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ACTIVITY NO. 1:
INTERACTIVE REPORT

Environmental

CHALLENGES AND CLIMATE ACTION

PART 5

FOCUS GROUP STUDY WITH VET
LEARNERS (POLAND AND ITALY)



Free publication

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What Vocational Education can do for Climate Action (VEforCA)

Activity No. 1: Interactive report: environmental challenges and climate action

SUMMARY REPORT

Research, Part 5

Focus group study with VET Learners – Poland and Italy

Language version: English

Prepared by:

**Fundacja “Fundusz Inicjatyw” (“Initiative Fund” Foundation)
PROMETEO**

FFI: Agnieszka Stawiszyńska, Dominik Kubas
Prometeo: Carlo Smaldone Villani, Francesca Pastorino Smaldone Villani

within the project

What Vocational Education can do for Climate Action (VEforCA)





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Summary Report Introduction – aims of the focus study.

The focus groups studies were carried out by Partners' institutions (Fundacja "Fundusz Inicjatyw in Poland and PROMETEO in Italy) as part of the project "What Vocational Education can do for Climate Action" (VEforCA). The focus groups study is the third part of the research within the project (apart from desk research, surveys, direct interviews with experts). The study in each Partner's country consists of two focus meetings. The first with a group of at least 5 VET learners. The second with a group of at least 5 VET staff.

The objectives of the research within the project, including the focus groups study, are:

- To identify the environmental issues perceived as particularly urgent and serious by the local communities.
- To identify the environmental challenges which have a direct impact on citizens' daily life.
- To collect climate action case studies related to existing successful initiatives taken in each partner country to involve VETs in climate actions.
- To discuss the relevant case studies (i.e. environmental challenges and related actions) identified through the desk research and inputs collected through the surveys.
- To analyse strengths, weaknesses and potential for replicability of citizen science approaches.
- To identify methods used in VET education in each local context to open up science and boost citizens' participation, in order to understand impact on engaging VETs, especially those with a disadvantaged background and parents, with environmental issues.

Focus groups studies are going to help to reach the project objectives. The process will see the direct involvement of VETs through a "citizens science" approach, turning them in active contributors to the project research, "trackers" of local environmental problems, also by using simple and common digital tools and mobile devices, and "explorers" of new bottom-up solutions to trigger environmental change.

During focus study with VET learners in each Partners' countries the participant were asked about six main questions:

Question no. 1: *What is the most urgent issue from your point of view related to climate change?*

Question no. 2: *Do you think that VET education can play a role in fighting against climate change?*

Question no. 3: *What are the biggest obstacles from your point of view to participating / engagement in citizen science / environmental protection activities?*

Question no. 4: *Could such or similar initiatives be implemented during your vocational education or training?*

Question no. 5: *What was the most impressive thing or activity related to environmental issues that you took part in?*

Question no. 6: *What methods/tools can be used in VET education to open up science and boost citizens', especially those with a disadvantaged background and parents, participation in actions related to environmental issues?*





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Conclusions from studies in Poland and Italy

From studies conducted in two partners' countries, some conclusions can be drawn.

VET disadvantage learners are aware of climate change. The most important environmental challenges in opinion of the participants are: global warming, droughts, melting of glaciers, air and water pollution.

VET learners from both countries think that vocational education can play an important role in fighting climate change, especially in raising the knowledge and awareness of citizens on environmental issues. In the participants' opinions, the VET institutions working with adults have a great potential for pro-environmental and pro-ecological activities.

According to the participants, the biggest obstacles to participation/engagement in citizen science or environmental protection activities are: other life / professional duties of people, an insufficient level of social awareness, the lack of sensitivity, the lack of knowledge.

Study shows that concept of citizen science is not widely known to the participants. Detailed explanation of this type of research allowed some participants to admit that they had heard about such citizen involvement. Polish participants have not yet participated in a formal and structured way in any citizen science initiatives. However, some of them indicated that they would be eager to do it. Italian participants indicated that have already taken part in such activities.

