

EcoYOU – Clean and green Minds for Environmentally Friendly Behaviour
*A1.18 Developing a Joint Study that includes a Blue-Map used to raise awareness on
environmental protection for youth in BSB regions*

Interview interpretation results – PRO NATURA GALAȚI Partner

(Romania)- Qualitative research

Given today's climate challenges, ecosystem degradation, and our collective responsibility to build a sustainable future, environmental education has emerged as a crucial area of focus in modern schooling. This report gathers insights, perspectives, and experiences from a diverse group of individuals, including teachers and youth leaders who promote environmental education in schools, as well as environmentally conscious parents, students, and young volunteers.

I) Environmental education through the lens of the interviewed youth's responses

1.1 Understanding environmental protection

Understanding and protecting the environment requires constant and conscious involvement, not just isolated or symbolic actions. The deep motivation to live in a healthy environment, together with the recognition of our individual responsibility, fuels the desire for change. Consumer society, cultural influences, and the lack of accessible resources create real barriers to adopting sustainable behaviors. At the same time, environmental education often remains superficial, theoretical, and insufficiently anchored in the daily reality of young people.

In order to transform awareness into effective action, it is essential for environmental education to become practical, engaging, and relevant. Collaboration between schools, local communities, NGOs, and digital platforms can add value to shaping young people as environmentally responsible citizens. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can we build a society that protects nature, not just in words, but through concrete actions.

Across the interviews, participants generally recognize environmental protection as essential for preserving nature, reducing human impact, and promoting sustainable living. While some define it in practical terms, such as minimizing their carbon footprint or recycling, others see it as a moral responsibility to respect nature and protect endangered species. Many emphasize that environmental protection is not just symbolic; it is a necessary response to long-term exploitation of natural resources and increasing environmental degradation.

1.2 Engagement and motivation

Understanding and protecting the environment means more than symbolic gestures — it is about a responsible and continuous attitude toward nature. Every contribution, no matter how small it may seem, matters. Recycling, avoiding single-use products, saving resources, or taking part in ecological initiatives are concrete steps toward a cleaner future. The motivation ultimately comes from the genuine desire to live in a healthy, balanced environment, as well as from the awareness of the negative impact we have on the planet. Even if not all of us have yet taken part in large-scale projects, the willingness to get involved shows that there is hope and potential for change.

Participants' involvement varies widely. Some actively engage in recycling, avoiding single-use products, conserving energy and water, or participating in clean-up activities and tree planting. Others have little direct involvement but express interest in contributing to environmental initiatives in the future. Motivations include the desire to live in a clean, healthy environment, to contribute to meaningful change, and to reduce negative impacts on the planet. For some, witnessing pollution or unsustainable practices in their communities also drives the desire to act.

1.3 Challenges and barriers

Adopting a sustainable lifestyle is not a simple process, but one full of challenges. The consumerist way of life, cultural influences, and social pressures in a society driven by excessive consumption can make changing habits difficult. In addition, economic barriers, such as the higher cost of eco-friendly products or the lack of sustainable alternatives, limit access to a green lifestyle. Another significant obstacle is the lack of strong environmental education, both in schools and within families, as well as the absence of positive role models in society. Nevertheless, acknowledging these difficulties is an important step toward change.

Several barriers hinder sustainable behavior. Social influences, such as peer attitudes or societal consumerist pressures, are commonly cited. Economic factors, like higher costs of eco-friendly products, also limit participation. Cultural factors, including lack of education or visible role models and insufficient public awareness, further reduce motivation. Many participants highlighted that adopting sustainable habits can feel inconvenient or require extra effort, which discourages consistent practice.

1.4 Education and awareness

Participants generally perceive current environmental education as insufficient. Schools provide limited exposure, and public awareness campaigns often fail to reach youth effectively. Many suggest that education should be more practical, interactive, and integrated across subjects. Social media and short, engaging content are considered highly effective tools for reaching young people. Additionally, participants advocate for “learning by doing” through volunteer projects, clean-ups, and other hands-on activities.

To enhance the impact of environmental education, participants recommend increasing practical, experiential learning opportunities, such as outdoor activities, workshops, and community projects. Raising awareness through social media campaigns and clear statistics about environmental impact is also emphasized. Finally, they suggest stronger leadership by example, stricter environmental legislation, and more visible engagement from adults and authorities to inspire young people to adopt sustainable practices.

Environmental education in Romania today is present, but still insufficiently developed to have a real and lasting impact on the ecological awareness of young people. Although progress can be seen compared to past years, a much more applied, practical, and interdisciplinary approach is needed. Static, theoretical activities fail to capture the interest of the younger generation, which prefers learning through direct experience: workshops, outdoor activities, community projects, or creative content on social media.

