

PRESS RELEASE

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Europe's Young Planetary Defenders Recognised on World Stage as Erasmus+ StAnD Project Concludes

Florence, Italy, 8 September 2026 – Four secondary school students from Italy, France and Germany have been recognised for their achievements in space science at the Opening Reception of the 46th COSPAR Scientific Assembly in Florence, marking an inspiring culmination of the three-year Erasmus+ [Students As Planetary Defenders \(StAnD\)](#) project.



From left to right: COSPAR Chair of Panel on Education Rosa Doran, accompanying StAnD teacher Tabea Mann, with StAnD students Anna Lotta, Cheyenne, Inès and Martina; behind: COSPAR Executive Director Jean-Claude Worms. (Photo credit: Sarah Leach)

The students received Certificates of Achievement during the Opening Reception, where their accomplishments were presented to an international audience of around 3,000 space scientists, engineers and researchers gathered in Florence for the world's premier space research conference. The following day they and their teachers shared their experience of StAnD with educators from around the world during the sessions of the Panel on Education.

From classroom to real space science

Since its launch in September 2023, StAnD has engaged more than 2,000 students and nearly 500 teachers across Europe and beyond in STEM activities focused on comets, asteroids, micrometeorites and planetary defence.



The project has given primary and secondary school students the opportunity to experience scientific research first-hand. Using real data, scientific instruments and professional research networks, students have:

- used robotic telescopes from the Las Cumbres Global Observatory network to plan observations, retrieve and analyse data, and create their own astronomical images;
- calculated meteor trajectories with the PRISMA/INAF meteor cameras and their data to map meteor paths using PASCAL (PRISMA All-Sky Camera Analysis Laboratory) software to identify possible landing areas for the recovery of meteorites;
- analysed astronomical images to search for asteroids in collaboration with the International Astronomical Search Collaboration (IASC), resulting in **72 preliminary asteroid discoveries**;
- collected and analysed micrometeorites through hands-on outdoor and laboratory activities.

These activities were integrated into participating schools' curricula and astronomy clubs through a student-centred, project-based approach. Rather than simply learning about astronomy, students became active participants in scientific research, gaining first-hand experience of the methods, collaboration and critical thinking that underpin modern space science.

"StAnD has shown that when students are given real scientific tools and mentorship, they become not just learners but contributors to the global space science endeavour," said Dr. Jean Claude Worms, Executive Director of COSPAR.

"What I enjoyed most about this project is that there are so many different parts that come together," said Tabea Mann, an accompanying teacher from Germany. *"First, for example, we can observe meteorites or asteroids with the robotic telescopes, then we can calculate, through triangulation, where they fall ..., and then also search in this (area) to see if there are meteorites to find."*



Left: Giulio Colombo presenting his involvement as a teacher in Italy with the StAnD project at the COSPAR Assembly; right: Teacher Tabea Mann with two of her students sharing their experience of StAnD (Photo credits: Chiara Lamberti, PRISMA/INAF)



Said student Martina Maze, one of the StAnD students present during the COSPAR Assembly: *"This year my science teacher Giulio Colombo and I simulated collecting a meteorite. ...before actually doing it, I didn't realize all the work that went into it. Well, once done, I realized that behind it there's not only the search for a stone, but there is a whole commitment, since you have to recognize the stone, you have to recognize the meteorite itself, ...and a whole lot of other things."*

Giulio Colombo, Martina's teacher, said *"The StAnD project gave me the opportunity to put the knowledge I acquired through the PRISMA project into practice at school... We hope we have planted some seeds and maybe in the future we will find some meteorite researchers, thanks to this project!"*



Left: Visitors to the COSPAR booth finding out about the StAnD project (Photo credit: Sarah Leach). Right: teachers in a Panel on Education workshop at the COSPAR Assembly calculating a meteor's trajectory (Photo credit: Chiara Lamberti, PRISMA/INAF)

Building lasting capacity in schools

StAnD has also focused on empowering teachers to bring authentic space science into the classroom. The project supported educators through a purpose-built Teacher's Manual, online MOOC and two summer schools.

During the COSPAR Scientific Assembly, the students and their teachers presented their work during the Panel on Education sessions, sharing their experiences and results with leading international experts. Their work included the creation of a 2027 calendar featuring astronomical images produced through StAnD activities.

