

Facing Global Challenges
Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious
Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training

Transnationales Erasmus+ Meeting in Vienna

02. - 04. February 2026

Facing Global Challenges

Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training

Report on the Transnational Meeting

Vienna, Austria | 2–4 February 2026

Erasmus+ Project:

Religions4ecology – *Facing Global Challenges: Environmental and Peace Education in
Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training*

Host Institution:

Private University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Austria

(KPH Vienna/Lower Austria)

Introduction

From 2nd to 4th February 2026, the Erasmus+ project “Facing Global Challenges – Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training (R4ecology)” held its transnational partner meeting in Vienna, Austria. The meeting was hosted by the Private University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Austria (KPH Wien/Niederösterreich).

The meeting brought together researchers and lecturers from partner institutions in Germany, Spain, Albania, Austria, and Malaysia. The primary objective was to advance the work of the project, particularly Work Package 4 (WP4), which addresses climate justice as a global challenge using the example of water.



Over the course of three days, participants engaged in working sessions, academic exchange, and interreligious encounters. The meeting focused on the further development of teaching materials, the teacher handbook, and the project's academic publication.

At the same time, the programme provided opportunities to experience Vienna's rich religious and cultural landscape, highlighting the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation in addressing global environmental challenges.

Day 1

Opening Ceremony and Working Sessions

The meeting officially began on 2nd of February 2026 at the premises of the KPH Vienna/Lower Austria at Stephansplatz. The opening session was moderated by Prof. Elif Medeni.

Participants were welcomed by members of the rectorate of the host institution, including PD MMag.a DDR.in Ulrike Greiner and Mag. Dr. Andreas Weissenböck MBA.

In her opening address, Rector Ulrike Greiner emphasized the unique profile of the KPH Vienna/ Lower Austria as an ecumenical and interreligious teacher training institution, bringing together different Christian denominations and religious communities within one academic framework. She highlighted the importance of addressing contemporary societal challenges—such as climate change, migration, and technological transformation—within educational contexts.

At the same time, she stressed the need to critically reflect on the relationship between education and societal problems, pointing out that education should not simply serve as a substitute for political solutions but should instead contribute to awareness, ethical reflection, and responsible action.

Following the opening addresses, representatives of various religious communities and educational institutions shared their perspectives on interreligious education and sustainability. Among the invited stakeholders were representatives of the Islamic School Authority (Amina Baghajati), and the Austrian Buddhist Union (Mag.^a Erika Erber), as well as representatives of different institutes within the KPH Vienna/ Lower Austria (Mag.^a Brigitta Schnaubelt, MMag.^a Karin Ertl, Ursula Peßl). Their contributions highlighted the diverse ways in which sustainability, environmental responsibility, and interreligious dialogue are integrated into teacher education and school curricula.





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Working Session 1

Presentation of Teaching Materials

The first working session, moderated by the Malaysian team, focused on the presentation of teaching materials developed by the partner institutions. Each participating country presented examples of their finalized or in-work teaching materials and explained how these resources contribute to environmental education and peace education within religious teacher training.

The presentations demonstrated a wide range of pedagogical approaches and emphasized that educational models must always take into account the specific cultural and social contexts of different countries.

During the discussion, participants reflected on several challenges. One key issue concerned the increasing diversity of classrooms, particularly in European contexts influenced by migration and cultural pluralism. It was noted that students often bring different experiences, levels of religious knowledge, and family backgrounds into the classroom. Participants therefore emphasized the importance of competence-oriented approaches that address not only knowledge but also attitudes and practical engagement with environmental issues.

Another topic of discussion was the role of peace education and climate justice within religious education. Several participants highlighted that religious traditions contain rich ethical resources that can inspire students to develop a sense of responsibility for the environment and for society.



