European Academy of Nursing Science 2025 Environmental Sustainability Survey

Executive Summary

Background

The European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS) holds annual summer schools for nurses who are PhD students at European universities. EANS has recently developed an environmental sustainability policy and behaviour change intervention that attempts to give summer school participants, including faculty and students, opportunities for choosing environmentally sustainable behaviours, and tries to increase the capability and motivation of individuals to do so.

Method

The 2025 summer school was held in Mataró in Catalonia, Spain, and was attended by 136 students and teaching faculty. We surveyed these participants using an online survey developed and hosted using the European Commission's 'EUSurvey' tool. We designed the survey to: determine the extent to which participants were aware of the EANS policy; how much they used the capability and motivational tools presented to them; their views on the policy itself; their travel and dietary behaviours during the summer school; any suggestions for improvements in both the policy and the manner in which is communicated; their attitude to the climate crisis. We collected quantitative and qualitative data.

Results

101 (74.3%) summer school participants returned the survey, evenly spread across student years and teaching faculty. The number of participants who answered the respective open questions ranged from < 10 to 67. Numerical and narrative data were confirmatory.

The vast majority of respondents were concerned about the climate crisis, considered it in their daily life choices, and were aware of the relationship between the climate crisis and health/healthcare. Almost all were aware of the EANS policy, but much less so in terms of the tools provided, with at most, 41% of respondents being aware of any tools. Respondents felt that EANS had given them some opportunity to make sustainable choices, but the information given had less impact on their individual capabilities or motivations. For three quarters of respondents the information given led to no changes in behaviour.

The majority of respondents (88%) travelled to the summer school by aviation, less so for those living in southern Europe (67%) compared to western (91%) and northern (100%) Europeans (as defined by the UN Geoscheme). For the majority, the reason given was that the location was inconvenient for ground based travel due to the distance from participants' homes and the summer school. Other reasons, such as caring responsibilities, general inconvenience of ground-based travel, cost and the need to take additional time off, whilst cited, were all endorsed by less than 30% of respondents.

Once at Mataró, respondents reported the venue to be accessible from their accommodation by environmentally sustainable means, mainly because of the closeness of the hotel. Consuming plant based foods was very easy for participants, slightly less so at formal events, but respondents were much less positive about single use plastics at the summer school venue, which they found hard to avoid using.

Suggestions for EANS from the narrative data included more website visibility on the efforts EANS is making on environmental sustainability, integration of climate health in the curriculum and the choice of more central venues to make travel easier.

Discussion

The EANS environmental sustainability policy has been well disseminated and is known about by almost all respondents. However, most respondents did not use the ground-based travel tools and climate calculators in the policy. Respondents rated the policy as having given them some opportunities for environmentally sustainable behaviour, but this was confined to within venue travel and dietary choices. Respondents were not made more capable nor motivated to undertake environmentally sustainable behaviours as a result of the policy, principally because they were already concerned about the impact of the climate crisis. Respondents suggested that EANS could make the policy and efforts to promote environmental sustainability more visible on the EANS website, for example with a 'Green EANS' tab.

Despite respondents' environmental and climate concerns, for EANS summer school students and faculty, there is a strong "*inaction attitude behaviour gap*" (Scott, Kallis, & Zografos, 2019; Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021), whereby the vast majority of summer school participants are concerned, knowledgeable and motivated around the climate crisis but equally, a similar majority undertake climate damaging behaviours such as travelling by plane in order to attend the summer school. They regard this mainly as a consequence of the location being inconvenient for non-aviation travel methods, rather than other reasons such as the need to travel quickly in order to care for dependents. As a consequence, they suggested that EANS chooses more central European locations for summer schools.

In contrast, the ability to eat a plant-based diet was rated as a major opportunity at the summer school, although respondents were highly critical of the excess use of single-use plastic in the lunches provided by the venue.