To increase the effectiveness of environmental education, it is essential for schools to collaborate with NGOs, local authorities, and the online environment in order to create interactive, relevant, and motivational programs. Only by integrating sustainability into both curricular and extracurricular activities, in a coherent and modern way, can we shape a generation that is active and environmentally responsible.

II) Environmental education through the lens of the interviewed teachers' and youth leaders' responses.

Environmental education is an essential component in shaping students as future responsible citizens. The involvement of children, especially in primary school, is visible and promising, particularly when supported by dedicated teachers and engaging practical activities. However, the reality of the Romanian educational system shows that this dimension is often affected by challenges such as lack of time, limited resources, and inconsistent collaboration with local authorities. In this context, environmental education risks being perceived more as an occasional activity rather than as a value integrated into students' development.

2.1 Understanding environmental education

Integrating environmental education into teaching activities is essential for shaping students who are aware of and responsible toward the environment. Through thematic projects, practical activities, and active involvement in events such as Earth Day or clean-up campaigns, students not only learn theory but also develop real behaviors with a direct impact on the community.

The messages conveyed should emphasize responsibility, respect for nature, and the consequences of inaction. Protecting natural resources is not just an abstract concept, but a reality that influences our everyday lives. Through consistent and coherent education, the school can become an important catalyst in forming a generation that understands both the value and the fragility of the planet.

The teachers integrate environmental topics into their teaching through a variety of approaches, depending on the age of students and subject matter. In chemistry and physics lessons, as well as during counseling classes and “Green Week,” environmental themes are addressed. For younger children, topics are introduced through thematic games, storytelling, songs, and visual materials, while primary school students engage in practical projects like selective recycling, plant

care, and ecological actions in the schoolyard or local park. Across all ages, the key messages emphasize respect for nature, responsible behavior, proper waste management, conserving resources, and understanding that even small actions contribute to a cleaner environment.

2.2 Engagement and challenges

Students' involvement in environmental issues is generally positive, especially when they are guided by motivated and dedicated teachers. Children's enthusiasm is evident in practical ecological activities, and their desire to contribute to protecting nature is genuine and encouraging. Nevertheless, promoting environmental education comes with real challenges. The lack of time, caused by the overlap of many curricular and extracurricular activities, limits the frequency and depth of educational interventions.

For environmental education to become a sustainable component of the educational process, constant support, accessible resources, and functional partnerships between schools, communities, and public authorities are needed.

Student engagement varies by age and context. Pre-school children show high involvement when activities are interactive and age-appropriate, while older students' engagement can be limited by lack of parental support or competing responsibilities. Challenges cited by the teachers include limited time for ecological activities, scarcity of age-appropriate materials, conveying abstract ecological concepts to very young children, and inconsistent collaboration with local authorities. A common observation is that motivation—both of students and parents—is crucial for effective engagement.



2.3 Effective strategies

For environmental education to have a real and lasting impact, it is essential that the strategies used be practical, hands-on, and adapted to children’s ages. The most effective methods have proven to be those that involve students directly—through concrete actions and the power of personal example. When students observe responsible behaviors and take part in ecological activities, they develop an authentic connection with nature and learn to protect it.

Interactive methods—such as thematic projects, field trips, workshops, or educational games—play a decisive role in motivating students. These approaches transform theoretical information into personal experience and stimulate both emotional and civic engagement.

To strengthen educational efforts, partnerships between schools, NGOs, and local communities must be better structured and officially supported. Joint projects have the potential to create a local culture of sustainability and to involve not only students, but also parents and citizens in protecting the environment.

Practical, hands-on activities are universally regarded as the most effective strategies. These include clean-up campaigns, planting projects, selective recycling, and participation in group projects. Interactive methods, such as games, field trips, and audiovisual presentations, help students understand environmental issues while making learning enjoyable and memorable. Teachers highlight that leading by example, integrating daily eco-friendly practices, and involving parents significantly enhance students’ awareness and pro-environmental behaviors. Collaboration between schools, NGOs, and local communities is improved through joint projects, workshops, and campaigns that actively engage both students and families.

2.4 Future improvements

Looking toward the future, the introduction of a weekly environmental education class and the inclusion of sustainability topics in the national curriculum, in an interdisciplinary manner, would represent important steps forward. Likewise, the official recognition of schools that develop ecological practices would encourage institutional involvement and create models to be followed across the country.

