

# EMPOWERING THE FUTURE: ASPNET STUDENTS IN FLANDERS UNITE FOR GLOBAL IMPACT



“The benefit that students get by participating in this event is that it broadens their horizons. By participating during this day, the students learn about other contexts, which makes what they experience as obvious in their own school not so obvious. It is a task for all of us to come together and get to know each other so that we can live together.”

Stijn Dhert - National coordinator of ASPnet in Flanders

On March 27, the ASPnet Network Day brought together students and teachers from UNESCO schools across Flanders at the Flemish Administrative Center in Leuven. This annual event served as a platform for young changemakers to reflect on their past initiatives and to chart a new course for sustainable development in the coming school year.

## A global exchange of ideas

This year's gathering was particularly special, as it welcomed delegations from both Ukraine and the Netherlands, emphasizing the strength of international collaboration within the ASPnet community. The exchange of ideas and experiences reinforced a shared commitment to sustainability, peace, and global citizenship.



The students from the ASPnet schools reflect on their previous actions they set up



Thor Haesen interviewing Stijn Dhert

## Reflection and learning: strengthening SDG actions

During this day, teachers and students from the different schools were divided into six groups each tasked with evaluating their previous projects focused on SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Through guided reflection questions: What were the strengths and weaknesses of our actions? What challenges did we face? How can we improve? Participants gained deeper insights into their impact and opportunities for growth.

These discussions were facilitated by students from KU Leuven's Educational Master in Behavioral Sciences and Erasmus students from UCLL's Faculty of Teacher Education, ensuring a structured and meaningful exchange.

“The importance of teaching SDG’s in schools consists of students being able to express the values they stand for. In this way, they learn at a young age how important they are. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals reflect the challenges the world is facing. That is why it is good that students are already working on this at a young age.

Ukrainian student - Ukrainian delegation of ASPnet



Maria Planella I Obach interviewing the Ukrainian students

### **Brainstorming the future: choosing the next SDG**

In the afternoon, students engaged in a dynamic brainstorming session to determine which SDG their schools would focus on in the next school year. Each group selected an SDG that had not yet been addressed, crafted a slogan, and presented their case in front of the entire assembly.

The debate was intense, with three SDGs emerging as frontrunners:

- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 15: Life on Land
- SDG 1: No Poverty

After a narrow vote, SDG 1 (No Poverty) was chosen as the primary focus for the upcoming school year, reflecting a strong commitment to addressing and solve the issue of social inequality.



The students celebrate the SDG’s after taking the group picture

### **A Call for Peace: The Ukrainian delegation’s challenge**

One of the most powerful moments of the day came when the Ukrainian ASPnet delegation addressed the audience. They challenged the Flemish ASPnet to create an "Alphabet of Peace" a collaborative booklet where each letter symbolizes an aspect of peace, a project already embraced by ASPnet schools in Poland, France, Italy, and Japan.

The ASPnet of Ukraine has been working together in a memorandum of understanding with the ASPnet in Flanders for a few months now. To solidify the partnership between Flanders and Ukraine, the Ukrainian delegation gave a number of gifts to Stijn Dhert and the other co-organizers of the network day of the Flemish ASPnet schools. These gifts symbolize peace in Ukrainian culture. Their message was clear: peace is the foundation for a better world.

With the commitment, creativity, and passion displayed during this network day, the future looks promising. The students of ASPnet in Flanders are ready to take action and the world is watching.

“The students who sit here, hold the future of the world. We as adults can only assist and guide. But it is up to you to make a choice. Be the ones that choose life.”

National coordinator of the Ukrainian ASPnet

*Article by: Thor Haesen*