

## EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, sustainable development has become increasingly embedded in the structures and missions of universities. Sustainability educators are calling for a transformational shift in curricula to better equip universities to contribute to sustainability efforts. While undergoing these transformations, universities face various challenges and barriers that may slow down their contribution to sustainable development goals and the greater good. Universities serve as key actors in implementing sustainable development, acting as an essential link between knowledge creation and knowledge transfer to society and beyond. However, this is not without challenges. These challenges extend to various aspects of higher education. In this paper, we will examine the educational challenges that universities face in the process of sustainability integration. We conducted 33 in-depth interviews with academic and non-academic staff associated with sustainability-related activities. The aim of this paper is to identify the challenges related to educational pursuits in line with sustainable principles and to outline best practices that can be transferred to other contexts. The challenges include (1) structural and institutional challenges, primarily related to curriculum reform, lack of awareness, insufficient teaching staff, lack of time; (2) curriculum and pedagogical integration constraints, such as ambiguous sustainability classification, incoherence between sustainability goals, curricula, and pedagogical practices, limited integration of sustainability in curricula, weak institutionalization of sustainability education, and inefficiencies in educational systems; (3) student-related outcomes, such as insufficient sustainability competencies among graduates, limited perceived relevance, uncertain and indirect influence of sustainability education on student behavior, and limited student social integration.

**Keywords:** educational challenges, sustainability, Central and Eastern Europe, universities.