



SUMMARY COUNTRY REPORT – GERMANY

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is playing an increasingly important role for the school system in Germany. However, the situation varies from state to state.

It should be noted that there are already a large number of materials, education for sustainable development is partly anchored in school law, and there are a large number of projects and individual schools that already provide climate education in a comprehensive sense. However, implementing ESD in schools is by no means the norm.

Germany is on its way.

Climate education is a little used term, in Germany it is a part of ESD.

There is a lot of potential, but the dissemination of ESD and climate education in schools is far from satisfactory.

There are very good concepts for further training of teachers in the field of ESD.

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Political Framework

Germany alone is responsible for 2% of global CO₂ emissions (European Commission 2019, p 12¹) and thus is still one of the biggest drivers of climate change in terms of per capita consumption. It should be noted that emissions have been decreasing slightly recently, but compared to the necessary reductions under the Paris Climate Agreement, Germany is far from meeting its commitments. In 2021, a momentous ruling was even made by the Federal Constitutional Court: the national climate protection targets, with the annual emission levels permitted until 2030, are incompatible with fundamental rights. This means that there are insufficient requirements for further emission reductions from 2031 onwards. The German Climate Act must be improved now. One could state that there has been much more debate on climate protection issues in Germany in recent years and that there are more projects and plans on this topic. Nevertheless, there is a large ambition gap as well as an implementation gap, if the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement are to be achieved and the time window described in the current IPCC report is to be used (see also: German Advisory Council on the Environment).

Education for Sustainable Development

Germany has recently distinguished itself by making education for sustainable development a higher priority. In 2021, Germany co-drafted and signed the so-called Berlin Declaration² within the framework of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD in the German capital city. This declaration emphasizes the importance of ESD and the signatory countries affirm that they will structurally ensure that ESD is implemented in their education systems. There are numerous materials for all educational areas.³ However, this should not obscure the fact that ESD and also climate education are not given the relevance they would need in everyday school life. A current expert opinion from 2019 provides a summary:

“Empirical evidence suggests that ESD has not yet found its way into the classroom on a broad scale, but is usually only taught by individual teachers who are particularly committed in this area - often in the area of science teaching and in the subject of geography.” (Aktionsrat Bildung 2021, p 13⁴)

The experts' recommendations for the German education system are as follows (Source: Aktionsrat Bildung 2021):

- “Creation of binding guidelines by the KMK (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany).

¹ European Commission (2019). JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT. Fossil CO₂ and GHG emissions of all world countries. 2019 Report.

² https://zfl.fau.de/medien/berliner_erklaerung-BNE.pdf

³ https://www.bne-portal.de/SiteGlobals/Forms/bne/lernmaterialien/suche_formular.html?nn=33800

⁴ Aktionsrat Bildung / vbw – Vereinigung der Bayerischen Wirtschaft e. V. (Ed.) (2021). *Nachhaltigkeit im Bildungswesen – was jetzt getan werden muss Gutachten*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag. <https://www.vbw-bayern.de/vbw/Themen-und-Services/Bildung/Aktionsrat-Bildung/Kurzgutachten-ARB-Nachhaltigkeit-im-Bildungswesen.jsp>

- Systematic integration of ESD into the development of teaching and professionalization of teachers.
- Strengthening the interdisciplinary principle and anchoring ESD in all school subjects.
- Strengthening the subject of geography at the secondary level.
- Development of innovative teaching and learning formats that enable the acquisition of differentiated and multidimensional knowledge on sustainability and also enable and motivate concrete application in practice.”

The authors of the report emphasize that it is not only about imparting knowledge, but also about the acquisition of creative competencies. In preparing their report, they observed that ESD is often minimized to scientific knowledge transfer.

Good Practices in Teacher Education

The FOLE project of the University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt should be mentioned as an example of ambitious teacher education. This is a research and practice project funded by the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection for the further training of university lecturers and seminar teachers in teacher education in ESD in Bavaria (FOLE-BNE_Bay⁵). Other universities, such as the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München⁶, the University of Vechta⁷ or the University of Tübingen⁸, are also known for having taken the topic of sustainability and climate change intensively into account in their teaching and research for years - including in teacher training.

Good Practices in School

In general, climate education takes place in the subject of geography in Germany in a subject-related manner. In addition, there are schools that are more intensively dedicated to education for sustainable development. The Hanseatic City of Hamburg has stood out for years in its efforts to promote Education for Sustainable Development in Germany. It is both a municipality and a federal state and has developed an ESD master plan for various fields of action.⁹ The climate schools are a good example of how education for sustainable development in the sense of climate education can be successfully implemented in schools.¹⁰ They follow the whole institution approach. Similar programs exist in some other federal states, e.g. North Rhine-Westphalia (School of the Future)¹¹ or Bavaria (Environmental School)¹². However, the implementation of the whole institution approach is not the norm at these schools.

⁵ <https://www.ku.de/mgf/geographie/didaktik/forschung/fole-bne-bay>

⁶ <https://www.elmundo.lehrerbildung-at-lmu.mzl.uni-muenchen.de/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.uni-vechta.de/uni/nachhaltige-hochschule/home/>

⁸ <https://uni-tuebingen.de/studium/studienangebot/schlueselqualifikationen-das-studium-professionale/zertifikate/zertifikat-studium-oecologicum.html> und <http://worldcitizen.school/>

⁹ <https://www.hamburg.de/nachhaltigkeittlernen>

¹⁰ <https://li.hamburg.de/klimaschule/>

¹¹ <https://www.sdz.nrw.de/>

¹² <https://www.lbv.de/umweltbildung/fuer-schulen/umweltschule-in-europa/>

"Towards a new model of Teachers' Professional Competence Development on Climate Change"