The opening session concluded with the presentation of the project's Vision Statement by Elisabeth Naurath, Anissa Strommer, Skender Bruçaj, and Lara Martín Vicario. The Vision Statement initiative was launched by Prof. Elif Medeni (KPH Vienna/Lower Austria). Together, the representatives developed a shared vision in which each religious tradition articulates its own perspective while highlighting the significance of water from its respective faith tradition. The Vision Statement has since been officially published on the project's website and is available online at <https://religions4ecology.org/project/our-vision/>

The opening session ended with closing remarks, followed by the presentation of guest gifts by the Rectorate to the invited guests. Certificates of participation were subsequently awarded by Richard Pirolt, MEd, Head of the International Office.





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Working Session 2

Development of the Teacher Handbook

The second session, moderated by the Albanian team, focused on the development of the project's teacher handbook.

Participants discussed the structure, content, and target audience of the handbook, which will serve as an important outcome of the Erasmus+ project.

It was agreed that the handbook should combine:

- theoretical reflections on environmental ethics and interreligious dialogue
- didactic frameworks for teacher education
- practical teaching materials that can be adapted to different educational contexts

A central theme throughout the discussion was the role of water as a shared interreligious and interdisciplinary example.

Water plays an important role in many religious traditions and therefore provides an ideal starting point for exploring topics such as:

- purity and ritual practices
- environmental responsibility
- climate justice
- symbolic meanings in religious texts

Participants also discussed how the handbook should address different educational contexts, including teacher education at universities as well as classroom teaching in schools.

The session concluded with agreement that each partner institution will contribute materials that reflect its local context, while still following a shared conceptual framework that ensures coherence within the handbook.



Following the official programme, the first day concluded with a series of cultural and social activities designed to foster intercultural dialogue and strengthen personal connections among the participants. The group took part in an interreligious city walk through Vienna, guided by Gernot Galib Stanfel, which offered insights into the city's diverse religious heritage.

This was followed by a visit to the historic Café Central, one of Vienna's most renowned traditional coffee houses. Participants then experienced *Time Travel – A Magical Journey Through Vienna's History*, an immersive exhibition presenting the historical development of the city. The day concluded with a joint dinner at the *Al-Zaytouna* Restaurant, providing further opportunities for informal exchange and networking in a welcoming atmosphere.



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Day 2

Academic Collaboration and Interreligious Encounters

The second day of the meeting combined academic collaboration with visits to religious institutions in Vienna, allowing participants to experience the city's rich religious diversity.

The day began with a visit to the Buddhist Centre Vienna, where participants were welcomed by the president of the Austrian Buddhist Union, Gerhard Weissgrab, and received an introduction to Buddhist perspectives on spirituality, mindfulness, and environmental responsibility. The visit highlighted the importance of inner transformation and ethical awareness as foundations for sustainable action.





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Working Session 3

Academic Publication

The central academic activity of the second day was Working Session 3, moderated by the Spanish team.

The session focused on the preparation of the project's academic publication, which will bring together research contributions from all partner institutions.

Participants discussed the structure of the publication and distributed responsibilities for the individual chapters. Each partner institution will contribute a chapter reflecting its research perspective and educational experience within the project.

The publication will address topics such as:

- interreligious dialogue and environmental ethics
- climate justice and sustainability
- didactic approaches in religious teacher education
- innovative teaching methods in higher education

A deadline of 29 June 2026 was agreed upon for submitting the manuscripts.





Interreligious and Cultural Programme

In addition to the academic sessions, the programme included several interreligious and cultural visits and encounters.

In the afternoon, the participants visited the Islamic Centre Vienna, where they were warmly welcomed by representatives of the Islamic community and introduced to the Centre's educational, religious, and interfaith activities. Welcome addresses were delivered by Dr. Ahmed Saad Al-Mofareh, Director of the Islamic Centre, by the Imam Salim Mujkanović, and Edina Husovic, representing the Islamic Religious Community in Austria. The programme highlighted the role of the Islamic Centre as a place of worship, education, and dialogue, while

also providing participants with deeper insights into the organisation of Muslim religious life in Austria. Following the visit, participants had the opportunity to enjoy refreshments during a coffee and tea break, and time was allocated for prayer.