Modelling work by the EANS sustainability committee, and policies adopted by some European universities (e.g. KU Leuven), suggests that only those participants whose journeys are between eight to 13 hours (i.e. between 700-1000kms) are able to travel by ground-based means to a summer school. For EANS, the majority of participants at EANS summer schools come from western or northern European countries. If event venues are in central European locations we estimate that between 40-50% of participants will have the opportunity to choose ground-based travel according to the above distance/time criteria. Siting summer schools in southern Europe will provide fewer participants with these opportunities. As a consequence, the overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for such events will be higher than those held in central or more northerly locations, despite any other environmentally sustainable policies adopted by event venues.

Recommendations

1. In general, EANS should choose summer school locations as close as possible to the countries of residence of most participants who attend. These locations are likely to be within western or northern Europe. When southern European venues are chosen, EANS should be aware of the increase in GHG emissions caused by this decision making, and limit these choices to no more than one per three years, ideally four years, given that a southern European event can have three times the emissions of a central one. Indeed, EANS might consider adopting a formal policy whereby summer schools are rotated around western, northern and southern Europe on a three-four yearly cycle.

2. For participants who live within 1000kms and/or an 8-13 hour ground-based journey duration of the summer school venue, EANS should provide assistance to help with individual's capability and motivation to make these choices. The EANS sustainability group is willing to do so, and has the tools to calculate which participants this applies to. Assistance should include online seminars and one-to-one mentoring.

3. The use of single use plastics by event venues should be discouraged.

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Report

1. Response rate

101 out of 136 summer school participants returned the survey, a response rate of 74.3%. The number of participants who answered open questions ranged from <10 to 67.

2. Respondent characteristics

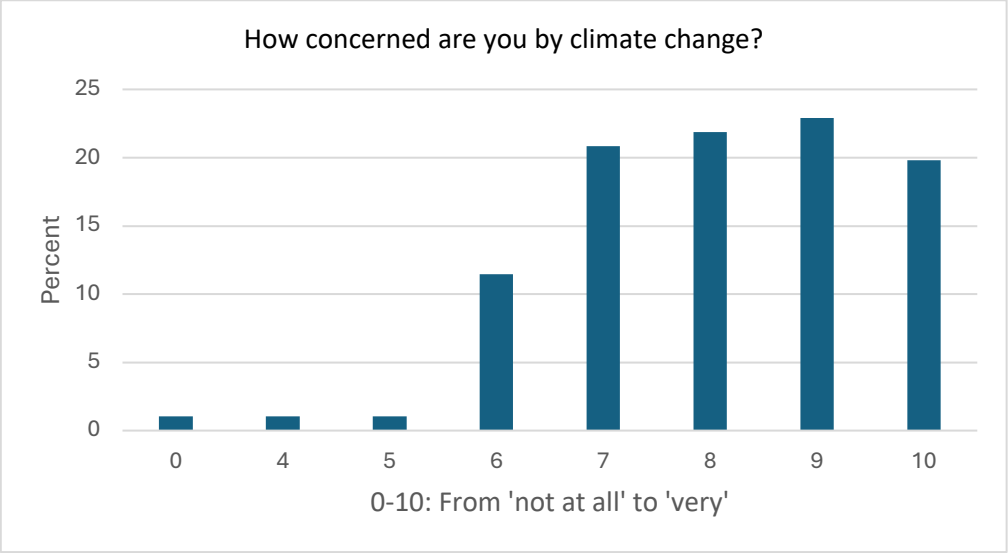
a) Student or faculty participant

Participant	N	%
First Year	27	26.7
Second Year	28	27.7
Third Year	24	23.8
Teacher	14	13.9
Other	1	1.0
Prefer not to say	5	5.0
Non-response	2	2.0

