

Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference
(8–10 June 2016, Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel)

High-level meeting of Education and Environment Ministries

Wednesday, 8 June 2016, 4.30–6 p.m.
Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel

Agenda item 3. Towards a new society: 10 years of education for sustainable development

Intervention of the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe

I would like to draw your attention to an educational Program implemented in Kosovo*, Serbia and Montenegro entitled “Education for Sustainable Development in the Western Balkans: Education for Sustainable Futures” (2011-2016). The Program is implemented by the REC in cooperation with Ministries of Education, and with the generous financial assistance of Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Europe Aid. It has been directly contributing to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing capacity building for the resolution “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and UNECE Decade on Education for Sustainable Development¹. It was also recognized as ground breaking initiative and listed as one of the best practices for the UNECE Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. The main aim is to enhance European educational reforms through the integration of sustainable development concepts into the curriculum, the development of educational tools to meet the curricula needs, capacity building for educational experts and teachers, and the promotion of ESD on a regional level.

Working Toward’s EU integration and Educational Reforms Through ESD

Educational reform is an important component of the European Union integration process. This has been prioritized through the European Commission’s 2012 Strategy “Rethinking Education” which called for a fundamental shift in education, with more focus on 'learning outcomes' - the knowledge, skills and competences that students acquire. Merely having spent time in education is no longer sufficient.

For the Western Balkans which are currently involved in this process, a key element of efforts to implement educational reform involves shifting away from old instructional models and towards new school curricula developed in line with an 'outcome-based' learning approach. Millions of Euros in European funds have been allocated for these changes in order to make students better prepared for a competitive work environment once they finish school.

Working to accommodate this shift in educational terrain, a team of experts from the Regional Environmental Center has used this political and financial momentum in Western Balkans to ensure that the essential principals of sustainability are firmly embedded in the new curricula

¹ For more information on the Program “ESD in the Western Balkans” please see:
<http://www.rec.org/publication.php?id=496>

across all age groups and subject fields. Fundamental skills students should obtain in school should not only emphasize the sciences and IT technologies, but skills which contribute to a more sustainable world. As the new curricula will be in place for generations solving environmental challenges of the future requires this approach².

Regional shifts

The REC has already performed instrumental work together with Ministries of Education, professional educational institutes and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Key achievements include the successful development and official approval of inter-subject areas for pre-school, primary, secondary, and general education topics in vocational schools curricula in Montenegro. This is significant in that it is now mandatory for teachers to implement these curricula areas in schools across the whole country³. Topics include important themes such as green economy, human rights, climate change, environment and health, sustainable cities and communities and biodiversity.

With the financial support of the European Union curriculum frameworks are also being developed in Serbia and Kosovo*, which will first be piloted before being implemented nationwide. In Serbia, together with the financial support of EuropeAid, sustainable development concepts have been successfully integrated into all subject fields of the new curricula for primary and secondary schools, as well as general education topics in vocational education. These subjects range from geography to physical fitness and from literature to foreign languages.

In Kosovo*, their National Curricula Framework has been amended to more effectively include sustainable development. The Core Curricula has also been amended to integrate sustainable development learning outcomes into the curricula as well as the development of sustainable development inter-subject topics. The next step will be the integration of sustainable development topics and learning outcomes into each of the subject fields.

The initiative will continue to expand as several pre-accession countries and Eastern Partnership countries are currently undergoing similar reforms and our Center has extended the research on ESD policy to Macedonia, Moldova, Bosnia, and Albania.

Capacity Building to Support the new Curricula

Putting policy in place is not enough as the most important aspect of education is to transfer this knowledge to students in order for them to achieve these learning outcomes. Therefore, educational tools like the Green Pack and Green Pack Junior⁴ have been developed in order to

² For more information on the educational reform initiative please see: <http://www.rec.org/news-item.php?id=1025>

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

³ For the officially approved inter-subject topics please see: http://www.zzs.gov.me/rubrike/obrazovanje_odrzivi_razvoj/

⁴ For information on our educational tools please see: <http://education.rec.org/>

meet these needs. Through the financial support of the Austrian Development Agency work is currently underway to develop a tool specifically for high school students to learn about the Sustainable Development Goals and how it is inter-linked with school curricula. Most importantly, trainings for teachers are a critical part of the process and significant resources have been allocated to ensure teachers from each subject field can apply this knowledge through cross-thematic planning and other SD teaching initiatives. Finally the REC has developed sustainable development courses for governmental officials from all sectors including education in order try and push implementation of sustainability practices in practice and in policy⁵.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the floor. Once again we would like to stress the importance of this Program and encourage other countries and donors to support similar initiatives.

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⁵For more information on the courses for sustainable development academy please see:
<http://www.rec.org/publication.php?id=536>