



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference**

Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022

**Report of the Ninth Environment for Europe
Ministerial Conference****Addendum****Co-Chairs' Summary of the High-level Meeting of Education
and Environment Ministries****I. Introduction**

1. The Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries took place in Nicosia, on 5 October 2022, during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022). The Minister for Education, Sport and Youth and the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus co-chaired the Meeting.

2. The Meeting considered progress made by participating member States in implementing the last phase of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (the Strategy) from 2017 to 2019, with a view to adopting a new framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development up to 2030, focusing on the special role that education had to play in addressing the unprecedented challenges currently faced by humankind.

II. Opening remarks and statements from international organizations

3. The Co-Chair and Minister for Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus, in his opening remarks, pointed to the special purpose of the High-level Meeting which provided a great opportunity to discuss the new Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10); an ambitious plan, aligned with the major global, European, Mediterranean and other regional initiatives on education for sustainable development (ESD). The new Framework would provide a response to many ongoing and emerging challenges in the current rapidly changing world, which was experiencing considerable political and socioeconomic developments both at the national and global levels. The High-level Meeting brought up critical questions regarding the future of education, reflected in the new implementation Framework, which were focused on the essence and content of education and ESD. The current important meeting would provide an

opportunity to discuss, commit and work together in the direction of transforming education plans and making ESD an intrinsic part of policies through the consolidated efforts of Governments, representatives of international and regional organizations, civil society, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth, aimed at transforming the planet. The new Framework was a great vehicle, providing guidance in a new era of ESD.

4. The Co-Chair and Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus, in his opening remarks, highlighted the importance of the High-level Meeting, which provided a platform for discussions on the role of ESD for the environment and education sectors, with, importantly, the active engagement of youth. The Minister stressed that humankind was facing a triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution that put current and future generations at risk. He pointed out that it was the duty of all to take decisions that would safeguard the well-being of future generations, as well as to educate young people, the future leaders, to respect the planetary boundaries and protect the environment. The Minister highlighted the key role of education in achieving sustainable development and its goals, and underscored the unique opportunity provided by the current meeting to discuss, interact and work together with youth in order to create a more prosperous, equitable, healthy and sustainable planet. The Minister concluded that the meeting was the right moment for committing to upscaling joint efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development.

5. The Executive Secretary of ECE highlighted the important achievements in implementing the Strategy since its adoption in 2005 and encouraged participants to further develop and strengthen strategies, plans and mechanisms for the implementation of ESD in the region, which could be a powerful catalyst for the transition towards more resilient systems and futures for the benefit of current and future generations. The Executive Secretary underlined that the ECE secretariat would continue to provide support to the implementation of the Strategy, and expressed the hope that the member States would commit to allocating and mobilizing sufficient financial and human resources for the implementation of the new Framework. She called upon the High-level Meeting to seize the extraordinary opportunity for global and regional collaboration offered by the Sustainable Development Goals to strengthen and enhance ESD at all levels, and to reaffirm the commitment to the future implementation of the Strategy by endorsing the new implementation Framework and adopting the joint Ministerial Statement.

6. The Acting Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said that:

The world is in crisis ... If we are to walk a new path. If we are to address today's complex, interconnected crises. If we are to reshape the systems and values that are causing them. If we are to survive and thrive. If we are to redeem and remake the state of the world, then we must first transform the state of education. This means investing in education for sustainable development across curricula. It means teaching people how to build resilience to environmental shock. It means raising awareness among the public so that new policies, reforms and technical solutions are understood and supported. It means scaling up the role of education to tackle future crises, to empower learners of all ages to act for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a more just, equitable society.

7. The Assistant Director-General for Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in a video statement, emphasized the importance of the UNECE Strategy for ESD as a regional strategy that made an important contribution to the global framework on ESD for 2030 and its accompanying road map. She referred to the Transforming Education Summit (New York, 16–17 and 19 September 2022), at which Heads of State and Heads of Government had made statements containing commitments on transforming national systems for greater inclusion, quality and resilience, and underlined that the current High-level Meeting paved the way for and made a highly valuable contribution to the strengthening of the role of ESD in transforming the future.