b) Home region

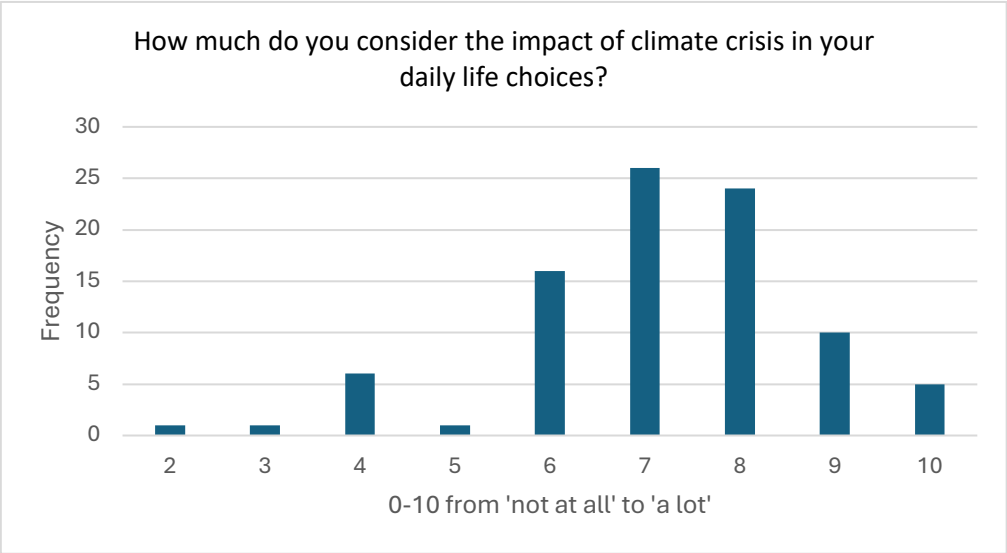
Region	N	%
Southern Europe	24	23.8
Western Europe	46	45.5
Northern Europe	31	30.7

c) Concern about climate change



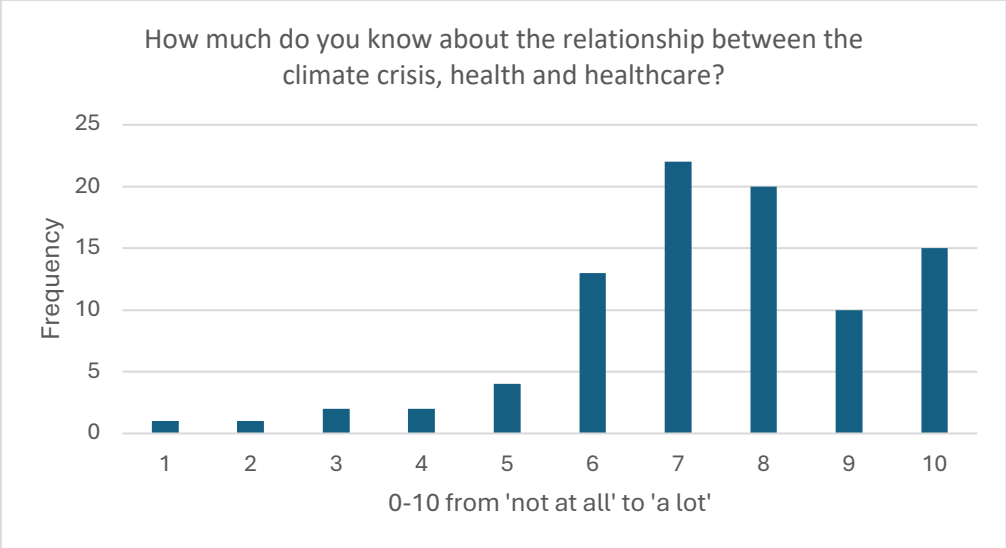
N=96, mean 8.03, SD, 1.63, range 0-10

d) Extent to which respondents consider climate crisis in daily life choices



N=90, mean 7.16, SD 1.58, range 2-10

e) Knowledge of relationship between climate crisis and health/healthcare



N=90, mean 7.43, SD 1.90, range 1-10

Summary: respondents were evenly spread across student years and teaching faculty, with all groups well represented. The majority of respondents were from western and northern Europe, none were from eastern Europe and less than one quarter from southern regions. Respondents were overwhelmingly concerned about the climate crisis, the majority (90%) considered it in their daily life choices, and a similar proportion were aware of the relationship between the climate crisis and health/healthcare.