To increase the impact of environmental education, teachers recommend: integrating environmental education into daily activities, making learning more attractive and interactive, and providing accessible educational materials. Policy-level support could include financial incentives, formal inclusion of sustainability topics in the curriculum, training for educators, and recognition of schools that excel in environmental education. Joint initiatives among schools, NGOs, and local authorities are also seen as essential to strengthen environmental awareness and practice in the community.

III. Environmental education through the lens of the interviewed parents responses

Environmental responsibility begins within the family and must be strengthened through early education, continued in school, and supported by the community. Ecological awareness is not just a matter of information, but of developing healthy and sustainable habits. Although there are real obstacles to adopting a sustainable lifestyle—from the lack of educational resources to everyday practical difficulties—a joint effort between parents, schools, and authorities can turn environmental education into an active force for change. Only through genuine and continuous collaboration can we create generations capable of protecting the environment in a conscious and responsible way.

3.1 Role in environmental awareness

Ecological awareness begins in the family, where the first life habits are formed. In this sense, early education on environmental protection is essential for the development of responsible and engaged adults. If young people learn from childhood to recycle, reduce waste, and respect nature, these behaviors become ingrained reflexes in their everyday lives.

All three parents emphasized the importance of educating children about environmental protection from an early age. They agree that forming responsible habits at home—such as recycling, reducing waste, and using resources sustainably—is essential for raising future adults who value sustainability. Parents play a direct role in guiding their children, primarily through personal example, daily practices, and active engagement in eco-friendly behaviors. Common strategies at home include selective waste collection, recycling, responsible consumption, and discussing environmental issues with children.

3.2 Challenges and perceptions

Parents reported several challenges in promoting environmental awareness. A recurring difficulty is the conflict between daily routines and sustainable practices—for example, the convenience of using disposable products or relying on private vehicles. Additionally, children are constantly exposed to messages encouraging overconsumption. Despite these obstacles, parents believe that today’s youth are generally more environmentally conscious than previous generations, thanks to increased access to information, school campaigns, and civic activism. However, they note that not all children are equally engaged.

Even when there is a desire to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, everyday difficulties—such as a busy schedule or the lack of viable alternatives to car travel—can sometimes limit the consistent application of ecological principles.

3.3 Support and resources

Parents generally feel that schools provide some environmental education through subjects like biology, geography, and civic education, as well as special events like Earth Day or “Green Week.” Nevertheless, they agree that schools often lack sufficient materials, trained staff, or infrastructure to support practical ecological activities. To improve sustainability education at home, parents suggested resources such as age-appropriate books, brochures, educational games, recycling kits, experiments, and visits to organic farms or recycling centers. They also believe that local communities and authorities can play a key role by:

- Improving and maintaining parks, urban gardens, and recreational areas to foster connection with nature.
- Creating spaces for families to donate or exchange used items.
- Organizing bio fairs, recycling workshops, and community clean-up campaigns.
- Providing incentives, regulations, and educational programs that encourage sustainable living.

Currently, environmental education provided in Romanian schools is unfortunately insufficient. Although environmental topics are occasionally included in the curriculum and in some

extracurricular activities, the lack of genuine involvement from decision-makers means that education for sustainability remains more theoretical than practical.

For parents to support the development of a strong ecological awareness in children, a real partnership with kindergartens and schools is essential. Only through collaboration between family, school, and community can a culture of environmental responsibility be built, which is necessary for the future of our children.

IV. Similarities and differences across groups

Similarities:

All groups—youth, teachers and youth leaders, and parents—share a fundamental appreciation for environmental protection. They recognize that understanding ecological issues is important not just theoretically, but through practical engagement that encourages action. There is a common belief that environmental education should lead to real-life behaviors that contribute to a healthier and more sustainable world. Each group acknowledges that raising environmental awareness is a shared responsibility, requiring involvement from schools, families, and the wider community.

Differences:

Youth prioritize direct, hands-on experiences. They are motivated by activities such as field trips, clean-ups, workshops, and interactive projects that allow them to actively participate and see tangible results. For young people, learning is most effective when it is engaging, creative, and immediate.

Teachers and youth leaders focus more on methodology and curriculum integration. They are concerned with how environmental concepts can be systematically incorporated into lessons, extracurricular activities, and long-term programs. Their emphasis is on structured approaches, pedagogical strategies, and creating consistent learning opportunities that develop students' knowledge and responsible behaviors over time.

Parents emphasize collaboration between home and school. They see their role as supporting and reinforcing eco-friendly habits in the family environment. Parents are particularly concerned with guidance, accessible resources, and communication with educators so that their children receive consistent messages and opportunities to practice sustainable behaviors at home.