8. The Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, in a video message, shared her thoughts on the role of ESD in the context of the ongoing climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity, and highlighted the importance of the

current High-level Meeting as an opportunity to work together to address pressing challenges. In order to live sustainably, a profound transformation of not only the economy but also of modern culture, behaviour and lifestyles was needed. Quality education, a key focus of the ECE framework, was key to changing mindsets, and empowering young pupils and adults to take action towards sustainability. The speaker highlighted the central role of education and training in implementing the goals of the European Green Deal and referred to the Council recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development,¹ adopted on 16 June 2022 by the Council of the European Union, as a key policy statement in support of the implementation of the European Green Deal. She briefed the meeting about the work of the European Commission and the support provided to its member States, their education systems and communities in implementing the main policy directions, including the leveraging of funds for various initiatives in support of opportunities for learning about sustainability at the national and local levels.

III. Implementation of education for sustainable development in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region: Progress report and the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030

9. The Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD presented the key findings of the Fourth evaluation report of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/INF/7), which had been taken into account when drafting the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10) and the Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11).

10. The Co-Chair briefed the participants about the process of elaboration of the Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030, which had been prepared by the group of experts of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD in consultation with its members, including the national focal points and observers from international and regional organizations, NGOs, members of the UNECE ESD Youth Platform and representatives of academia. The Framework was the result of collaboration and negotiation, reflecting the will of the member States to move forward with implementation of ESD in the region that would intrinsically support countries. It would be open and flexible, but mainly it would reflect and respond to the current demands and challenges of ESD, as formulated under the ongoing climate and health crisis, war and the other wider complexities that were currently globally dominant. In preparing the document, the experts had taken into consideration the main objectives of the UNECE Strategy for ESD per se (2005) and the results of the previous four phases of its implementation (2005–2019). As part of the process of elaborating the new strategic plan, the national focal points and experts of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD had held a series of in-person and online meetings during the period 2018–2021 and had produced a draft document further to consultation and approval. Also, the policy document took into consideration and was aligned with other global commitments and regional initiatives. The Co-Chair invited the High-level Meeting participants to make statements in support of the draft Framework proposed for adoption.

¹ See <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9242-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

IV. Statements regarding the new Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 and its adoption

11. The Deputy Minister for Environment of Armenia expressed her gratitude to ECE for the promotion of pan-European economic integration and for addressing global environmental challenges. She underlined the crucial role of education in equipping the public with the necessary knowledge for implementation of sustainable development policies, plans and actions. In that regard, the inclusion of environmental education in the curricula of different fields of study was crucial.

12. The State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection of Germany emphasized that education was at the heart of tackling the triple global crisis and that there was currently a promising framework in that regard. She confirmed the country's commitment to ESD by implementing the necessary actions put forward in the 2021 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural (UNESCO) "Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development",² reaffirming the significance of ESD as a key enabler for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To achieve the goal of empowering all learners to act sustainably by 2030, Germany had established a comprehensive national interministerial and multi-stakeholder process, whereby all stakeholders from politics, science, industry, society and youth worked closely together to implement a national plan of action on ESD, addressing both the formal and non-formal education sectors.

13. The Minister for Education, Religion and Sports of Greece emphasized the need to adopt the new Framework for implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, especially at a time when societies and education systems were being called on to prepare students for a world that was changing at an increasingly fast pace. Emphasis on quality education, the whole-of-institution approach, digital education and entrepreneurship skills for jobs of the future were four pillars that should progressively underpin all education systems so that students could be provided with the tools necessary for future success. She highlighted the importance of continuing to bring together ministers of education and of environment, and of underscoring that the outcomes of the current meeting should serve as guidance in designing cross-sectoral policies for a sustainable future. Given the magnitude of the challenges ahead, it was vital for all to work together.

14. The Secretary of State for the Ministry of Education of Romania said that there was an urgent need to effectively implement the four strands of the new Framework for implementation of the UNECE Strategy on ESD 2021–2030, and shared information about steps undertaken at the national level to promote green schools and green learning. Romania had included green skills in the core curricula for primary and lower secondary education, and had allocated a significant level of funding to the setting up of a national network of green schools, which saved resources and implemented eco-school programmes. Participation and engagement of all relevant stakeholders at the national and international levels, including regional and local communities, as well as civil society, was essential. The steps taken to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals were important for the European region. The Minister emphasized the commitment of the Government of Romania to providing high quality education systems that recognized schools, digital education, entrepreneurship and innovation as priority actions.

