



Training for sustainable food systems development

Policy paper



Erasmus+



TRAINING FOR
SUSTAINABLE
FOOD SYSTEMS
DEVELOPMENT



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The context

Shift to sustainable food systems in Europe

A convergence of factors makes the food system one of the most important global issues.

Feeding a projected global population of 9.6 billion in 2050 in the face of global environmental changes and natural resource constraints is one of the main sustainability challenges of this century¹.

Food represents our cultural identity and tries to remind us every day that we are part of Nature. The dominant trend is an increasing separation between the land and the food products, as well as the extension of the food chain: the increasing distance between places of production and places of its consumption breaks the links with nature and culture. Meanwhile, we face a constant decrease in agricultural soil area.

According to the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, a sustainable food system is *“a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised”*².

Sustainable food systems are delivered in a way that contributes to social well-being and maintains ecosystem health. They can be considered as resilient systems in which when the perturbations threaten to affect the performance of the system, feedback mechanisms re-establish the alignment of the ecosystem. In fact, a sustainable food system, resources, actors and activities align dynamically around sustainability principles.

For this reason, sustainability requires reflexivity: that is, the ability to review objectives and strategies on a continuous basis, involving a large range of stakeholders. This may be necessary when system knowledge increases, or when solutions to trade-offs, contradictions or conflicts of interest are needed. A policy for sustainable food systems should therefore be framed as a transition policy where its outcomes are constantly updated and clarified³.

At an EU level there is a great variety of food-related policies. This leaves for several contrasts because they're not coherent and integrated. This means there is scope to strengthen policy coherence and coverage and target actors with influence. Moving to a food systems approach will require improving policy coordination and coherence at EU level. This is not only a challenge, but an opportunity for the EU to play a role in innovation, trade, health, wealth generation and geopolitics⁴. The EU has a long-term sustainability vision of 'living well, within the limits of our planet' by 2050.

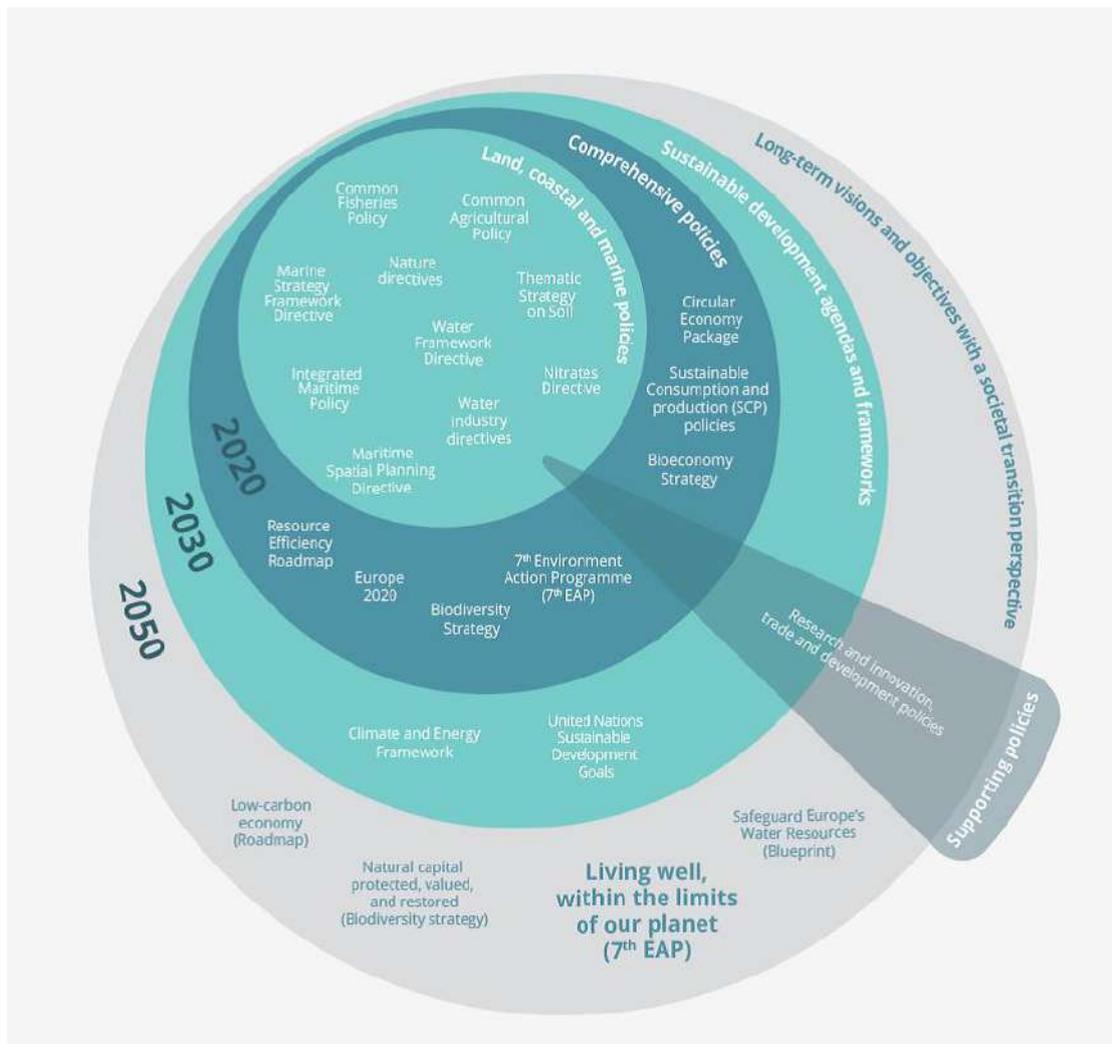
¹ EEA – European Environment Agency, 2017. Food in a green light: A systems approach to sustainable food, Copenhagen.

² HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

³ Pushkarev (EPHA), Becheva (FoEE), de la Vega and Schmidt (IFOAM EU), Agrillo (Slow Food) 2018. Transitioning towards sustainable food systems in Europe.

⁴ Maggio, A., Van Criekinge, T. and Malingreau, J. P., 2015, Global food security 2030. Assessing trends with a view to guiding future EU policies, JRC Science and Policy Reports, Joint Research Centre, Brussels

Fig. 1 EU policies for food and sustainability until 2050. Source EEA



Public policies are fundamental to support sustainable solutions at all stages of the food chain. Promoting and developing sustainable actions require people to change their behaviour and habits. Awareness, education and social engagement are key for developing participation and responsible behaviour among the community. Based on the principles of participation, empowerment and individual and collective responsibility, all of us are involved in fixing our food system. A sustainable food system integrates several components in order to create value in the ecological, social, nutritional and economic dimensions for the community⁵.

The green skills in the food sector

The Europe 2020 Strategy recognises the central role of the transition towards a green, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy in achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth⁶.

Despite differences of perspective and definitions among stakeholders, the 'green economy' is often seen as an economy that pursues growth while also promoting sustainable development through more efficient use of resources. Thus, aligned with concepts of sustainability, the

⁵ Diesis, 2016. How social enterprises contribute to sustainable food systems.

⁶ Some examples: United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development -Rio+20 (2012); UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals; the Paris Climate Agreement (2014), Green Employment Initiative and the circular economy policy package (2015/2016).

objective of a green economy in the food sector is to simultaneously work toward economic development, environmental protection, and greater social welfare.