Their participation demonstrated how authentic space-science research can be integrated into school education while supporting the project's wider goals: to engage young people in the study of asteroids, meteors and planetary defence; increase motivation and interest in STEM; and equip educators to deliver STEM-related topics through inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches.



Looking ahead

"The students we celebrate today represent the future of space science," said Rosa Doran, Chair of the COSPAR Panel of Education and President of NUCLIO, a partner in StAnD. "Throughout this project they have demonstrated remarkable curiosity, dedication and scientific ability. We hope this recognition marks the beginning of their scientific journeys. Perhaps one day we will welcome them back to a future COSPAR Scientific Assembly—not as students, but as researchers presenting discoveries of their own."

Led by the Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (INAF), Italy, StAnD brought together organisations working in astronomy, education and science outreach from Italy, France, Portugal, Greece and Germany: COSPAR, NUCLIO, Ellinogermaniki Agogi and FTP-Europlanet. Over three years, the partnership has developed educational resources, teacher-training materials and practical activities designed to remain available to schools beyond the lifetime of the project.

As StAnD concludes, its legacy will live on through the students and teachers who have discovered that space science is not simply something to read about—it is something they can actively do.

For more information about the Students As Planetary Defenders project, visit <https://projectstand.eu>.
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About Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It has an estimated budget of €26.2 billion. This is nearly double the funding compared to its predecessor programme (2014-2020). The 2021-2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life. It supports priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan and the European Skills Agenda. The programme also supports the European Pillar of Social Rights; implements the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027; and develops the European dimension in sport. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.





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About INAF

INAF - Italian National Institute for Astrophysics is the main Italian research institute for the study of the Universe. INAF promotes the enhancement of the research results conducted or coordinated by its astronomers. Besides research in astronomy and astrophysics, INAF is very active in education towards students in schools and society through dissemination, educational and outreach activities. These activities are carried out by the 16 research facilities spread all over the country. INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Torino, the leading partner of StAnD, is one of the most important research institutes in Piedmont (NW Italy) and its history dates back to the mid-18th century. Currently more than 100 people (including researchers, technicians, administration, students) collaborate with the Observatory activities.

About COSPAR

The Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) is an international scientific organization established in 1958, under the International Science Council (ISC). Its mission is to promote cooperation in space research, with an emphasis on the exchange of scientific results, information, and the development of global partnerships across disciplines for the benefit of all. Through its scientific Commissions, Panels and Task Groups, COSPAR covers a wide range of space science fields, including Earth observation, planetary protection, astrophysics, and space life sciences and is a trusted advisor to the United Nations on critical issues in space research. It plays a key role in fostering collaboration between the global scientific community, space agencies, industry, and emerging space nations. Through capacity building workshops, it supports the growth of space science expertise worldwide and its biennial event, the COSPAR Scientific Assembly, gathers thousands of researchers, serving as a major platform for knowledge exchange and international dialogue.

About NUCLIO

NUCLIO - Núcleo Interativo de Astronomia e Inovação em Educação - is a non-governmental organisation that trains teachers in the use of new technologies, innovative methodologies, promotion of real research in the classroom where students are introduced to the scientific methods using robotic telescopes, data mining, and other advanced tools for science learning. NUCLIO is the coordinator of one of the largest astronomy education efforts in the world, the Galileo Teacher Training Program.

About Ellinogermaniki Agogi

Ellinogermaniki Agogi is one of the most innovative schools in Europe with 2300 students (ages 5 to 18) and 250 teachers. The school continuously modernises STEM education by promoting and creating learning environments for students and offering numerous opportunities for teachers' professional development enabling them to thrive in the landscape of unprecedented challenges and opportunities in the 21st century.

About FTP-Europlanet

Founded in 2021, and located in Weinheim, Germany, **FTP-Europlanet gUG** builds on the heritage of the **Faulkes Telescope Project (FTP)**, established in 2004 to bring the excitement of observing with research-grade telescopes into classrooms. Through an MoU with the **Europlanet** Executive Board, FTP-Europlanet gUG draws on the 18 years' experience of Europlanet in delivering media, communications and education activities and training for the European planetary community, with a particular emphasis on supporting early career researchers to develop skills for their future careers.