Information Paper No. 4

Outline of practical steps for implementing the workplan activities/outputs on strand 2 on the whole institution approach and education for sustainable development:

(a) "Strategic Framework on Whole Institution Approach"- draft proposal for workplan activity on implementing the key Strand-2 on "Whole Institution Approach and Education for Sustainable Development"[1]

Item 8 of the provisional agenda:

Proposal for developing an outline of activities for implementing the second strand on the whole institution (school) approach outlined in the draft workplan

Prepared by the Chair of the Expert Group Prof. Arjen Wals in collaboration with the leading countries implementing the workplan activities of the key strand 2 on "WIA and ESD" (the Netherlands and Cyprus) and the Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD Dr. Aravella Zachariou

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[1] This information document was not formally edited

Background

Whole school approaches (WSA) and whole institution approaches (WIA) are frameworks that have been developed to guide the development and implementation of sustainable practices across an entire organization, like early childhood centres, (vocational) schools and universities, including all staff, students, and stakeholders.

WSA and WIA are based on the idea that all aspects of a school or institution are interconnected and can contribute to sustainability, including curriculum, organisational development, leadership and management, culture, operations, professional development and community engagement.

The development of WSA and WIA has been influenced by a growing body of research that highlights the benefits of sustainability education and the need for a whole-systems approach.) Education has a crucial role to play in promoting sustainable communities and that a systemic whole school approach is necessary to achieve this goal (Sterling et al. 2018).

To guide the development and implementation of WSA and WIA, it is crucial that frameworks are developed and enacted that can guide educational policy and governance as well as institution/school- and community-based development of the WIA. Such a framework would need to reflect the growing recognition of the importance of sustainable development and the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of an organization. Such a framework can provide guidance for schools and institutions that wish to promote sustainability through curriculum, operations, and community engagement using a whole-systems approach.

UNECE has been at the forefront of promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the region since the adoption of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in 2015. The strategy aimed to promote a systematic and comprehensive approach to ESD, including the adoption of Whole School Approaches (WSA) and Whole Institution Approaches (WIA) to sustainability. The implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD across the region was evaluated in a report by Hadjiachilleos and Zachariou (2022), which highlights some of the achievements in the field of WSA and WIA.

One of the key achievements in the UNECE region has been the development of national strategies and action plans for ESD, which often include a focus on WSA and WIA. According to the report, at least 15 countries in the region have developed such strategies, with some of them explicitly mentioning the need for a WIA and WSA approach. Another notable achievement by UNECE ESD Strategy implementation in national contexts is the development by many Member States, of guidance and training materials for teachers and educators to support the application of WSA and WIA.

The UNECE has also been working to promote the sharing of good practices and experiences in the field of WSA and WIA. The report highlights several initiatives, such as the UNECE ESD Peer Learning Platform, which provides a space for educators and policymakers to share their experiences and learn from each other. In addition, several regional conferences and events have been organized to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

In conclusion, the UNECE has made significant progress in promoting WSA and WIA in the region, including the development of national strategies and action plans, the provision of guidance and training materials, and the promotion of sharing good practices and experiences. At the same time, there is still much work to be done to fully integrate WSA and WIA into the education systems of the member states. UNECE seeks to develop a WIA framework for educational policy and governance that is flexible, non-prescriptive and dialogical to allow for more situated and contextual enactment of the WIA within the UNECE member states.

To help realize this Ministers of Education and Environment on ESD in the UNECE region, member states reaffirmed at the third high-level meeting (REF) their commitment to work jointly for the effective implementation of the new implementation framework. The countries expressed their intention to provide the necessary support to implement the work plan activities of the new implementation framework. Cyprus and Netherlands announced officially to lead the key strand for WIA and ESD through experts and by providing an in-

kind and financial contribution to the development of the deliverables, which were approved by the member states.

Mandate

During the 3rd Joint High-Level Meeting for the Ministers of Education and Environment on ESD agreed that under the leadership of the Netherlands and Cyprus, an expert group will be established with the terms of reference to develop the work plan activity for key strand two "Whole Institution Approach and Education for Sustainable Development" in the UNECE Region. The expert group will work in close collaboration with the UNECE ESD SC and the leading countries for developing the tools as well as the capacity building activities that will facilitate the effective implementation of the Strategic Framework on WIA and ESD in the Member States in the UNECE Region.

Synthesis of the expert and support group

Expert group

In order to advance the work on the development of a WIA framework that can be used in a wide range of contexts within the UNECE region an expert group will be created consisting of people with extensive experience and knowledge of the WSA/WIA in relation to SD. The expert group will review and synthesize existing frameworks that support the WIA/WSA within the context of ESD but also in the context of other, ESD-related education, such as Citizenship Education, Health Education and Climate Education. In addition the Expert Group will consult with educational policy makers from some of the members state to explore ways to engage Ministries of Education, regional and local school boards in the support of the WIA. The expert group will also be responsible for the development of the UNECE WIA Framework.

