

POLICY BRIEF

From Climate Anxiety to Climate Resilience and Regeneration in Education

Climate education today tends to focus on teaching complex scientific facts that pose existential threats, without adequate consideration for teachers' and learners' emotional capacities. Besides, climate education rarely introduces ways to deal with climate change impacts as they unfold. Competences needed for collective action to tackle today's polycrisis and foster both inner development and societal transformation also lack attention.

This leaves younger generations disempowered to limit, respond to and recover from the varied impacts of extreme weather events (e.g., storms, flooding) and phenomena such as sea level rise. Youth are also ill-equipped to address the root causes of climate vulnerability (e.g., disconnection from nature, marginalisation). This situation contributes to rising levels of stress, overwhelm, and anxiety in children and youth, with devastating societal impacts.

This policy brief calls upon education policy-makers and other relevant education stakeholders to support a deep change in primary, secondary and higher education, as well as in teacher and other educators' training, so as to foster individual, collective and planetary health and wellbeing. It makes the case for offering transformative climate resilience education for children and youth. This approach to climate education aims to alleviate climate anxiety and facilitate collaboration between teachers and learners to enhance climate resilience and regeneration locally, as a foundation for deep societal transformation. This policy-brief also calls for new policies, programmes and initiatives that establish support systems for teachers and educators, prioritise teachers' wellbeing, facilitate life-long learning on transformative climate resilience and regeneration, and foster collective action. It builds upon a [literature review](#) and consultations with teachers and educators under the CLARITY project.

CLARITY is an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Union, co-led by Lund University ([WEE](#) and [LUCSUS](#)), [One Resilient Earth](#), [Legacy17](#), [Climate Creativity](#), [Real School Budapest](#) and [The Vision Works](#) from 2023 to 2026. CLARITY focuses on transformative climate resilience education for children and youth, with the aim of fostering a shift from climate anxiety to resilience, creativity, connection and regeneration among learners.

CLARITY aims to enhance educators' competences and skills for dealing with climate anxiety and support integrative approaches that link the inner resilience of learners and the outer dimensions of transformation. It involves designing and implementing new pedagogical approaches, frameworks and tools, to the benefit of children and youth in primary, secondary and higher education. Those resources will be tested and passed on through teacher training offered at European level, and specifically in Germany, Hungary, Sweden, and Norway. An online hub will also be created to share learning resources and provide access to a transnational community of teachers and educators committed to learning together and supporting each other.

The CLARITY project pilots new pedagogical models, tools, teacher training programmes as well as the provision of an online community for teachers and other educators. Those are based on the latest research and pioneering experiments with transformative education for climate resilience and regeneration from around the world. The project will provide helpful resources and insights with a view to scaling up this approach across Europe and beyond.

To be part of our co-creative work, or receive our newsletter, please contact: contact@transforming-climate.education.

An alarming situation...

Climate change affects the health and wellbeing of children and youth

Children remain among the population groups most vulnerable to climate change impacts. There is mounting evidence of the significant emotional and mental health impacts of climate change upon children and youth. Besides, as the climate crisis intensifies, children and youth in Europe will be increasingly exposed to extreme weather events and profound changes in their environment.

Children and youth should learn about the existential threat that climate change already poses to them, to people globally, and to the lives of other living beings, in age-appropriate ways. However, leaving students emotionally overwhelmed when learning about climate change can worsen their mental health at a critical time in their physical and mental development. Increased anxiety and stress during this phase of life can lead to permanent changes to brain structure and emergence of severe mental health issues. Emotional overwhelm also enhances feelings of powerlessness and can lead to denial or apathy regarding climate action.

Teachers lack tools and support to alleviate climate anxiety

Teachers and other educators in Europe are committed to giving children and youth the knowledge and skills they need to live healthy lives and build flourishing futures. However, teachers generally lack pedagogical material and training to teach about climate change and its impacts in adequate ways. They experience high levels of stress and overwhelming workloads, and those who are already teaching about climate change using available learning material often report a worsening of their own mental wellbeing. Surveyed teachers feel ill-equipped to alleviate increasing

climate anxiety levels for themselves and their students. They do not have the time nor the support system in place to engage in life-long learning in new teaching areas related to climate resilience and regeneration, nor in related innovative or transformative learning practices. Moreover, both students' families and school leaders tend to oppose deviations from traditional ways of teaching in the classrooms, although they are needed to address increasing climate anxiety and other climate change impacts.