Majority of the participants in both countries took part in some pro-environmental actions in the past (e.g. cleaning the area, environmental campaigns, running for the Earth, event to save wild animals, Fridays for future, Info days).

According to the participants, a good practice in VET sector would be to implement short ecological / environmental modules as a mandatory part of vocational trainings. Good method could be also a practical tasks to be performed by learners during training (practical homework, e.g. collecting data / taking a photo on the way home from the training). The participants also indicated that schools should play a vital role in the process of raising the ecological knowledge and awareness amongst people since their childhood.





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Focus study in Poland

Introduction

The focus group study in Poland with a group of VET learners took place on November 30, 2022. The focus lasted 1 hour and 10 minutes. It started at 8.50 and ended at 10.00.

The participants of the focus group were 6 people (five men and one woman) – past and present participants of the vocational education and training system – who are currently taking part in a vocational course. Previously, they had benefited from career counselling, job placement, and internships.

All focus participants were disadvantaged people / people with fewer opportunities. Participants took part in a discussion in which the moderator asked a total of 6 main questions.

At the end of the focus, the participants received small gifts and a photo of the participants with the moderator was taken.

In the further part of the report, participants will be assigned numbers according to the following rule: P1 - Participant no. 1, P2 - Participant no. 2, etc. to number P6 - Participant no. 6.

The moderator of the focus study was Mrs. Agnieszka Stawiszyńska. The assistant moderator was Dominik Kubas PhD.

Main points of the focus meeting:

1. The moderators welcomed the participants.
2. The participants signed the attendance list and information clauses regarding the processing of personal data.
3. Introduction of participants to the project (project objectives, target groups, planned results) by the moderators.
4. Presentation of the objectives of the focus meeting to the participants (research objectives, participants, how the data will be used).
5. Explaining to the participants the concept of a “citizen science approach”.
6. Conducting a discussion on 6 main topics.
7. Group photo and handing out thank-you gifts to the participants for their participation in the study.

The course of the study

Question 1

The main part of the focus group study began with the matter of the most urgent environmental issues and climate change, including in the local environment of the participants. Question no. 1 to the participants was: What is the most urgent issue from your point of view related to climate change?

The participants' responses during the meeting:

P1:

- Climate change is happening, but there is little ecological awareness of people. I remember from my childhood that there was snow on Christmas Eve and now it's gone.
- Mining resources are a threat. Air pollution causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.





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- Global warming - glaciers are melting, some territories may be under water in the future, e.g. parts of the Netherlands.

P3:

- It does not feel like that in Świdnik, because clouds are dispersed over the airport so that planes can land.

P4:

- You can see the changes in the environment, the weather was different 20 or 30 years ago.

P6:

- There is less snow now in winter than before.

- Crops are affected, there are droughts, the ground is hard.

Question 2

The next point of the meeting was to discuss the role that the VET sector / its staff can play in pro-environmental / climate change-counteracting activities. Question no. 2 to the participants was: Do you think that VET education can play a role in fighting against climate change?

The participants' responses during the meeting:

P1:

- This is very important at the local level. It should be more widely used, public institutions should take care of it.

P2:

- Environmental training is definitely needed.

P1:

- We need to talk a lot about environmental education and get people interested.

P2:

- Someone must point out to me that there is a problem with the climate, as I see it, I believe.

- Ecological meetings are needed.

P1:

- A person has to feel the changes themselves.

P5:

- There is technical progress. The weather has changed, now there is less snowfall. But thanks to this, winter is cheaper, home heating is cheaper, road services use less sand and salt on roads.

- It is not a threat to humans, because there are filters in the chimneys that protect dust emissions. People have knowledge.

- There are many health resorts, rehabilitation helps in overcoming diseases, ensures recovery. There is clean air in spas.

P3:

- They should teach in schools from a very young age.

- People litter. Since childhood you have to learn how not to pollute the air, the environment, not to burn rubber.

Question 3

In the next step, the moderators moved on to issues that make it difficult or impossible for the participants / the public to engage in climate action / participate in citizen science initiatives. Question no. 3 asked to the participants was: What are the biggest obstacles from your point of view to participating / engagement in citizen science / environmental protection activities?.





