

Cyprus Interventions

10th meeting of representatives in the UNECE Commission for Education for Sustainable Development

Item 2a: outstanding activities and initiatives implemented since the ninth Steering Committee meeting in 2014

a) Foundation of Permanent Unit for Education for the Environment and for Sustainable Development

Cyprus after the submission of the progress report on November 1, 2014, has promoted the creation of the Permanent Unit for Education for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Until recently, a coordinating body for issues of Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development was operated through the Pedagogical Institute. However, since there was no institutional framework to support it and its role and responsibilities were not clear, gaps and overlapping issues emerged, in terms of the effective promotion of issues related to Education for the Environment and Sustainable Development, both in relation to its horizontal nature, and within the Directorates of Education. Considering the above and given that ESD is a priority for the Republic of Cyprus, the establishment of the Permanent Unit on Education for the Environment and for Sustainable Development was decided in January 2015 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The main mission of this Unit is to promote and effectively implement comprehensive education policy issues in the EE/ ESD, which will contribute to the effective mainstreaming of sustainable development at all levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary education) and types (formal, informal and non-formal) education, in a single, holistic, coherent and systematic way. Its aim is synergy with all stakeholders (social partners, professional groups, local communities, NGOs, Organizations, Universities, etc.) to promote EE/ESD in the broader civil society. The focus is to develop an education system that equips all interested parties to deal effectively with the issues involved in the educational process, also at the non-formal and informal education levels, in order to create environmentally literate and democratic citizens, who will be responsible for their choices, will seek alternatives, will participate in activities, will consult and co-design, in order to protect the environment, improve their quality of life and ensure a world that will be based on the principles and values of sustainable development. This Unit will be staffed with permanent and seconded staff, and will have clear responsibilities and institutional framework with respect to its operation. Already the Minister of Education and Culture has set up a special team of scientists and technocrats who have completed a proposal for its establishment. At this stage, the proposal for the establishment of the Unit is in the process of public consultation with a view to finalization as well as the consensus as to the operation and responsibilities among all stakeholders. It is estimated that that the composition of the Unit

will begin its operations in September 2015 after its approval for implementation by the Council of Ministers of the Republic.

b) Enhancing non-formal education by expanding the Network of Centers of Environmental Education

The National Non-Formal Education Centre Network for Environment and Sustainable Development, which was created by the Ministry of Education and Culture under the supervision of the Pedagogical Institute, has been operating since 2004 with four non-formal education centers. Since this year it has been decided to extend and integrate the Non-formal Education Centers Network for the Environment and Sustainable Development with the creation of three more such centers in small remote communities with specific environmental, cultural and special local characteristics. The decision on the extension and completion of the network is associated with the promotion of providing students, teachers and other groups with authentic learning experiences, with the study and analysis of the issues of sustainable development in real environments, with the need for development and promotion of significant environmental areas of our country, through the active involvement of local communities and local people as “informal educators”, aiming to transfer, through intergenerational communication and interaction, unrecorded knowledge and relationship of local populations in their place, as a key factor in ensuring the local sustainability. It is important to mention that in the ten years of the non-formal Education Centers Network for the Environment and Sustainable Development, more than 300,000 students, teachers and other population groups participated in its programs. It is also important to mention that despite the economic crisis that exists in Cyprus, the Government supports this network with national resources, recognizing that overcoming the crisis and creating better societies can occur through a comprehensive, long term and systematic policy for Education for Sustainable Development. Already Cyprus has spent more than 5 million Euros for the creation of the infrastructure and the functioning of the Education Centers Network for the Environment and Sustainable Development, while an amount of 1 million Euros is spent from national resources annually for the operation of their programs.

c) Curriculum for Environmental Education/ Education for Sustainable Development

The Curriculum EE/ESD is also a major priority of the Republic of Cyprus. The official introduction of the Curriculum for EE/ ESD in the educational system of Cyprus both interdisciplinary and with separate hours in the curriculum, became in 2012, with its compulsory incorporation in primary education in Cyprus. Annually about 48,000 students of Primary Education, explore issues of sustainable development, based on the design from each school and through participatory processes, of their own Sustainable Environmental Education Policy. From this year, by decision of the Ministry of Education, the Curriculum of EE/ ESD will be introduced in pre-primary education on a mandatory basis. For this purpose a special group was set up, that is processing the Curriculum of EE/ESD for pre-primary

education, in addition to compulsory education and training seminars for teachers of pre-primary education for the implementation of the Curriculum in schools which have been scheduled for the next school year. By transferring the Curriculum of EE/ESD in pre-primary education, 12,000 more students in Preschool annually deal with environmental issues and sustainable development. With the implementation of the Curriculum in Pre-Primary Education of Cyprus, approximately 62% of the student population of Cyprus is systematically addressing the issues of sustainable development. The aim is that the entire student population of Cyprus will examine the issues of sustainable development, which is foreseen in the long term with the official introduction of the Curriculum of EE/ESD in Secondary Education of Cyprus. This is estimated to start in 2018 and after completing the extension of the program in pre-school education.

d) Priority target for the year 2014-2015: "Sustainable Development: greening our schools, improving our quality of life"

The Republic of Cyprus, in an effort to promote further the issues of Education for Sustainable Development, set for this school year as a the focus target for all schools of Cyprus "Sustainable Development: greening our schools, improving the quality of life " With this objective, all schools are invited to intensify their efforts and actions towards Education for Sustainable Development aiming for the school to become an example of sustainable development for society, with a view to improving our quality of life, collectively and individually, on the basis of protecting the environment, ensuring social cohesion, healthy living, financial soundness, justice, and rational management of natural resources.

To implement this objective schools are encouraged to:

- be examples of organizations on issues of sustainable development, through promoting intervention and change, in a participatory and holistic way, in the place and in the community, which can systematically shape the sustainable school in the long term,
- highlight the complexity of environmental issues and their social-political-economic, alongside with their ecological character, based on their interdisciplinary examination and through the utilization of all courses and specialties,
- strengthen the practical nature of sustainable development through the adoption and implementation of measures and actions for sustainable development in light of specific needs, particularities and specific engagement issues of each school.

It is finally noted that the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus, in an attempt to engage all parties in the effort to create the sustainable school, has created networks of partnerships with all parts of society, so that they contribute actively and in a meaningful way to the effort of schools to promote and implement interventions and changes in the school and in their community that will help improve their quality of life.