latvia, Spain, and Ukraine) embeds sustainability topics across different subject areas, thereby weaving these themes and competencies into everyday learning and demonstrating a model for holistic curriculum integration.

Key outputs include a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for vocational education and training (VET) teachers, which facilitates the exchange of sustainability-focused lesson plans and pedagogical strategies. Additionally, the project developed a general curriculum framework comprising three modules to guide educators in incorporating sustainability concepts into teaching practice. Preliminary evaluation indicates that students exposed to this integrated curriculum exhibit increased awareness of sustainability issues and an improved understanding of how their behaviors impact the wider community. These findings underscore that empowering teachers with resources and training to infuse sustainability into regular teaching can effectively foster sustainable mindsets in youth. The SysMind project’s best practices offer a valuable pathway for educational systems seeking to advance SDG 4.7 and related targets beyond this first decade (2015–2025) of efforts.

Keywords: sustainable mindset, SDG goals, cross-curricular competencies, professional development, lifelong learning.