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The participants' responses during the meeting:

P3:

- People don't segregate garbage because they want to save money.

P5:

- Environmental education must be understandable for listeners, then people will act in a friendly way for the benefit of the environment.

P4:

- I have no direct influence on climate change.
- I segregate garbage, I live in the countryside.
- On a family farm, we do not use too much spraying / artificial fertilizers – in this way we care for health and the environment.

P1:

- People do little because there is little talk about climate change, there is a coal lobby.
- People don't know how to segregate waste properly. In Poland, only 40-50% of waste is recycled.

P6:

- There are not many such actions in my city, or they are conducted during the day when I am on an internship.
- I segregate garbage. I see in the dumpster that sometimes people do not segregate in containers. It is more convenient for people to mix garbage. People burn garbage on garden allotments.
- When I was in Krakow, the air is polluted over the city.

P2:

- People don't participate because they think "because we [do this] and they that " (others litter, destroy – we do not).
- There are different reasons, I'm interested in something else.
- We do not segregate garbage in the estate, many people do not look at it. It would be necessary to set an example that others segregate – because people imitate others.

Question 4

Another point of the meeting was the discussion of citizen science initiatives in the VET sector. Question no. 4 was: Could such or similar initiatives be implemented during your vocational education or training?

The participants' responses during the meeting:

P2:

- Anyone can help scientists.

P5:

- There should be a TV programme on this subject to get the public interested. Films on TV teach how to care for the environment.

P1:

- I read about it. It should be widespread because it is not talked about enough. What speaks to people is their own experience or image.

P2:

- I could get involved in a citizen science initiative, but they'd have to explain the goals to me, explain the activities.

P1:

- An ecological module in another vocational training would always be good, it would increase the knowledge of the students.





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P2:

- It would have to be justified why there is such a module in vocational training.
- Such a module would be a –“repose” from vocational training.

P5:

- Citizen science - data collection would be fun for trainees.

P1:

- It would be a “repose”, because vocational training for a long time is boring.

Question 5

In the next step of the study, pro-environmental actions / activities in which the participants took part were discussed. Question no. 5 for the participants was: What was the most impressive thing or activity related to environmental issues that you took part in?

The participants' responses during the meeting:

P5:

- I took part in the "Piast Run" - the goal was to protect the environment and promote a healthy lifestyle. There were many people of different nationalities. They informed us about environmental protection, and then there was a prize run, hot pea soup.

P2:

- I sort garbage every day.

P1:

- I segregate garbage.
- I turn off the water tap when brushing my teeth. I do small everyday things for the environment.
- I pick up the paper (trash) as it lies on the lawn.

P2:

- People should be explained how wrong they are doing, not condemned.

P3:

- I participated in the "Cleaning Up the World" campaign.

Question 6

The last point of the meeting was to discuss possible practices / tools within the VET sector in order to open it to citizen science and environmental activities. Question no. 6 asked to the participants was: What methods/tools can be used in VET education to open up science and boost citizens', especially those with a disadvantaged background and parents, participation in actions related to environmental issues?

The participants' responses during the meeting:

P4:

- Everyone has so many responsibilities, life issues, problems that hardly anyone thinks about it.
- Special institutions deal with ecology.

P1:

- Not much is said about ecology.

P3:

- I don't know how to help the environment.
- I have a bad association with ecological actions, because I was once punished.

In addition, at the end of the meeting, there were also general statements of the participants:





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P3:

- I have no idea how to increase people's interest in ecology.

P1:

- Nobody is interested in it, e.g. the commune.

- Cameras at the dumpsters make people segregate garbage because they would pay fines. Penalties can sometimes make sense.

P6:

- VET institutions should be involved in environmental initiatives.

P5:

- The subject of "environmental protection" should be in school.

P6:

- People drive cars every day and exhaust fumes are produced. Hybrid cars are coming, but most are traditional engines. On the balcony, you can smell smog / exhaust fumes.

