Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

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Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference
Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022

Report of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

Addendum

Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development

adopted by the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries of the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

We, the ministers responsible for education and the environment from the countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, meeting in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Nicosia,

Recalling the decisions of the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, held in Belgrade from 10 to 12 October 2007, including the Declaration "Building Bridges to the Future" (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8) and the Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/4/Add.1), and also the decisions of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, held in Batumi, Georgia, from 8 to 10 June 2016, including the Declaration "Greener, cleaner, smarter!" (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1) and the Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.2), made by the ministers responsible for education and environment at the joint session on education for sustainable development (ESD), which called for the holding of future ministerial segments on ESD on a regular basis, preferably under the aegis of the Environment for Europe process, urging countries to further upscale their efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development at all levels,

Acknowledging the importance of education for achieving sustainable development and the framework entitled "Education for Sustainable Development: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals" (ESD for 2030), endorsed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its fortieth session, held in Paris from 12 to 27 November 2019, and the "Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development" adopted at the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, organized by UNESCO and the Government of Germany and held online from 17 to 19 May 2021,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 76/209 on education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (adopted on 17 December 2021)[1] and previous resolutions on ESD,

Being aware of the European Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability,[2]

Noting with great concern the negative impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on human health, safety and well-being, as well as the disruption to societies and economies and the devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, and the fact that the poorest and most vulnerable are the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic,

Noting also with great concern that the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution consists of three self-inflicted planetary crises that are closely interconnected and that put the well-being of current and future generations at unacceptable risk,

Considering the unprecedented global school closures caused by the pandemic, which have resulted in significant learning losses, especially for girls and vulnerable groups, and increased dropout rates affecting sustainability,

Concerned about the hazards to education and ESD, in particular, underfunding during humanitarian emergencies and crises,

Reaffirming the ambition of States Members of the United Nations to get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by designing and implementing sustainable and inclusive recovery strategies, including on ESD, to accelerate progress towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, to reimagine our societies, to promote green and transformative economies centred on respect for the well-being of all within the planetary boundaries, and to help to reduce the risk of and build resilience to future shocks, crises and pandemics,

Recognizing both the central role of the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development in promoting ESD in the region through demonstrated successful cooperation between the environment and education sectors, and the important contribution of other relevant sectors and stakeholders, especially educators, non-governmental organizations and their networks, business, youth and the media,

Acknowledging the importance of empowering marginalized and vulnerable populations, including girls and women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees and persons affected by armed conflict, crises and natural disasters, by providing to them with adequate learning environments and opportunities, as well as resilient, healthy and sustainable settings and quality and gender transformative ESD,

Emphasizing the central role of youth as a catalyst for change to create a better and resilient future and considering the importance of actively empowering and engaging youth in formulating and implementing sustainable development policies and practices, as recognized through the declaration of 2022 as the European Year of Youth,

Taking into consideration the emphasis that the Steering Committee has placed on the role of youth by establishing the UNECE ESD Youth Platform as a means for youth mobilization and engagement on ESD in the region,

Emphasizing the importance of continued cooperation between ECE, UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in implementing the Framework for the Implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/3)[3] and the UNESCO ESD for 2030 Framework and its road map, including the country initiatives on ESD for 2030 launched by UNESCO member States (A/C.2/76/L.17),

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[1] A/RES/76/209.
[2] European Commission, COM(2022) 11 final, 2022/0004 (NLE), Brussels, 14 January 2022. Available at https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5325-2022-INIT/en/pdf.
[3] https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/ece_cep_ac.13_2022_3_adv_edited.pdf.

Supporting efforts to strengthen synergies with other global and regional processes aimed at achieving ESD and sustainable development, including the Environment for Europe process, the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and its Action Plan, Education 2030 - Incheon Declaration: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the ministerial pledges on education made during the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021), the Kunming Declaration "Ecological Civilization: Building a shared future for all life on Earth" made at the fifteenth meeting (part I) of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Kunming, China, 11–15 October 2021), as well as the outcomes of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP and other relevant international, regional and national processes,

Taking into account the continued challenges and needs identified by the member States in their national implementation reports, related to the strengthening of regulatory frameworks, educator competences on ESD, quality learning outcome assessment mechanisms, enhancement of the whole school/whole institution approach to sustainable development, support to research on ESD, empowerment of youth participation in decision-making, speeding up of the transition towards green and digital economy and society, based on transformative learning environments, acknowledging also that some countries, particularly countries with economies in transition, may continue to need support for carrying out relevant activities,

1. *Strongly support* the continuation and stepping up of efforts for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development until 2030 at the regional (ECE) level, in synergy with relevant efforts undertaken at the global and subregional levels (e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union/European Economic Area, Central and Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, Central Asia) and at the national level;

2. *Adopt* the Framework for Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030;

3. *Recognize* the great importance of the issues elaborated in the Framework and the need to, as a matter of urgency, mobilize political and financial resources for strengthening the education for sustainable development (ESD) contribution to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in order to fully benefit from its potential to effectively contribute to addressing the multiple crises and challenges related to the achievement of sustainable development;

4. *Commit* to further promote and upgrade efforts in creating the necessary enabling conditions for the implementation of the Strategy for ESD, supporting institutions, educational systems and educators at all levels within and beyond schools, colleges, technical and vocational education and training institutions and universities, in order to capitalize on learner-centred, positive, real life experiences and good practices to make learning more relevant and interesting, as well as to effectively help learners to develop the knowledge, skills, mindset and action needed for the necessary large-scale green transition and a more sustainable future;

5. *Also commit* to carefully consider global, regional, subregional and national studies and assessments of the impacts and consequences of humanitarian health and social crises, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, on education and the environment, and capitalize on both negative and positive lessons learned, as well as to:

   (a) Ensure that the content and pedagogy of value-based ESD will be enriched and strengthened, addressing the root causes of the COVID-19 pandemic and similar crises (focusing on the relationship between nature and society);

   (b) Optimize funding and availability of resources, invest in and enhance resilience and preparedness of education and training on sustainable development, such as accessible learning platforms, digital hybrid learning, including safe,

affordable and equal access to the Internet, as well as targeted educator capacity development programmes;

(c) Promote healthier, greener and safer conditions and practices within and beyond schooling settings;

(d) Secure the needed educational interventions for accelerating the necessary lifestyle changes, transforming social and economic systems that are currently primarily focused on economic growth to the detriment of the planet and reorienting them towards a sustainable future, improving our relationship with nature, understanding its value and putting that value at the heart of our decision-making in order to create a safer and sustainable post-pandemic era;

6. *Reconfirm* the relevance and importance of all (horizontal and vertical) issues and themes identified in the Strategy for ESD;

7. *Recognize* that climate change, biodiversity and ocean literacy (see also the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030 and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration) are critical priority issues at the global and ECE levels, as they are connected and combine nearly all Sustainable Development Goals through integrated, interdisciplinary educational approaches, such as by linking sustainable development with culture and circular economy, as well as by connecting climate change with the security nexus of water-energy-food-ecosystems;

8. *Commit* to focus our efforts, promote and achieve concrete progress on the four following priority areas/strands of policy identified by the Steering Committee and on strengthening the role of youth within these strands to ensure that youth are more active in planning and integrating ESD policies and actions at the national and regional levels:

(a) Linking ESD with quality education by embedding ESD into quality standards, framework mechanisms and resources associated with formal quality assessments and institutional reviews and effectively involving all those who oversee quality enhancement and have responsibility for this agenda in education at the national/international level;

(b) Implementing ESD across all educational and training programmes in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings, through the whole institution approach, which aims to strengthen the sustainable development aspect of the overall culture of learning institutions through appropriate learning programmes, governance, infrastructure and relationships with societies and networks within and outside the institutions; capitalizing on lessons learned on the whole institution approach in the ECE region; providing competent and coherent frameworks for its promotion; involving educators and all stakeholders, particularly youth, in whole institution approach plans to promote ESD in their respective institutions; and strengthening cooperation between formal and non-formal education;

(c) Assuring, through appropriate institutional and operational frameworks and means, that digital education and information and communication technologies are developed and used in systematic, balanced and blended ways to support the processes needed to enhance learning and ESD, in particular by removing barriers to access to digital technologies and through enhancement of opportunities for blended learning and accessing open educational resources and practices, while raising awareness about the positive, critical and potentially negative impacts that technology, and information and communications technology in particular, can have on learning for a sustainable future;

(d) Connecting ESD with economic and social development, addressing entrepreneurship, employment, business, financial and policy areas that influence the sources of welfare and well-being by identifying functional approaches, guidelines, projects and organizations that support the required knowledge, values, attitudes, qualifications and skills for new jobs related to green and circular economy and green technologies, as well as contribute to the necessary green transformations and sustainable development;

9.   *Focus* on the implementation of the four priority strands of the Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030, by:

(a)   Requesting ECE to continue providing secretariat support to further advance ESD in the region;

(b)   Requesting member States to update their national ESD strategies in accordance with the new implementation framework 2021–2030;

(c)   Encouraging member States to develop synergies and networks of collaboration by sharing ideas, good practices and projects, based on the key priority areas of the new implementation framework 2021–2030;

(d)   Encouraging member States to enhance multisectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration on ESD at all levels of governance with ministries of education and environment, collaborating with all other ministries that have an impact on sustainable development, to ensure the whole-of-government approach that is critical for ESD implementation in all countries of the region;

(e)   Encouraging member States to strengthen the UNECE ESD Youth Platform by appointing youth national focal points and to support youth activities on promoting ESD at the regional, subregional and national levels;

(f)   Inviting member States to continue regular reporting to ECE on national progress in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD within the established reporting mechanism, updated in accordance with the priority areas of the new implementation framework 2021–2030, and based on the experience from the previous monitoring and evaluation methodology, while also allowing for the comparability of reporting outcomes with previous ECE national implementation reporting exercises;

(g)   Inviting ECE to further enhance cooperation with UNESCO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Union, the Mediterranean Committee on Education for Sustainable Development and other relevant bodies (e.g., the Alumni Network of the Central Asian Leadership Programme on Education for Sustainable Development);

(h)   Requesting the Steering Committee to prepare, with the support of the ECE secretariat, a workplan and budget for the implementation of the Strategy for the period up to the end of 2025. This should include targeted assistance activities, taking into account the results of the final evaluation report on the implementation of the Strategy, as well as needs identified by the subregional and national capacity-building activities held in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Mediterranean and those expressed by the member States;

10.   *Invite* stakeholders, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors, to continue contributing to and supporting the implementation process;

11.   *Invite* member States, in keeping with the commitment made under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, to continue to support countries to strengthen education in areas related to sustainable development;

12.   *Request* the Executive Secretary of ECE to catalyse efforts for resource mobilization, including financial support, by member States, for strengthening and scaling up ESD actions [in partnership with UNESCO and UNEP];

13.   *Also request* the Executive Secretary of ECE to mainstream ESD activities, partnerships and initiatives in all programmes;

14.   *Reconfirm* that future ECE ministerial high-level meetings on ESD should be held on a regular basis, preferably at the Environment for Europe conferences, as appropriate, which provide a broad framework bringing together a wide range of stakeholders.

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