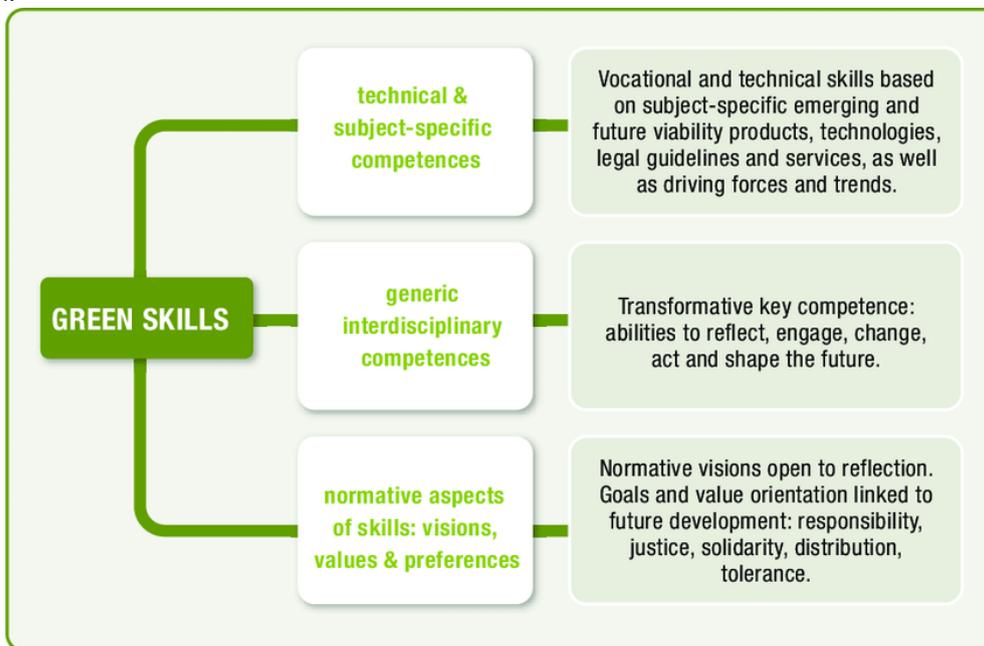
Based on the definition adopted by the European Commission, the green skills⁷ are 'environmental awareness skills refer to the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes [in the general population] needed to live in, develop and support a society which reduces the impact of human activity on the environment. These generic "green" skills include the capacity to include environmental concerns alongside others (such performance and safety) in taking decisions, including the choice of processes and technologies⁸.'

Therefore, green skills do not only mean technical expertise but also skills and competences to implement sustainable development approach like:

- Understands and values equality and diversity, inclusivity and social cohesion;
- Ethical;
- Understands the importance of collective intelligence when making decisions create far-reaching impact;
- An inclusive and sensitive communication style that engenders trust;
- Ability to see the bigger picture (the impact a decision will have on the environment, economy and society);
- Commitment to developing sustainable solutions with Innovative and creative approach to problem-solving to develop sustainable solutions.

Fig. 2 Categorising green skills.

Source: DL&AS, translation research and strategy lab, LiquA. Cedefop, OECD (2015). Green skills and innovation for inclusive growth.



The green skills learning programmes should take into consideration that the needed competences are not solely practical.

The complexity and multisectoral aspect, which characterise the green challenge, require new solutions, involving many sectors and often need a cross-sectoral approach. This demand interdisciplinary skills to create shared problem definitions and shared solving perspectives. New value chains emerge from or transform existing ones, so competences of cooperation and interaction between organisations are needed to devise more sustainable solutions. As a further

⁷ There are several definitions of green skills. www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=TVETipedia+Glossary+A-Z&id=232

⁸ EU commission (Skills panorama) 2015, Europe.

important category is the normative aspects of skills, these must also be addressed as they reflect societal and cultural values and visions⁹.

Therefore, the transition to a green economy requires a workforce with the right skills. This includes not only skills in the low carbon and environmental goods and services sector, but also those needed to help all businesses to use natural resources efficiently and sustainably and to be resilient to climate change. The evidence gathered in the course of the project on green skills¹⁰ made in the skills strategy for England (Skills for Sustainable Growth) indicates that in general businesses are currently not certain about their future green skills needs. That said, some sectors do identify specific skills needs, including energy generation, the construction industry and the food and agriculture sectors.

The green transformation in education and training: creating awareness through multisectoral training

Within the context of the 2050 vision of 'living well, within the limits of our planet', the European Commission is discussing the notion of a 'European brand' for a sustainable society in which economic growth is compatible with planetary boundaries and benefits are fairly distributed¹¹.

There is a clear need to complement broad sustainability goals with concrete knowledge to inform and train all the actors involved in the food system transition or transformation processes.

The European project T4F 'Training for Sustainable Food System Development' aims to respond to this issue through training addressed to professionals of the food sector and its new generation of workers, in order to develop their 'green skills' and drive the green growth. The main objectives of the training program are:

- fulfil the lack of competences and training needs in the field of sustainability for workers of the agro-food sectors;
- stimulate the development of green professionals and improve the professional competence, cooperation and competitiveness in alternative food systems;
- offer specialised training contents on sustainable practices in the food sector;
- promote the green social entrepreneur as a new professional figure.