3. Awareness and impact of the EANS Environmental Sustainability Policy and its Contents

97 (96%) of all respondents were aware of the EANS policy.

a) Respondents were aware of the policy through the following routes:

Communication Route*	n	%
Summer school handbook	58	57.4
Attendance at a previous summer school	43	42.6
Word of mouth	28	27.7
EANS website	26	25.7
EANS meetings	21	20.8
Policy document	19	18.8
EANS conference workshop	10	9.9
EANS newsletters	6	5.9
Other	2	2.0

*respondents could choose more than one communication route

b) Respondents reported receiving the following **capability** resources, contained in the handbook

Resource	N	%
Trainline	30	29.7
Rome2Rio	15	14.9
Seat 61	6	5.9

c) Respondents reported receiving the following **motivational** resources, contained in the handbook

Resource	N	%
EU Carbon Calculator	41	40.6
TravelandClimate.org	9	8.9

d) On three 0-10 scales from 0 = 'no difference' to 10 = 'a big difference' respondents rated the extent to which information provided to them by EANS gave them **opportunities**, and increased their **capability** and **motivation** to make environmentally sustainable choices:
   a. **Opportunity**: mean 6.59, SD 2.1, range 2-10;
   b. **Capability**: mean 4.3, SD 3.0, range 0-10;
   c. **Motivation**: mean 5.0, SD 3.1, range 0-10

e) Sixteen respondents (15.8%) reported that the information given to them by EANS had made them change some of their travel plans. Narrative responses to open questions indicated that these were changes to local within-location travel, such as taking public transport not taxis. Twenty percent of respondents reported that the information given by EANS caused them to change their accommodation choices and 26% their diet.

f) Respondents suggested some ideas to better communicate the EANS environmental sustainability policy, including enhanced communication via the EANS website (a 'Green EANS' tab), improvement of information channels like regular newsletters dealing with sustainability issues, environmental sustainability as topic in summer school lessons, incentives, and recognition for those that take a more sustainable position.

Summary: the existence of the EANS environmental sustainability policy has been very well communicated to summer school participants, principally through the handbook but also via a range of other communication routes. However, there is much less awareness of the tools provided by

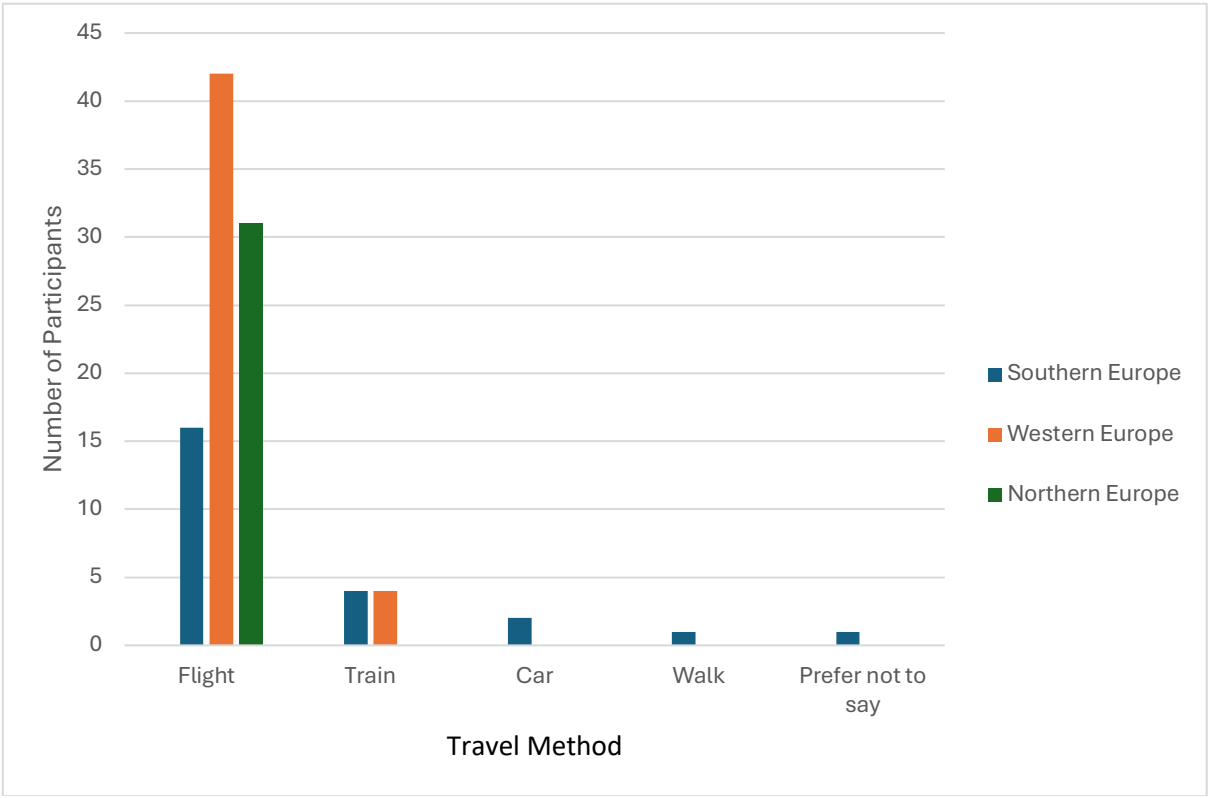
EANS to improve people's capability for choosing environmentally sustainable travel. At most, 41% of respondents reported being aware of one carbon calculator, with awareness of the other tools being much less. Respondents felt that EANS had given them some opportunity to make sustainable choices, above the mid-point of the questionnaire scale, but the information given had less impact on their individual capabilities or motivations, which were at, or below, the mid-point in the scales. The information given led to change in behaviour for no more than a quarter of respondents. A number of suggestions were made regarding communication of the policy by EANS, including more visibility on the website, integration of environmental sustainability into the summer school curriculum, incentives to take the more environmentally sustainable option, and recognition for those that do so.

