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The most effective education  
puts children at the center,  
directing their own learning  
about issues that affect  
their lives and futures.

# Eco-Schools:

## Engaging the Youth of Today to Protect the Planet of Tomorrow

**E**co-Schools is the largest global sustainability school program, with over 59,000 schools that engage 20 million students and 1.4 million teachers across 93 countries. The program was developed in response to the needs identified at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Officially launched in 1994 in Denmark, Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom, with the support of the European Commission, Eco-Schools has grown to become a global model for environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) and has been recognized by UNESCO and UN Environment.

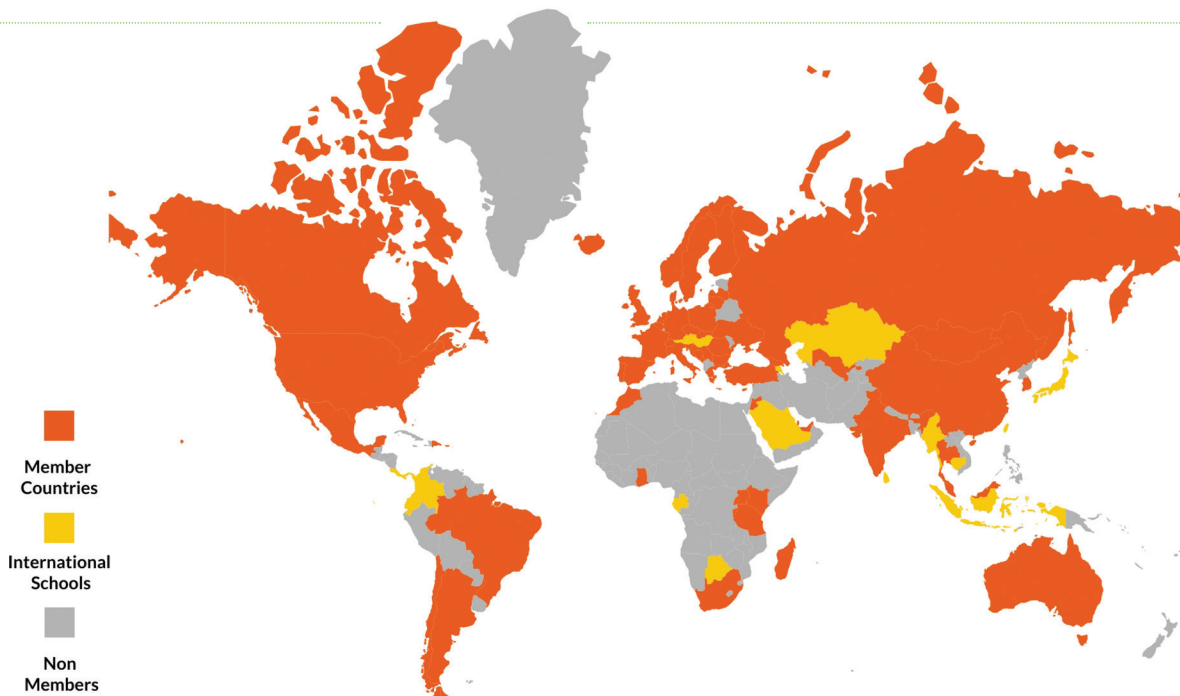
**Kristina Madsen**  
Foundation for  
Environmental  
Education



Today, the Eco-Schools program is coordinated internationally by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), an umbrella organization with over 100 members worldwide. A total of 72 member organizations have the license to implement Eco-Schools on a nationwide scale. The program is an ideal way for schools to embark on a meaningful path toward improving the environmental footprint of both the school and the local community while at the same time having a life-long positive impact on the lives of young people, their families, school staff, and community members.

### Seven Steps for Continuous Improvement

The Eco-Schools program relies on its unique Seven Steps framework to plan and implement an ongoing learning journey. Using a whole-school approach and project-based learning pedagogy, the Seven Steps framework helps schools meet both environmental and educational objectives. It also recognizes that environmental education needs to be integrated into the existing





curriculum. The Seven Steps are designed with the learner at the center; the teachers act as facilitators and co-learners. The program then expands to a wide range of stakeholders, both in the school and in the local community.

In a nutshell, every school establishes an EcoCommittee, carries out an environmental review, makes curriculum linkages, creates an action plan, monitors and evaluates their progress, spreads awareness of their actions within their local community, and develops an Eco Code of values. Usually after two years of implementing the program and establishing a high level of achievement within each of the Seven Steps, schools can apply for the prestigious Green Flag award, which involves a rigorous assessment process.