Chair of the expert group: **Professor Arjen Wals**, Education & Learning Sciences, Wageningen University, The Netherlands & Sustainability Hub, Norwegian Life Sciences University, Norway

Members of the expert group (to be asked) will be selected from the following list. In total the group will have 5 senior experts and one junior support person.

Professor. Paul Pace, Professor Mathematics and Science Education, Faculty of Education, Fawwara Centre, Siggiewi, Malta

Dr. Anna Mogren – Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Educational Studies Karlstad University, Sweden

Professor Marco Riekmann, Professor of Higher Education Development, University of Vechta, Germany

Professor Mariona Espinet, Departament de Didàctica de la Matemàtica i de les Ciències Experimentals at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Dr Aravella Zachariou, Unit of Education for Sustainable Development, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

Assistant to the Expert Group and the Support Group - **Rosalie Mathie**, Norway

Support Group

The work of the expert group will supported by a supporting group from the MS of the UNECE Region. The role of the supporting group is to critically reflect and provide feedback, suggestions, and comments on the documents. For the synthesis of the supporting group, the UNECE ESD SC Secretariat will send a week after the end of the 15th meeting of the SC an invitation to all the Member States and Organizations to declare their interest for

participation. The selection of the members of the supporting group will based on specific criteria related with their experience on WIA and ESD and strategic frameworks.

Purpose and objectives of the strategic framework on WIA and ESD

Purpose

To provide a complete and concrete strategic framework on WIA and ESD in the UNECE Region that will be aligned with the new implementation framework of the UNECE ESD Strategy 2021-2030. The strategic framework aims to support Member States, Organizations and Institutions, in formal, non-formal and informal education and at all levels, in the UNECE Region to develop appropriate policies, measures and resources that facilitate them to reorganize and transform themselves as "whole institutions" on ESD.

The Whole Institution Approach (WIA) to Sustainable Development is a crucial element of the UNECE ESD Implementation Framework for the UNECE ESD Strategy 2021-2030. The WIA aims to renew and enrich education, learning and capacity-building in a wide range of institutional contexts. The WIA approach intends to improve all aspects of an institution in term of its vision and ethos, its services and products, its human resource development, its leadership and organisation, its own sustainability practices, and its relationships with the people, communities and places around the institute. Special attention is provided to the way people learn from each other around sustainability issues.

The WIA involves orienting a given institution's strategy and ultimately its overall culture towards sustainable development. This requires the institution to review its own actions in the light of sustainable development principles, focusing on the four overlapping spheres of learning program, governance compatible with sustainability principles, infrastructure, and relationships with the community and society at large.

The strategic directions for the WIA have been identified in the UNECE ESD Implementation Framework (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/ece_cep_ac.13_2022_3_e.pdf). The framework encourages member states and other international organizations to develop and support policies, measures, and resources that facilitate efforts by institutions and organizations to reorganize and transform themselves as "whole institutions" through competent and coherent frameworks, self-assessment mechanisms, opportunities for participation of stakeholders, particularly youth, and mobilization and creation of opportunities for youth to participate actively in the design of whole institution approach plans. The ECE Steering Committee on ESD aims to create synergies with WIA-related initiatives initiated by UNESCO, the European Union, WHO, GENE etc.

In summary, the WIA approach is a critical component of the UNECE ESD Implementation Framework for the UNECE ESD Strategy 2021-2030. The WIA approach aims to improve education, learning and capacity building holistically by enabling learners to develop a whole system view and fostering the willingness and ability to identify and execute actions for preventing and addressing sustainability problems. Member states and other international organizations are encouraged to develop and support policies, measures, and resources that facilitate the implementation of the WIA approach.

Objectives

Paragraph 56 of the UNECE Implementation Framework identifies a number of objectives can help facilitate the dissemination and implementation of the whole institution approach in the ECE Member States. As indicated above, the overall goal is to develop and support appropriate policies, measures and resources that facilitate efforts by institutions and organizations in formal, non-formal and informal sectors, at all levels, to reorganize and transform themselves as "whole institutions" in response to sustainable development

challenges and opportunities. Specifically this can be done through the realization of the following objectives:

(a)   Provision of competent and coherent frameworks that foster participatory approaches enhancing commitment, ownership and responsibility for promoting a whole institution approach in diverse contexts;

(b)   Use of the lessons learned and expertise gained on the whole institution approach throughout the ECE region for the creation of a self-assessment mechanism that can support institutions and their members in their efforts to advance sustainability in the framework of the whole institution approach;

(c)   Provision of the opportunities, the needed tools and resources that facilitate the participation of stakeholders (particularly youth) and institutions in a whole institution transformation;

(d)   Mobilization and creation of opportunities for youth to participate actively in the design of whole institution approach plans to promote ESD in their respective institutions and adopt a leading role in reinforcing the focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 4.7

(e)   Strengthening of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD synergies with organizations, mechanisms and networks (e.g., UNESCO, the European Union and WHO) that also develop policies for a whole institution approach.