Teachers lack competences and support to engage with climate resilience, re-generation and societal transformation

Climate anxiety is exacerbated by the fact that we are not tackling the climate crisis and its impacts at their roots through inner development and a deep societal transformation. Building long-term resilience to the impacts of climate change requires accepting unavoidable loss and damages, adapting to some impacts, and engaging in systemic changes towards individual, collective and planetary health and wellbeing.

Climate education today does not provide pedagogical tools nor support systems so that teachers and educators build competences and develop practices for both inner development and societal transformation. Learners need to use not only their heads, but also their hearts and hands to fully understand the root causes of climate vulnerability and engage in tackling those root causes creatively. Researchers and practitioners increasingly acknowledge the critical role of social-emotional and behavioural learning. Imagination and creativity are also critical in tackling climate change and its impacts. A transformative approach to climate resilience education is indispensable, and includes building new competences among teachers, educators, children and youth.

... calling for a deep change in education

We call on education policymakers and other relevant education stakeholders to support and invest more in teachers' wellbeing, new learning approaches, and related support systems. This step is critical to address the climate anxiety crisis, and grow climate resilience and regeneration in our societies. Such a deep change in education requires >>>

Supporting a shift towards transformative climate resilience education

NARRATIVE

Transformative climate resilience education introduces a new narrative:

- Teachers and other educators, children and youth... **we must all learn how to navigate emotions associated with climate change in healthy ways.** We cannot alleviate climate anxiety through mere climate action.
- We need to address the impacts of climate change as they unfold by **building both inner resilience and local climate resilience.** To build climate resilience in the long run, we need to regenerate communities and restore local ecosystems.
- To further limit climate change impacts, we must **address both climate vulnerability and the root causes of the socio-ecological crisis.** This involves new and creative practices to envision alternative ways of living, fostering connection and collective action that involves educators, learners, and their community.
- By implementing transformative climate resilience education, we have an opportunity to **transform our response to climate change in society at large.** This approach would trigger a shift from individuals experiencing anxiety and taking isolated actions to communities fostering resilience and regeneration while experiencing joy.

APPROACH

Transformative climate resilience education introduces a new approach:

- It involves a shift towards **nurturing new competences** to grow climate resilience, foster regeneration, and support societal transformation. Building upon the European GreenComp, a [competence framework](#) to foster transformative climate resilience education was developed through the CLARITY project.
- **Innovative learning approaches** are essential to nurture new competences and make education transformative. A combination of cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioural, ethical, place-sensitive, and creative learning approaches can make learning more impactful for all kinds of learners. These approaches require flexibility in teaching and some are likely to take place outside of the classroom.
- Fostering **connection and collaboration** with external stakeholders, such as community members, artists, scientists and traditional knowledge holders etc. is crucial to address the roots of the climate crisis in creative ways.
- Teaching should **explicitly acknowledge emotions and potential trauma** in learners and educators. This is particularly important in communities that have experienced or are likely to experience extreme events associated with climate change.

Investing in support systems that facilitate life-long learning, enhance teachers' wellbeing, and support collective action

SUPPORT

Multilevel support systems are critical to enable teachers and other climate educators to foster transformative climate resilience education for:

- **Providing comprehensive learning resources:** Adequate teacher training, resource hubs with relevant and updated learning materials, and transnational communities for peer learning and support are critical. Given the fast-evolving nature of science and practices for climate resilience and regeneration, learning is lifelong and requires continuous engagement.
- **Prioritising teachers' wellbeing:** Teachers and educators need robust learning resources and support systems to manage their own climate anxiety and understand the role of emotions in influencing climate action. It is also vital to address the climate anxiety of their learners and apply trauma-informed approaches when necessary. Knowledge about, access to, and collaboration with mental health professionals and organisations specialising in climate change and mental health may also be required.
- **Establishing institutional support:** Teachers require robust support from their governing bodies, school leaders, educational administrators, students' parents, and other relevant stakeholders. This is essential for participating in necessary training, pilot projects, and peer support groups, enabling teachers to acquire and master new competences before teaching them. Support should include:
 - **Time:** Adequate time for professional development and collaborative projects.
 - **Trust:** Confidence in teachers' abilities and decisions.
 - **Financial resources:** Funding for training programs, materials, and new initiatives

Additionally, teachers need support, including policy support, from their schools or universities to convey new narratives on climate resilience and regeneration, adopt and integrate innovative pedagogies, collaborate with external experts, and involve the wider community in educational efforts. By providing this support, institutions can empower teachers and other educators to deliver transformative education for climate resilience and regeneration.