4. Respondent travel to the summer school

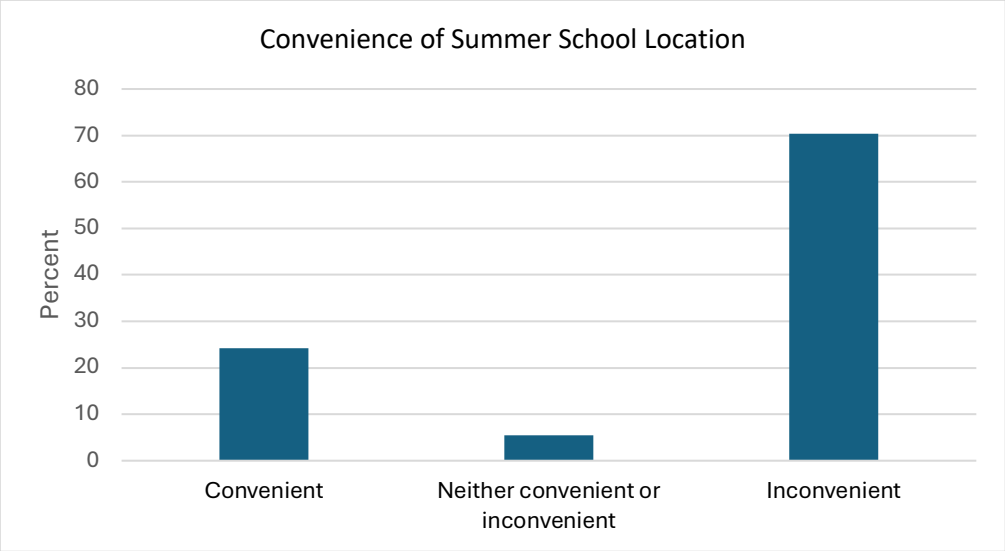
a. Respondents used the following travel methods to attend the summer school

Travel Method	N	%
Flight	89	88.1
Train	8	7.9
Car	2	2.0
Walk	1	1.0
Prefer not to say	1	1.0

b. This differed slightly by the participants' home region of Europe:



c. Reasons for travel choices: 70% of respondents cited that the location of the summer school was not convenient for rail or other ground based travel methods



d. This was confirmed by respondents' cited reasons for not taking a ground-based travel option:

Reason not to take a ground based travel option	n	%
Distance	77	76.2
Caring responsibilities	30	29.7
General inconvenience of ground based travel	21	20.8
Cost of ground based travel	20	19.8
Additional time off work not allowed	18	17.8
Not motivated to take ground based travel options	4	4.0
Insufficient knowledge	2	2.0
Not convinced about climate change	1	1.0
Other	5	5

*respondents could choose more than one reason

e. These results were confirmed by the responses to the open questions. Distance to the summer school was considered too far to use ground-based transport by many participants. Lack of funding and lack of time were also mentioned as reasons to prevent participants choosing the more environmentally friendly option.

f. Sixteen (15.8%) of respondents reported that their employer or home university provided financial or other incentives to choose environmentally sustainable travel options. These included increased expenses for train travel in Erasmus programmes and in specific university regulations, first class rail travel as a perk, restrictions on choosing air travel where journeys last less than one day, no admin fee for train bookings, and environmental compensation payments where air travel taken.

g. The narrative data included repeated suggestions for train connections from central stations in Europe. It was suggested that EANS should choose central European locations as summer school locations, cover the additional costs of ground-based travel, and provide incentives to travel by train.

Summary: the majority of respondents travelled to the summer school by aviation. 67% of southern Europeans flew to the summer school, compared to 91% of western Europeans. All

northern Europeans flew. The majority of respondents stated that opportunity for environmentally sustainable travel was limited because the location was inconvenient for ground based travel, mainly because of the distance from participants' home and the summer school. Other reasons, such as caring responsibilities, general inconvenience of ground-based travel, cost and the need to take additional time off, whilst cited, were all endorsed by less than 30% of respondents. A small number of respondents reported being subject to environmental sustainability rules from their employer, including financial incentives and choice restrictions.

5. Respondents' opinions about the environmental sustainability of the venue

a. Ninety-five (94%) of respondents rated the teaching venue as accessible by environmentally sustainable travel means from their hotels.

b. The majority of respondents (n=62, 61.4%) were unaware if their accommodation had an environmental sustainability policy or not.

c. Forty-four (53% of student respondents) reported that they were given the opportunity to share a room at their accommodation.

d. Respondents reported receiving the following capability resources from the organisers:

Resource	N	%
Maps	46	45.5
Public transport info	44	43.6
Cycle Hire	1	1.0
Other*	9	8.9

* comments all referred to the fact that the hotel was located so close to the teaching venue that they required no resources to find their way

e. On a 0-10 scale from 0 = 'very difficult' to 10 = 'very easy' respondents rated the ease with which they could consume plant based foods during lunch breaks as a mean of 8.5 (SD 2.1) and at formal events as 7.9 (SD 2.4).

f. On a 0-10 scale from 0 = 'very difficult' to 10 = 'very easy' respondents rated the ease with which they could avoid single use plastic items as 3.7 (SD 3.1).

g. Narrative data on suggestions to the organisers for an environmentally friendly summer school were diverse and reflected the numerical data. They ranged from better waste separation, avoiding disposable items, plant-based food only (also for the gala dinner) and no food waste, hotel with sustainability program, and other ideas like e-posters and remote teaching.

Summary. Overwhelmingly, respondents found that the venue was accessible from their accommodation by environmentally sustainable means, mainly because of the closeness of the hotel organised by the host university to the teaching rooms, rendering the resources supplied largely unnecessary. Consuming plant based foods was very easy for participants, only slightly less so at formal events, but respondents were much less positive about single use plastics, which they found hard to avoid using and suggested more action on this topic. E-posters and more remote teaching were also suggested.

References

Scott, E., Kallis, G., & Zografos, C. (2019). Why environmentalists eat meat. *PLoS One, 14*(7), e0219607. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0219607

Verplanken, B., & Whitmarsh, L. (2021). Habit and climate change. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 42*, 42-46. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.02.020