### An Adaptable Program With Students at the Center

One of the most important aspects of the Eco-Schools program is the uniqueness of each school's journey. The themes followed and the actions taken are decided by the EcoCommittee and reflect the circumstances, culture, and challenges of each community. The Seven Steps framework is flexible enough to accommodate any school setting and local context.

The methodology is a means to bring about change through active involvement of young people while applying a rigorous pedagogical process—the whole-school approach toward ESD. The nature of each of the Seven Steps and the order in which they are implemented



allows for incremental change in sustainability literacy through active learning. Students' actions improve the environmental performance of the whole institutions, starting with their behavior. This process empowers them with the confidence to make the world a better place in which to live.



Eco-Schools provides the methodological tools for schools to evaluate their own challenges, assess risks, and develop the solutions within a structure of ongoing improvement. The schools are guided to re-orientate existing curricula around sustainable development themes and develop practical projects which draw upon local knowledge and skills from their own communities as well as resources from national NGOs, and regional and international expert organisations.”

» Urvashi Dabysing, *Eco-Schools National Operator, Mauritius*

The Seven Steps methodology enables project-based learning and hands-on experiences that empower students with a greater sense of agency. This is particularly important, considering that media coverage of global environmental challenges, including climate change, often leaves children with feelings of despair, anxiety, and apathy. Through the Eco-Schools program, young people are able to engage in their local environment and actively protect it by taking positive action on real-life sustainability issues.

### Advancing Global Citizenship Through Eco-Schools

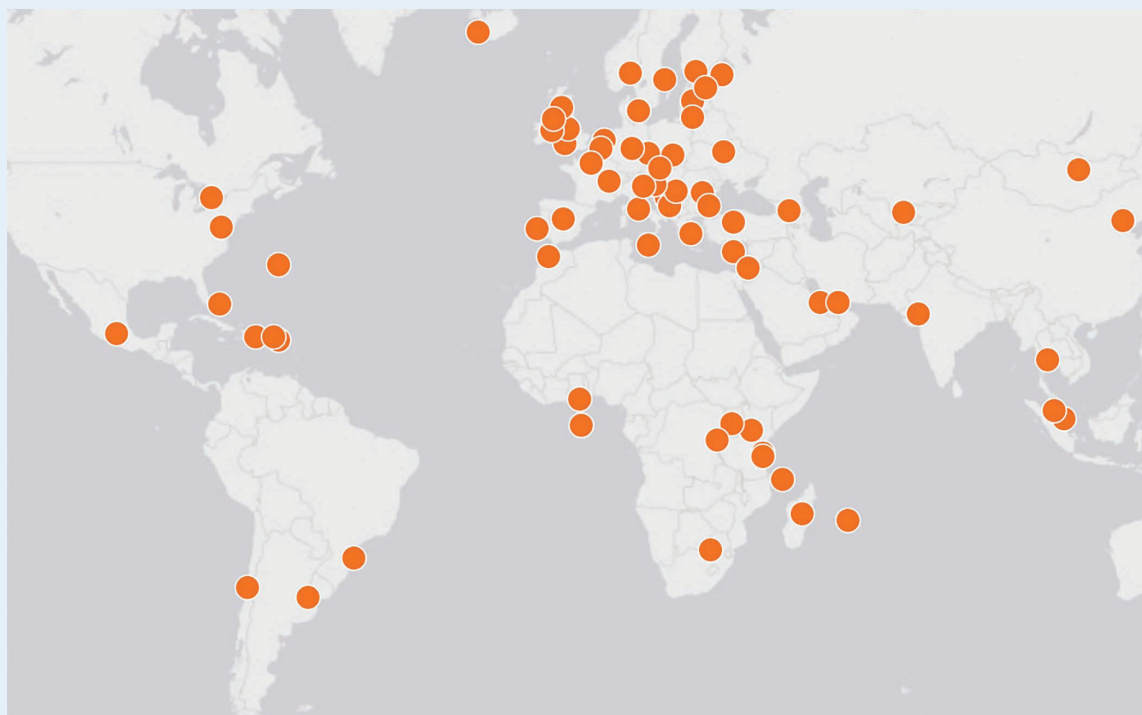
One important aspect of the Eco-Schools program is global citizenship. The program twins schools from different contexts through a common environmental theme. A few years ago, the Eco-Schools program linked up a school in Northern Ireland with a



## Countries involved in the Eco-Schools program

For more information, visit [www.ecoschools.global/national-offices](http://www.ecoschools.global/national-offices)

