

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

---

**H**uman beings are responsible for a number of crises which threaten the very future of life on earth. For centuries, we have treated the planet as if its natural resources were limitless and as if we could spoil them, use them and then discard them. We have spilt billions of litres of oil into the seas, cleared millions of acres of rainforest, mined deep underground, producing toxic slag heaps, stripped the natural minerals from the soil through industrial farming methods, and filled the atmosphere with dangerous levels of carbon dioxide, leading to potential climate breakdown. The list could be continued, but the last item alone could put an end to all life on earth.

However, there is now a growing realisation that such profligate practices are not only harmful for other living creatures on the planet, they are also potentially fatal for humans. In developing countries, in particular, the results are already being seen: droughts, hurricanes and other natural disasters are destroying people's homes and livelihoods and are also a major factor in the flood of refugees seeking a better life. Many of these refugees are ending up in Europe, making it more difficult for our politicians to avert their gaze from problems in less developed countries. Europe has perhaps contributed more than any other region to these problems. Now we need to recognise our role in causing them, and play an active part in trying to resolve them.

Education is one means of doing so. It is the next generations who will increasingly see the consequences of climate change – and other problems – and the consequences will not be confined to the less developed regions. Already Europe has seen increasingly erratic and extreme weather events, and these will increase in future years. So young people need to understand and take the lead both in adopting more sustainable lifestyles and in creating solutions for the region as a whole.

This manual is a practical tool to begin that process. It is designed primarily for youth workers and educators to introduce the topic of sustainability to young people in a non-formal setting. However, it will also be suitable for groups of youth workers, youth leaders or educators who may be looking for training on the topic of sustainability. By means of the activities in the main body of the manual, young people and those who work with them can familiarise themselves with some of the problems facing the globe, and begin to discuss solutions. The last two chapters of the manual take matters further: this is an opportunity for youth groups to begin to make a difference in their locality, and perhaps beyond.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### **Chapter 2. Sustainability: the issues**

Chapter 2 looks at the definition of "sustainability" and "sustainable development" and describes the international efforts to put sustainability on the agenda of national governments, in particular through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The last section of the chapter explores Europe's record on sustainability.

### **Chapter 3. Education and youth work for sustainability**

Chapter 3 introduces the idea of education for sustainability and includes some practical and methodological advice for running the activities in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 4. Activities**

Chapter 4 includes 18 activities on sustainability, at different levels of complexity and addressing a number of different issues. Each activity contains detailed instructions, and some also provide additional background information. The last part of each activity makes some suggestions for how young people can take forward the work done in the session and begin to make a difference in their communities.

## **Chapter 5. Making a difference**

Chapter 5 will help you with supporting your group to take action in the community: it offers some background principles and methodological advice, including on planning actions with a group. It also contains a number of examples of groups “making a difference”, which you can use as inspiration.

## **Chapter 6. Sustainability checklist**

Chapter 6 contains a number of ideas which the group could implement, for example in the youth centre, in the locality, or even at international meetings.