- We need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the focus group study conducted with the participants (learners) of the VET system in Poland.

First, the concept of citizen science is not widely known to the participants. Only a more detailed explanation of this type of research with an indication of examples of citizen science initiatives (e.g. taking pictures of animals / birds, measuring the air temperature outside and entering the result into the mobile application) allowed some participants of the study to admit that they had heard about such citizen involvement in the media, e.g. on TV.

Second, the participants of the study are generally aware of climate change, especially in the context of weather changing before their eyes over the last 2-3 decades. Participants emphasized that currently in Poland the weather in winter is significantly milder than in their childhood / youth.

Third, as the most important environmental challenges, the participants considered climate change, including global warming, droughts, melting of glaciers, rising water levels on the Earth, greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution (including exhaust fumes and smog), insufficient segregation of waste in society.

Fourth, the participants believe that the VET sector / training institutions can play an important role in raising the knowledge and awareness of citizens on environmental issues. In addition to the role that the participants would see for schools (to teach about ecology since childhood), it is VET institutions that work with adults on a daily basis that have great potential for pro-environmental and pro-ecological activities. According to the participants, a good practice would be implementing short ecological modules as part of vocational trainings, or practical tasks to be performed between successive days of the training (practical homework, e.g. collecting data / taking a photo on the way home from the training).

Fifth, the participants in most cases took part in some pro-environmental actions in the past (e.g. cleaning the area, running for the Earth).

Sixth, according to the participants, the biggest obstacle to engaging in ecological actions are other life / professional duties of people and an insufficient level of social awareness that it is important that every person has an impact on the climate and the environment through everyday activities.





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Seventh, the participants of the study have not yet participated in a formal and structured way in citizen science initiatives. However, some of them indicated that they would be ready to do so if the objectives of such an action and the way in which they would carry out their activities/tasks were explained to them, e.g. how they would collect data for scientists.





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Focus study in Italy

Physical data of the focus group

ID# 2

Place: Vercelli (VC), ITALY

Date of the Focus Group: 16th of November, 2022

Number of participants: 6 disadvantaged learners

Assessment of participants

We asked the group of disadvantaged learners who had participated together with the VET teachers (some of them) in the questionnaire, for their willingness to participate in the focus group aimed at learners. We invited all those who had experience in environmental activities or at least had participated in, promoted, helped environmental education campaigns, either for personal or future professional reasons.

The request was made on behalf of Prometeo by the teacher who is in charge of the projects and is the Institute's responsible. The classroom was made with 16 learners and the responsible selected the ones interested in reporting their environmental activities or the ones who had previous experience in environmental campaigns and were arriving from disadvantaged area of the Piedmont region, or interested in carrying out and promoting environmental education actions.

The request generated 6 responses, all equally significant and relevant. It was therefore decided to accept the first 6 requests received, rewarding the speed of response. The time given to join was one day, in the second week of November 2022.

Connection with the Survey

In the proposal it is written that 6 disadvantaged learners should be involved in the surveys and focus groups, selected on the basis of their interest in environmental education and affirmative actions. So, we started from the answers to the survey "What Vocational Education can do for Climate Action (VEforCA) " gave a list of 6 VET learners, 8 VET educators, 4 VET teachers and 2 trainers.

VEforCA Assessment from disadvantaged learners

Question 1

Q1 What is the most pressing issue - from your point of view - related to climate change?

6 answers

- global warming causes pollution
- Pollution
- heating
- pollution
- the melting of ice
- water pollution





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Q1.2 What are the environmental problems perceived as particularly urgent and serious by local communities?

6 answers

- air pollution
- Air pollution
- the smog
- space heating
- waste collection
- garbage collection

Q1.3 What are the environmental challenges that have a direct impact on citizens' daily lives?