15. The State Secretary for the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia highlighted the importance of commitments made at the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences and confirmed the country's firm intention to implement them at the national level. The speaker emphasized that the adoption of the new Framework for ESD further represented a collective commitment to continue and deepen the implementation of

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development: Learn for Our Planet – Act for Sustainability* (Paris, 2022).

the Strategy. ESD was especially needed to further empower individuals to contribute to sustainable development through the choices they made as individuals, consumers and in their lifestyles. That would further lead to empowering them to demand better, sound actions and results from other relevant actors, including Governments. The speaker expressed the hope that he would witness the successful results of the Strategy's implementation and other commitments made at the current Conference.

16. The representative of ECO-Forum, speaking on behalf of the European non-profit organizations, welcomed the Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030, which included many important topics for discussion. He referred to the meaning of the term "ESD", pointing out that educational policies in every country must advance in implementing all commitments and prospects for the future expressed also in the UNESCO Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development. He underlined the importance of cooperation between ECE and UNESCO in advancing the ESD agenda, including the sharing of good practices of successful transformation. He acknowledged the demonstrated commitment of various educational settings, as well as NGOs, young people and other partners in promoting ESD at all levels of education systems; however, at the same time, there remained many countries where such efforts were not supported by the administration and still depended on individuals' personal enthusiasm. That could also be observed in the UNECE ESD Steering Committee, where some States were very active, while others ignored the entire process.

17. The representative of the State of Palestine greeted teachers on World Teachers' Day and referred to the outcome of the recent Transforming Education Summit, which confirmed that everyone needed a transforming mind in order to transform education systems. He highlighted the special role of teachers – the main actors in achieving the transformation of education systems – and stressed the importance of considering the development of indicators measuring the social outcomes of the changes introduced into education systems. There was a need to reconcile with the environment as Governments and also as individuals.

18. The Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Netherlands in Cyprus, underlined that the current challenges facing humankind required radical changes to make the world sustainable. Education was key for developing the knowledge, skills and mindsets that were needed. Young people and students were, in particular, agents for change, but the needed transformations required the involvement of society as a whole, which must learn and innovate. The education system of the Netherlands was on its way to reforming curricula in order to make knowledge on climate change and sustainability a structural component. The UNECE Strategy for ESD was a source of inspiration, as it addressed not only formal education, but also non-formal and informal learning. Schools, businesses, government and NGOs needed to be involved both within and outside the education system. The UNECE Strategy for ESD provided both input for a national policy and programme and inspiration in the form of good practices at the international level, as well as underlining the urgent need for action.

19. The Co-Chair and Minister for Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus concluded by underlining the particular role of the new Framework for ESD as a way to advance ESD in the region. He highlighted that, in Cyprus, the new Framework would guide the Government in reviewing the national policy on ESD and pointed out that, since the introduction of the Strategy in 2005, Cyprus had acknowledged its value throughout time and would pursue its goals at the national, bilateral and international levels on the basis of experience gained from the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD and in cooperation with its members. As a contribution in support of work plan activities to be organized by the Steering Committee during the next implementation phase from 2021 to 2025, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus had contributed €150,000 towards events, expert knowledge and organization of international meetings for the implementation of the priority strand on the whole institution approach/whole school approach. The Minister invited other countries and partners to collaborate on transforming national policies in the direction of sustainability. He emphasized that the current Conference provided an excellent policy tool.

20. Ministers and heads of delegation adopted by acclamation the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030

(ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10), providing a way forward for the implementation of the Strategy in the region up to 2030.

V. Panel discussions along the four strands of the new Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030

21. The panel discussion was organized along the four priority strands of the new Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030, i.e.: (a) Quality education and ESD; (b) Whole institution approach/institutions as communities of transformational learning; (c) Digital education, information and communications technology and ESD; and (d) Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD. The discussion was moderated interactively, with ministers being invited to reflect upon leading questions proposed for each panel (related to each specific strand) in open discussions, sharing reflections about the policy measures, initiatives and future aims of their respective countries along each strand.

22. The panel discussion on the first strand on quality education was built around the following questions: “(1) How do you guarantee that ESD is embedded in national policies? (2) In what way do you support capacity-building for learning for sustainability in organizations (educational organizations, professional organizations, institutions, ministries)? (3) How do you involve professionals (public, private, local authorities and institutions) in quality enhancement programmes for learning for sustainability?”.