The interreligious programme also included a guided visit to St Stephen's Cathedral and other significant historical landmarks in Vienna. The international guests received a warm welcome from Provost Dr. Pucher of the Archdiocese of Vienna. Dr. Johann Hisch then guided the multireligious group through the Cathedral, including a visit to its roof, where he shared his extensive knowledge of the building's rich history, architecture, and religious significance. These visits provided valuable insights into Vienna's religious heritage and cultural history while creating further opportunities for dialogue, mutual understanding, and exchange among participants from diverse religious traditions.

These visits provided valuable insights into the religious heritage and cultural history of the city and offered further opportunities for dialogue among participants from different religious backgrounds.





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Day 3

Reflection, Dissemination, and Future Planning

The final day of the meeting began at the Gersthof Protestant Center, where participants gathered to reflect on the outcomes of the previous sessions and discuss the next steps of the project. The discussion focused on the progress achieved within Work Package 4 and the transition toward Work Package 5, which will concentrate on dissemination and public engagement. Participants reviewed the current status of project deliverables and identified remaining tasks related to the teacher handbook, teaching materials, and academic publication.

The interreligious highlight of the final day was the interreligious panel discussion entitled *"The Commitment of Churches and Religions to Creation Care and Climate Protection"*, moderated by Sylvia Inou.



The session opened with a welcome address by Prof. Dr. Cornelia Richter, Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Austria. The panel brought together representatives from different religious communities and institutions, including Mag. Andrea Sölkner (Church Counselor, Protestant Churches Austria), Markus Gerhartinger (Deputy for Environmental Issues, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vienna), Hajret Beluli (Green Mosque, Linz), and Thomas Klien (Gomde Upper Austria). The discussion highlighted the shared responsibility of religious communities in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable practices through faith-based engagement and interreligious cooperation.



The afternoon continued with a visit to the Yunus Emre Fountain, guided by Dr. Kerim Edipoğlu. From historical, literary, and religious perspectives, he explored the symbolic significance of the fountain and reflected on the importance of water within the Islamic tradition, thereby reinforcing one of the central themes of the project.



Evaluation and Website Management

Back at Stephansplatz, the final working sessions focused on project sustainability and team development. The session on Evaluation and Homepage Management, moderated by Jörg Imran Schröter, reviewed the outcomes of the meeting and discussed strategies for the continued dissemination and maintenance of the project's online presence. The final working session addressed evaluation procedures and website management. Participants discussed strategies for improving the dissemination of the project's results. Plans were also presented for the production of a short image film (approximately five minutes) that will introduce the project and its objectives on the project website. In addition, participants agreed to collect

photographs and visual materials from all partner institutions to strengthen the project's online presence and public outreach.

This was followed by "Reflect & Connect: A Creative Team Energizer Session", during which participants reflected on their collaboration, strengthened team dynamics, and identified the diverse competencies and strengths within the international project consortium





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The Transnational Project Meeting concluded with a guided visit to the Vienna Museum entitled "From the Source to the Canal". The exhibition traced the historical development of Vienna's water supply system and illustrated how access to clean water has shaped the city's social, cultural, and urban development over the centuries. The visit provided a fitting conclusion to the meeting by once again highlighting the central importance of water from historical, cultural, and sustainability perspectives.



Conclusion

The Transnational Meeting in Vienna marked an important milestone in the Erasmus+ project R4ecology. Over the course of three days, the participants engaged in productive discussions and collaborative work that significantly advanced the project's objectives. Key achievements of the meeting included:

- further development of the teacher handbook
- progress in preparing the academic publication
- exchange of teaching materials and best practices
- strengthening of international and interreligious cooperation

The meeting also demonstrated the importance of interreligious dialogue in addressing global ecological challenges. By bringing together educators and researchers from different religious and cultural contexts, the project contributes to the development of innovative approaches to environmental education, peace education, and sustainable development.

The Vienna meeting therefore represents an important step toward preparing future teachers to address global challenges through ethical reflection, interreligious understanding, and responsible action.