Argentina	Dominican Republic	Madagascar	Singapore
Australia	England	Malaysia	Slovakia
Bahamas	Estonia	Malta	Slovenia
Belgium – Brussels	Finland	Mauritius	South Africa
Belgium – Flanders	France	Mexico	South Korea
Belgium - Wallonia	Georgia	Mongolia	Spain
Bermuda	Germany	Montenegro	Sweden
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Ghana	Morocco	Switzerland
Brazil	Greece	Netherlands	Tanzania
Bulgaria	Iceland	Northern Ireland	Thailand
Burundi	India	Norway	Turkey
Canada	Ireland	Poland	Uganda
Chile	Italy	Portugal	Ukraine
China	Jordan	Puerto Rico	United Arab Emirates
Comoros	Kenya	Qatar	United States
Croatia	Kuwait	Romania	US Virgin Islands
Cyprus	Latvia	Russia	Uzbekistan
Czech Republic	Lithuania	Scotland	Wales
Denmark		Serbia	Zanzibar





school in Madagascar to do an inquiry-based project on the issue of water. In normal circumstances, the school in Northern Ireland would only have looked at the topic of water from the source, consumption, and wastage perspective and the school in Madagascar only would have looked at it from the access, quality, and sanitation perspective. The program exposed students to different realities of the world and they were able to consider water from different perspectives—consumption, access, quality and quantity, hygiene, and sanitation.

The learning did not stop there; the students considered how to solve the problems they identified. The students in

“

I am very impressed by the Eco-Schools programme. It helps the child move away from the bookish knowledge and apply what they have learnt. The environment has become a cause of grave concern today. This programme sensitises children to the importance of preserving and conserving it. Please keep up the good work!”

› Neeta Roy, Parent, Army Public School, Bangalore, India

Northern Ireland decided to collect funds for the installation of a water hand pump, so that the students in Madagascar would have safe access to quality drinking water. This is empathy

in action, as students went beyond awareness of a problem to feeling motivated to solve it.

### A Key Contributor to ESD

The Eco-Schools program makes a major contribution to ESD across the world. Formation of an Eco-Committee ensures that the process and decision-making is participatory. Environmental issues are integrated into every aspect of the school life and involve all concerned stakeholders along the way. While conducting the Environmental Review, students gain awareness of environmental themes and associated problems that are locally relevant. Moreover, when students develop the Action Plan to engage with identified environmental issues, they acquire understanding and practical experience related to those issues in an interdisciplinary and holistic way. They gain 21st century skills, such as critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and decision-making. In this way, the Eco-Schools program becomes ESD in action. Through the Eco Code, students showcase a new acquired set of objectives, values, and attitudes concerning environmental improvement and protection. While many formal education systems around the world see ESD as an extracurricular activity, Eco-Schools is a vehicle to adopt a whole-school approach toward ESD.

### The Impact of the Eco-Schools Program

From its modest beginnings in a few European countries,







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It changed my perspectives on things that I once turned a blind eye to and it widened my view, enabling me to think outside of the box rather than just staying in my comfort zone. The Eco-Schools programme taught me that despite having different beliefs, different dreams, different races, and just being different in general, we humans are still living on ONE planet. Throughout my four years of being in this programme, I also realised that changes are possible and it is up to us to help make our world a better place so that our future generations could have a chance to live in a world filled with wonders of mother nature.”

› Nojuel JC Soluku, Student, SM St Michael Penampang, Malaysia



the Eco-Schools program has expanded and demonstrated its effectiveness in many countries across the globe. Over the last 27 years, FEE and its member organizations have worked relentlessly and diligently to ensure that education is recognized as a critical driver to achieve sustainable development—an objective that requires continued action.

The impact of the program is well-recognized and respected by institutional partners, such as UNESCO and UN Environment, as well as corporate partners, such as Mars Wrigley Foundation and Alcoa Foundation. For three years in a row, Eco-Schools has been selected by HundrED as one of 100 inspiring innovations that are changing the face of K-12 education. In 2021, the program was included in the HundrED Hall of Fame, a collection that

“The innovation is scalable and has already demonstrated its effectiveness to many countries. The Seven Step Methodology is a series of carefully engineered measures to help schools maximise the success of their Eco-School ambitions. This method involves a wide diversity of individuals from the school community—with students playing a primary role in the process.”

› The HundrED Research Team

gives special recognition to education innovations that have demonstrated sustained growth of impact and scalability.