6 answers

- use fewer polluting vehicles to move around
- The information of the people
- separate collection
- waste collection
- the fight against smog
- lower air pollution

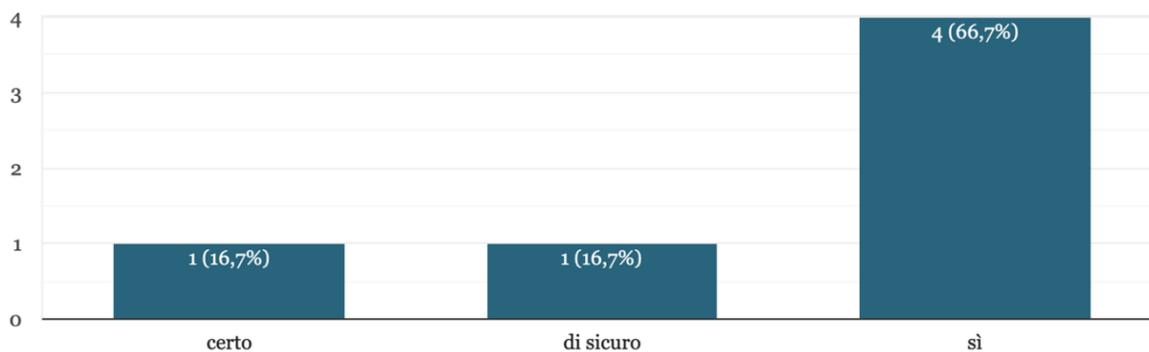
Question 2

Q2 Do you think vocational education can play a role in fighting climate change?

6 answers

Q2 Ritieni che l'istruzione professionale possa svolgere un ruolo nella lotta al cambiamento climatico?

6 risposte



- Certo -> *sure*
- Di sicuro -> *quite sure*





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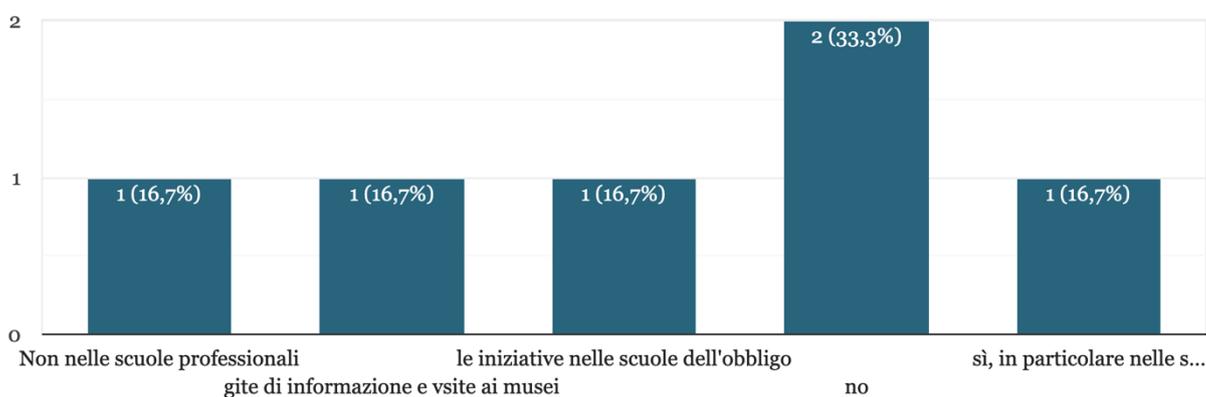
- Sì -> *Yes*

Q2.2 Do you know of any climate action - successful initiatives - undertaken to engage students in climate action?

6 answers

Q2.2 Conoscete qualche azione sul clima - iniziative di successo - intraprese per coinvolgere gli studenti nelle azioni sul clima?

6 risposte



- Non nelle scuole professionali
- *Not in vocational schools*
- Gite di informazione e visite nei musei
- *Information tours and museum visits*
- Le iniziative nelle scuole dell'obbligo
- *Initiatives in compulsory schools*
- No, *No*
- Sì, in particolare nelle scuole elementari e medie
- *Yes, particularly in primary and secondary schools*

Q2.3 Have environmental actions or environmental education been implemented in your learning process?