Shared barrier:

Across all groups, a common challenge is the lack of sufficient resources, time, and structured support. Youth often face limited opportunities to participate in hands-on activities due to scheduling conflicts or unavailable programs. Teachers and youth leaders struggle with overcrowded curricula, insufficient teaching materials, and the need for professional development. Parents may lack guidance or clear ways to contribute effectively to environmental education at home. This shared barrier highlights the need for coordinated efforts and accessible tools to support all stakeholders in fostering sustainable behaviors.

Similarities: All groups value environmental protection and recognize the need for practical engagement.

Differences: Youth prioritize direct experience; teachers/youth leaders focus on methodology and curriculum integration; parents emphasize home-school collaboration and support.

Shared barrier: Lack of resources, time, and structured support affects all groups.

Summary Table:		Similarities and Differences Across Groups		
Category	Youth	Parents	Teachers & Youth Leaders	
Common Understandings of Environmental Protection	Value protecting nature and see it as essential for a healthy future; understand recycling, reducing waste, and sustainable behavior.	Emphasize both environmental protection and teaching responsibility; focus on modeling positive behaviors.	Believe environmental protection is vital and should be taught early; see it as part of family responsibility and life-long habits.	
Perceptions of Current Education & Awareness	Often find school environmental education theoretical and limited; prefer interactive, hands-on learning.	Recognize environmental education is insufficient and often too theoretical; seek to provide practical experiences and guidance.	Observe that schools provide some environmental education but feel it is inconsistent; want stronger cooperation with schools to reinforce learning at home.	
Challenges and Barriers	Limited access to engaging activities; busy schedules; lack of sustainable alternatives in daily life.	Time constraints in the curriculum; limited resources; lack of institutional support; difficulty implementing applied lessons.	Limited knowledge/resources to support children; inconsistent communication with schools; everyday practical constraints (time, resources).	
Effective Strategies & Desired Support	Hands-on activities: workshops, field trips, eco-projects; peer role models; interactive content online.	Interdisciplinary and applied teaching; collaboration with NGOs and local communities; official recognition and support.	Strong partnerships with schools; structured programs for families; guidance on reinforcing sustainable habits at home; community engagement opportunities.	

Table 1: Similarities and differences across groups (PRO NATURA Galati Interviews in Romania)

V. Recommendations and solutions for learning about environmental issues

1. Hands-On and experiential learning

- Organize workshops, field trips, community clean-ups, gardening, and eco-projects.
- Use real-life examples to teach concepts like recycling, waste reduction, and energy conservation.
- Encourage students to apply learned principles at home and in their communities.

2. Interactive and engaging methods

- Use games, simulations, and digital platforms (apps, social media challenges, educational videos) to make learning appealing.
- Integrate creative projects like posters, videos, or campaigns that allow students to express their ideas.

3. Interdisciplinary integration

- Include environmental topics across subjects: science, geography, civics, and arts.
- Connect sustainability concepts to everyday life and societal issues.

4. Collaboration and partnerships

- Foster partnerships between schools, NGOs, local authorities, and families to create joint programs.
- Involve youth in decision-making and local environmental initiatives to give them ownership.

5. Role models and mentorship

- Teachers, youth leaders, and parents should model sustainable behaviors.
- Invite experts, activists, and community leaders to share experiences and motivate students.

6. Parental and Family Involvement

- Encourage parents to reinforce eco-friendly habits at home.
- Provide guidance, resources, and activities that families can do together.

7. Regular and consistent education

- Include weekly or recurring environmental education sessions in the school curriculum.
- Use both formal lessons and extracurricular activities to ensure continuous engagement.

8. Recognition and motivation

- Celebrate schools, classes, and students who show active participation in environmental initiatives.
- Award certificates, create eco-clubs, or feature projects publicly to motivate further involvement.

9. Address barriers and provide resources

- Ensure access to eco-friendly alternatives (recycling bins, sustainable transport, educational materials).
- Reduce logistical barriers by coordinating school schedules and community events.

10. Evaluation and feedback

- Assess the impact of environmental education programs on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Use feedback to improve activities and make them more relevant and effective.

Conclusion

Overall, learning about environmental issues is most effective when it is practical, consistent, and engaging. A combination of hands-on activities, interactive methods, and real-life examples helps students develop lasting eco-friendly habits. Collaboration between schools, families, NGOs, and local authorities strengthens the impact, while role models and active participation motivate youth to take responsibility. Addressing barriers and providing accessible resources ensures that environmental education is not only theoretical but translates into meaningful action. By integrating these strategies, we can cultivate a generation that is aware, responsible, and proactive in protecting the environment.



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