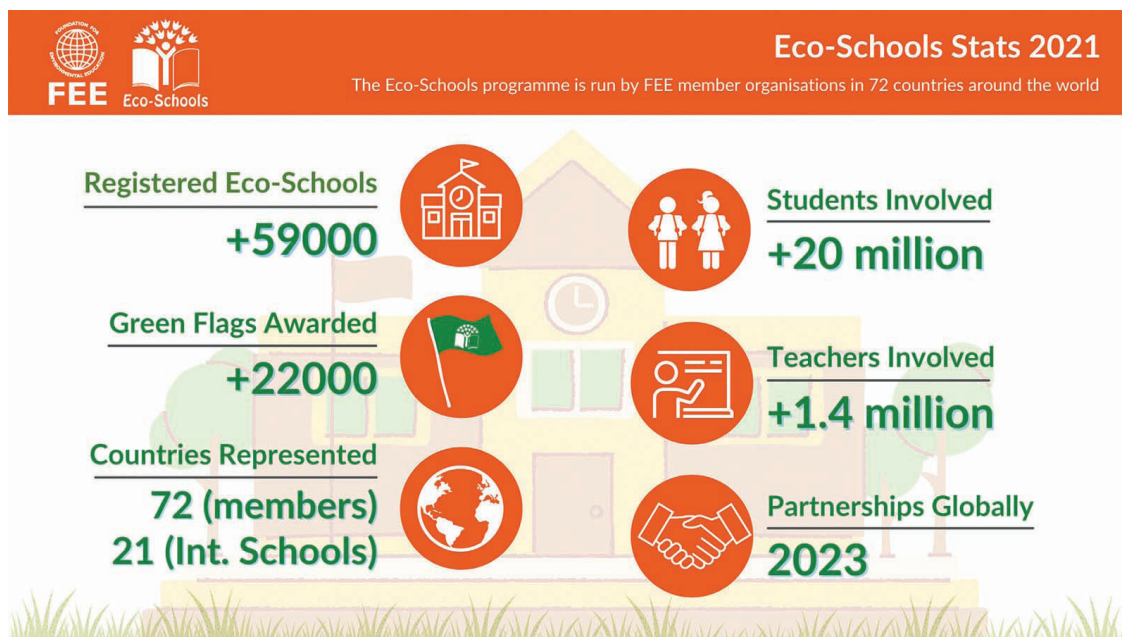
A key publication documenting the impact of Eco-Schools was released in 2019 in connection with the program’s 25th anniversary. The “Changing

Together” publication can be found on the Eco-Schools website ([ecoschools.global/changingtogether-download](https://ecoschools.global/changingtogether-download)).

## Looking Forward

According to UNESCO, education is the most powerful path to sustainability. Yet, 47% of the national curriculums of 100 countries make no reference to climate change. Eco-Schools represents a way for schools to directly overcome national barriers to ESD implementation. The program recognizes that sustainability will be a key factor in years to come and calls for the expectation of achieving a sustainable transition to be reflected in the education system.

As part of FEE’s 10-year strategy GAIA 20:30, the Eco-Schools program will contribute to addressing three major challenges of our time







by: Empowering Climate Action, Protecting Global Biodiversity, and Reducing Environmental Pollution.

### Joining the Eco-Schools Network

If you are inspired to implement the program, you can reach out to an Eco-Schools National Operator in your country. The list of member countries can

be found on the Eco-Schools website. International Schools in countries without an FEE member organization have the option to run the Eco-Schools program directly with the FEE Head office, along with two other FEE educational programs: Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) and Learning About Forests (LEAF).

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Our students have become more aware and passionate about the environment, and, in turn, they are driven to protect our planet. Eco-Schools provides incredible opportunities for students to collaborate, deepen their observation skills, increase their questioning skills, and learn that they can make an impact, no matter their age. Our students have increased their environmental literacy and are eager to share what they know with younger students and our wider community.”

› Jennifer Hertzberg, *Principal, Flint Hill Elementary School, USA*

## Foundation for Environmental Education Principles

- Ensure that participants are engaged in the learning/teaching process.
- Empower participants to take informed decisions and actions on real-life sustainability issues.
- Encourage participants to work together actively and involve their communities in collaborative solutions.
- Support participants to examine their assumptions, knowledge, and experiences, in order to develop critical thinking, and to be open to change.
- Encourage participants to be aware of cultural practices as an integral part of sustainability issues.
- Encourage participants to share inspirational stories of their achievements, failures, and values, to learn from them, and to support each other.



- Continuously explore, test, and share innovative approaches, methodologies, and techniques.
- Ensure that continuous improvements through monitoring and evaluation are central to our programmes.

<https://www.fee.global/>

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