6 answers

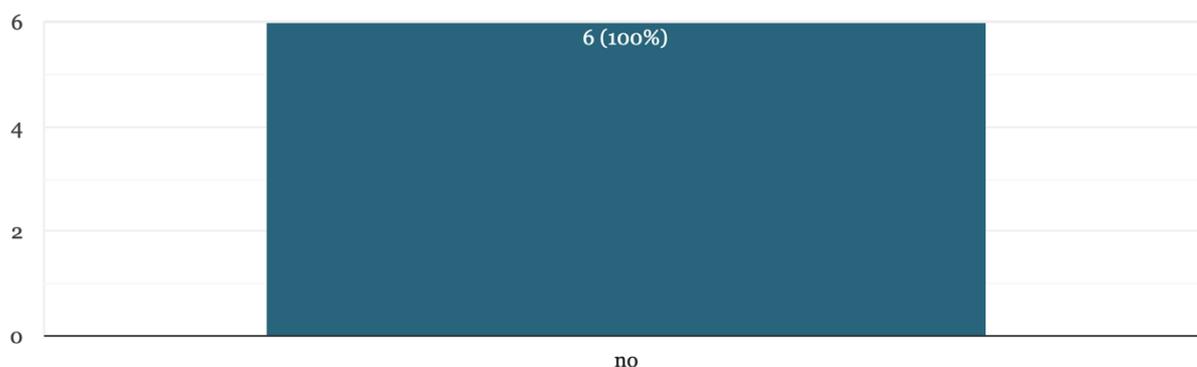




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Q2.3 Le azioni ambientali o l'educazione ambientale sono state implementate nel tuo processo di apprendimento?

6 risposte



Q2.4 What actions can a VET educator take (and what would be the actions of a VET provider) in this regard?

6 answers

- Insert a few hours of training into the courses
- information
- sensitize students
- ask for funds for courses on this topic
- ask to have information courses carried out
- discuss with students

Q2.5 What actions can a VET student take in this regard?

6 answers

- Propose informative activities, such as trips and visits to museums
- encourage teachers to involve them
- ask to spend time on this topic
- ask for more involvement
- encourage teachers to inform
- discuss with teachers

Question 3

Q3 What are the main obstacles - from your point of view - to participation/engagement in citizen science or environmental protection activities?

6 answers

- sensitivity is lacking, and too little is said about it
- the lack of knowledge
- disclosure is lacking, the arguments are not simple
- I don't know





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- lack of sensitivity
- I do not know

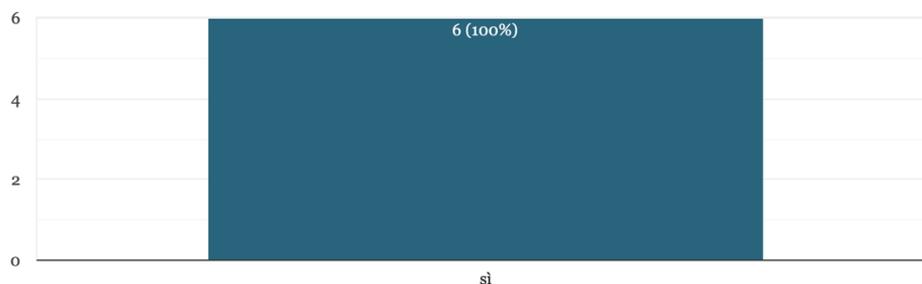
Question 4

Q4 Could similar initiatives be implemented during your education or professional training?

6 answers

Q4 Potrebbero essere implementate iniziative simili durante la tua istruzione o formazione professionale?