Deliverables of the framework

(a)   **A comprehensive framework for development, enactment and evaluation of the WIA** that can be used in a wide range of contexts, especially for educational policy-makers, educational leadership and governance. The framework will be based on an analysis of current frameworks as well as consultations with key informants from UNECE member states who are responsible for ESD in their countries, and on a review of scientific research on WIA in relation to SD.

(b)   **Compilation of good-practices**, an extended review on practices in UNECE member states, both on WSA as a whole, but also good-practices on each element of the WIA such as the physical school/institution-buildings, campuses, offices, workplaces, the vision, ethos and culture of the organization, the way people interact and learn from each other and their surroundings, the relationship with the surrounding community and the required professional development of all staff involved. Good practices here refer to practices that are also critical and transparent in terms of acknowledging struggles and set-backs and sharing ways to improve these practices. Put differently, critically reflexive case studies, are preferred over feel good impressionistic success stories. The case studies are to become companion vignettes in the framework to illuminate different aspects of the WIA. A **template (b1)** will be developed to support the case study compilation.

(c)   **Guidelines for utilizing the framework** for different audiences (policy-makers at the national, regional and local level, school leaders, education institutions, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, coordinators, HRM-officers and teachers) who are in different starting positions (from pioneering to more experienced).

The deliverables of the Strategic Framework on WIA and ESD will be aligned with the second work plan activity of key strand 2 "toolkit on WIA (WSA) ESD" in a way that both of them to complete each other.

Implementation process and proposed timeline

The first task to be conducted is to agree on the framing of the tasks and deliverables and to develop a more detailed workplan for the period September 2023 – December 2025. This will be done at a startup meeting held in Cyprus in September of 2023. The remaining of 2023 will consist on the development of the framework.

In early 2024 a template for the critical reflexive practices / case studies will be identified based on literature and (online) interviews with key informants. This template will presented, explained and discussed during a 2 hour webinar early in February 2024 with the UNECE ESD Steering. The template will be sent to all the countries by the secretariat with a deadline to be determined.

During the February and March 2024 case studies will be collected and analyzed. . Preliminary results will be presented to the Steering Committee late May 2024. Critical elements for developing the strategic framework will be identified in a 3-day session that coincides with the UNECE ESD Steering Committee meeting (if this is feasible). This meeting will include both the expert group and the supporting group. On the last day, the expert group will frame the first draft of the strategic framework and develop a 1st the draft of the guidelines that will support the framework.

From May to December 2024 development of the pre-final draft of good practices publication will be presented for approval to the 19th Meeting of the Steering Committee.

January-March 2025 development of the draft strategic framework and the draft guidelines.

At the end of March 2025 a meeting with expert group and supporting groups (on-line or physical) will be organized for discussing the drafts

April-May 2025 preparation of the pre-finals to presented at the 20th meeting of the UNECE ESD Steering Committee (for approval) .

End of June 2025 submission of the final Framework and the guidelines for utilizing the framework to the secretariat for being published by the UNECE

September-December 2025 organization of a series of webinars for informing countries and stakeholders for the tools, a regional conference and a number of capacity building activities will be organized. Countries will be invited by the UNECE Secretariat to express their interest to host the events.

Phasing, Activities and Outputs

2023 (June-December)	**2024**	**2025**

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5) (6)   (7)   (8)

	Preparation *Organization or expert group, support group & agreeing on the* **workplan** *(1)*
	Framework development *Inventory of existing WSA and WIA frameworks. Interviews with key informants from different institutions. Realisation of* **draft framework** *(2).*
	Case study research *Development of Case Study* **template** *(3),* **Compilation of Case Studies** *(4)*
	Finalisation of **framework** *(5),* *Integration with case-studies, establishing* **guidelines for framework utilization** *(6)*

	Capacity Building & Dissemination Series of webinars (7) and (online) capacity-building workshops (8) for informing countries and engaging stakeholders (mainly policy-makers and institutional leaders), a regional conference. Throughout 2024 and 2025 the progress and products of the framework development will be shared via social media and key international websites but the main dissemination will take place in the second half of 2025.

Capacity building and dissemination activities

Capacity building activities

Based on the case study analysis and the guidelines for utilization of the framework a series of online and, when possible, face-to-face capacity-building activities for mainly policy-makers and institutional leaders, will be organized. When logistics and planning allow, there will also be face-to-face workshops in combination with UNECE committee meetings. The online workshops will be open to all UNECE member states as well as to other countries who show an interest in the development of a WIA to sustainability. If circumstances and resources allow, an international conference in country that is interested to host it or a national workshop by a country. Will be held and supported by this project.

Joint events with other regional mechanisms Member States such as UNESCO and the European Union are foreseen as well.

Dissemination Activities

Throughout 2024 and 2025 the progress and products of the framework development will be shared via social media and key international websites but the main dissemination will take place in the second half of 2025. Dissemination will also take place during regional events and conferences.

Countries supporting the initiative

The Netherlands and Cyprus have declared that they will support the development of the WIA ESD Framework by in kind and financial contributions.