After a brief research for identifying the training needs in the field of sustainability for workers of food sectors in each country involved in the project (Spain, Italy and Belgium) we designed a framework for T4F training programme.

Although there are different training programs on sustainability related to the food sector, a good level of knowledge, skills and competences in this direction are still missing. All training programs observed covered specific issues related to the transition towards sustainable food systems as well as they were addressed to a very specific target (chefs or farmers or students, etc.). It is important to ensure basic understanding of sustainability issues surrounding food. The following step is to provide the knowledge and skills to manage and implement a smart and sustainable growth in the field of the food system. Life programme has demonstrated how it is possible to create green jobs and to develop green skills as well as it can help in the further greening of the

⁹ Cedefop; OECD (2015). Green skills and innovation for inclusive growth. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series.

¹⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Department of Energy and Climate Change. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Skills for a green economy. A report on the evidence © Crown Copyright 2011. URN 11/1315.

¹¹ EPSC, 2016, Sustainability now! A European vision for sustainability, EPSC Strategic Notes, Issue 8, European Political Strategy Centre. https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/strategic_note_issue_18.pdf

workforce all over the EU. With this in mind, it is essential to develop new vocational training in order to re-skill the professionals of the food sector towards 'green thinking'.

Our education systems need to prepare students/professionals with the skills required by alternative emerging markets.

The T4F Framework provides a comprehensive and coherent description of attitudes, skills and competences needed to create professionals of food sectors towards more sustainable food system. It will also be useful to the institutes in order to assess their training offer and evaluate what are the attitude, approach and key skills that they should enhance in their country in order to provide and implement specific training courses.

The T4F Training has been designed in eight integrated modules for standard vocational training in the food sector. It offers theoretical and practical contents on sustainability matters. The training envisages working transversely with competencies that cover all dimensions of the concept of sustainability.

Evaluating the lack of skills and competencies identified in training needs research conducted for each country by the partners, has determined the activities and the tasks selected. Then those activities and tasks have been transformed into the following 4 areas of activities and 8 units of the training programme:



The T4F training programme is designed taking into account existing ECVET guides and recommendations, in particular the set most closely related to learning outcomes, learning outcome units and the assessment of learning outcomes.

Policy recommendations

The T4F policy paper aims to offer a set of recommendations to support education and training for the transition towards sustainable food systems at local, national and European level.

In the last publication of Cedefop concerning skills for green jobs, it is underlined that as the developments since 2010 reveal, countries use different approaches to define and measure 'green occupations'. However, strategies, policies and regulations that focus explicitly on green skills and employment are scarce.

Moreover taking into consideration all the activities carried out during the project and all the outputs produced, the paper focuses its attention on three main aspects:

- ✓ Training at schools. *Sustainable food: why should we be trained in the Horeca sector?*
- ✓ Training for professionals. *Green skills and food: how can we gain knowledge to develop the enterprise in a sustainable way?*
- ✓ Inform citizens. *Sustainable food for all: what are the communication and awareness-raising challenges?*

During the final conference of the project on the 25th of September 2019, in Brussels, three policy co-creation workshops were realised in order to explore opportunities and challenges of training for sustainable food systems. Moreover the partnership decided to adopt a bottom-up approach by involving the direct stakeholders directly in the design phase.

Following in the paper are presented the results of the co-creation workshops mentioned above. This policy paper is addressed to various stakeholders such as policy-makers, trainers, professionals and organisations of the third sector in the food sector at local/ regional, national and European levels.

For policy makers

We put forward the following policy recommendations, in the conviction that the Training for Sustainable Food Systems is an excellent tool to promote the transition towards more sustainable patterns. Our training has great potential to impact on the Horeca training sector as well as professionals of the food sector. In addition, to raise awareness of society in order to help third sector stakeholders to better prepare themselves to meet the societal challenges currently facing Europe.