6 risposte



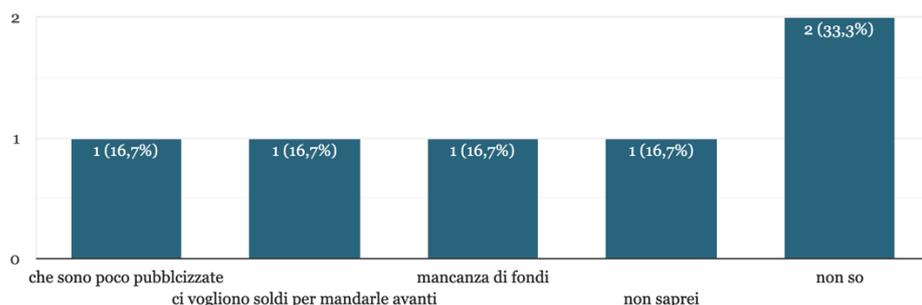
Sì - YES

Q4.2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of these actions?

6 answers

Q4.2 Quali sono i punti di forza e di debolezza di queste azioni?

6 risposte



- Sono poco pubblicizzate
- *They are little publicised*
- Ci vogliono soldi per mandarle avanti
- Per mancanza di fondi
- *It takes money to keep them going*





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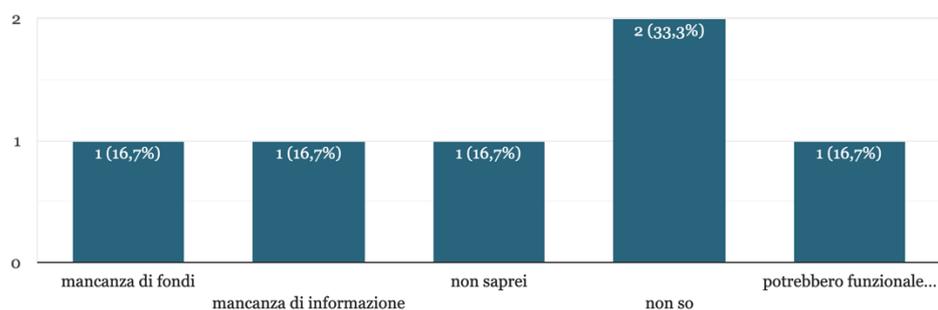
- *Lack of funds*
- Non saprei
- *I don't know*
- Non so
- *I don't know*

Q4.3 Why could/couldn't they be implemented in the VET sector?

6 answers

Q4.3 Perché potrebbero/non potrebbero essere implementati nel settore dell'IFP?

6 risposte



- Mancanza di fondi
- *Lack of funds*
- Mancanza di informazioni
- *Lack of information*
- Non saprei
- *I don't know*
- Non so
- *I don't know*
- Potrebbero funzionare le azioni di informazione semplice
- *Simple information actions could work*

Q4.4 Have you had the chance to be part of any citizen science activities (what kind)?

6 answers

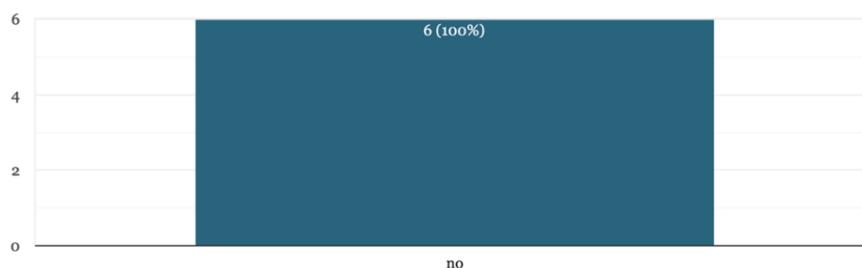




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Q4.4 Hai avuto la possibilità di far parte di qualche attività di citizen science (di che tipo)?

6 risposte



Question 5

Q5 What was the most impressive thing or activity related to environmental issues that you attended?

6 answers

- Environmental campaigns
- Event to save wild animals against killings (like bears and wolves)
- Fridays for future (2 answers)
- Infodays about the climate change and its consequences (2 answers)

Question 6

Q6 What methods/tools can be used in vocational education to open the participation of citizens, especially those with a disadvantaged background and their parents, to science in actions related to environmental issues?

6 answers

- bring a mandatory part on environmental protection into the courses.
- insert courses on purpose
- more involvement in the school
- more publications and information material
- insert hours of specific training in professional courses
- give more space to these topics during the courses





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