Policy makers at regional/national and EU level should:

- **Increase the level of public knowledge** of green skills and competences because they are relevant not only in the food sector, but also in other areas (entrepreneurship, communication, cultural heritage).
- **Forecast financial support** in order to promote the greener transition of food enterprises. This would be an important incentive for the entrepreneurs who would like to invest in the re-skilling of their workers. Especially for the medium and small enterprises.
- **Develop new programmes** for new occupations related to green employment or making adjustments to existing programmes/occupations.
- **Encourage the importance of training the trainers** on sustainable transitions. These developments demand that trainers develop skills and provide knowledge to ease transitions to green economies and societies.
- **Advocate the collaboration** between the public authorities (EU or national) and other relevant stakeholders to improve awareness on the importance of the green transition through social dialogue at all levels.

- **Support the networks of civil society actors** advocating the transition to a sustainable food system. It is crucial to secure an active role for social partners and civil society in the design, application and monitoring of national sustainable development policies.

For trainers and professionals

The T4F project tested and evaluated the training materials among students and trainers of the Horeca sector in three schools based in Spain, Italy and Belgium. Furthermore, the materials produced (training material and toolkit for trainers and professionals and assessment) were presented to national and European stakeholders during the final conference in Brussels.

The impact of eco-innovation on the quality of jobs, the skills and competences required, is another most relevant aspect to consider. The availability of dedicated skills for green jobs plays a crucial role in triggering change and facilitating sustainable transition (Cedefop, 2013).

Properly trained, skilled employees are an important precondition for further growth of employment in the environmental protection sector. Lack of skilled specialists is already impeding development.

Education institutions and VET providers should:

- **Engage in the update of current curricula** with a green skills approach. This translates into new skill sets that necessitate curriculum updates or even new qualifications across education and training levels. In order to ensure that quality training is developed, this process requires: having trainers with sufficient knowledge of new skills and new training methods; and fostering the adaptability of skills standards to the ever-changing needs of the overall economy.
- **Promote the T4F Framework and Training materials** at the European level by European stakeholders involved in promoting awareness and competences on green skills, sustainable development (eg. EUFIC; Food 2030; cross links with other Erasmus project on the sectors) by featuring T4F as good practice while promoting training for sustainable food systems.

Additional Recommendations

As analysed in various studies, there is a need to build a food policy framework at the EU level around strategic tools aimed at the integration and coherence between policies, the reorganisation of existing tools, and the introduction of new instruments when necessary in order to delineate the transition towards sustainable food systems¹⁴. As highlighted in the IPES FOOD report 'Towards a Common Food Policy for the EU'¹⁵ there are still conflicting objectives of existing policies in the food sector. New governance architecture for food systems, a concrete vision of the policy reform and its realignment are required in order to deliver sustainable food systems.

Based on the results emerged during the workshop done in the framework of T4F project, the stakeholders of the food sectors consider that the EU policy framework has various contradictions and should foster the balance direct regulation, market-based, knowledge-related, governance and strategic tools into an effective policy mix to systemically address all the factors that are blocking the transition of the food systems.

¹⁴ Pushkarev (EPHA), Becheva (FoEE), de la Vega and Schmidt (IFOAM EU), Agrillo (Slow Food) 2018. Transitioning towards sustainable food systems in Europe.

¹⁵ IPES FOOD, 2019. Towards a common food policy for the European Union. The policy reform and realignment that is required to build sustainable food systems in Europe. http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_FullReport.pdf

Conclusion

Food systems are multiple and complex and require a holistic approach. They have many entry points and require better connections to be made between different sectors and stakeholders in order to bring about a transition towards more sustainable food production and consumption.

It is necessary to take a multilevel approach from the global to the regional scale of the food chain, as well as a multidimensional approach of economic, social and environmental sustainability as the Brundtland report recommends.

The new EU policy framework needs to reflect and pursue economic, social, ecological, health, ethical and resilience aspects simultaneously through a transition policy.

This transition policy should involve a profound revision of existing regulatory framework and their knowledge base. It should acknowledge the existence of different types of barriers to change and system 'lock-ins' that constrain the current pathway of evolution of the food system to sustainability.

The adequate training programmes tailored to different targets can be a key actor of this transition, but it requires not only valid training programmes but also tools and measures to promote the implementation of them such as: financial supports, benefit, incentives for enterprises, directives for schools, obligations for formative credits.



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