23. The three high-level panelists from Andorra, Georgia and San Marino answered the questions with their own statements. Returning remarks were the following: leave no one behind; raise awareness of all stakeholders in the education system; the position of Sustainable Development Goal 4 as a lever for all other Goals. A reference to World Teachers’ Day was made by the panelist from San Marino, highlighting the central role of teachers in the process, as well as their training. Audience members provided examples of stakeholder platforms and networks working on the theme, and highlighted social aspects. The wrap-up from the moderator focused on: Sustainable Development Goal 4; the need to develop and support competences of teachers, principals and schoolboards; more theoretical frameworks for schoolboards; multi-stakeholder platforms for all stakeholders involved; and, monitoring and evaluation for feedback.

24. The panel discussion of the second strand on “Whole institution approach: institutions as communities of transformational learning” was built around the following questions: “(1) How do you support the whole institutional approach in your national framework (schools, organizations, local authorities and ministries)? (2) Based on your national experiences, how can policies ensure the collaboration of stakeholders for integrating the whole institution approach regarding ESD? (3) (a) What advantages of the whole school approach/whole institution approach do you experience? or (b) What challenges are you facing in your national context?”.

25. The two high-level panelists from Cyprus and Hungary gave their first positive impressions of the concept, but also pointed to its complexity. The concept of “Eco-schools” was prominent in Hungary, but later, in interventions from the audience, it was brought up more. The “whole school approach/whole institution approach” is a multi-angle concept, embracing aspects such as school plans, pedagogy, content, actors/teachers, infrastructure and its maintenance. A “warning” was issued that such a holistic concept did not always fit in with school organization, as schools were autonomous in how they managed themselves and their curricula. However, reactions to the concept were mainly positive, with questions on “why, what, how and who” being addressed. It was important to “practise what you preach”.

26. The panel discussion of the third strand on “Digital education, information and communications technology and ESD” was built around the following questions: “(1) What does a balanced use of digital tools for ESD programmes mean in your national context? (2) From your experience, how did the transition to digital education due to the pandemic impact

(positively or negatively) ESD implementation in your national context? (3) In which ways can digital tools contribute in a meaningful way to learning for sustainability? Do you have national experiences to share?”.

27. The high-level panelist from Greece underlined the role of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in speeding up the digitalization of education that required both equipment for all to ensure access and also the corresponding knowledge, skills and competences. She shared the experience of Greece focused on work with the three “Cs”: connectivity (including equipment); content (also requiring open sources, platforms); and capacity (skills, competencies). The competence of “critical thinking” was also needed, as well as capacity-building for digital education for students, teachers and all other involved actors. Audience members referred to the history of the development of digital education and the role of educational NGOs. One of the restrictions of information and communications technology was the absence of personal contact, especially concerning “values”, therefore such technology and digital education constituted a useful tool, but should not replace all education.

28. The panel discussion of the fourth strand on “Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD” was built around the following questions: “(1) How can ESD-oriented entrepreneurship and employment programmes support vulnerable groups, marginalized groups and youth? (2) Do you expect increased youth employability as a result of ESD-oriented entrepreneurship or employment programmes? If yes, how? If no, why? (3) Which needs and opportunities can education, oriented to sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship, respectively meet and provide to accelerate transformation towards more sustainable economies (green jobs, circular economy and bioeconomy)?”.

29. The high-level panelist from the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia emphasized that ESD had to be present in all subjects, as it reached out to all different human activities. It had to be present throughout education, not just in subjects. The perspective for ESD was to contribute to both quality of life and the workforce. It should also open companies up to taking action on sustainable development.

30. The moderator finalized the discussion by highlighting the following main points:

- ESD was the driver for change in education systems.
- Everyone must learn, not only children and schools.
- The four strands would be a focus and an agenda to work on, but the Strategy, with all its other objectives, must not be forgotten.
- ESD was not the responsibility of only the education and/or the environment ministries, but of all ministries, in collaboration with other stakeholders, including schools, business and NGOs.
- Huge transitions were coming, there was no blueprint, and there was a need to learn a way out of unsustainability.

VI. Adoption of the Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development

31. The Co-Chair and Minister for Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus introduced the draft Nicosia Ministerial Statement. He highlighted that the main purpose of the Statement was to support and increase efforts to implement the UNECE Strategy for ESD until 2030 at the regional level in synergy with other organizations and processes within and beyond the United Nations system. The Statement had been developed as a holistic document with a clear vision and strategic goals, leading to concrete and feasible tasks and based on the principles of inclusivity, equity, democracy, solidarity and dignity. The Statement was the result of collaboration and participation, and represented a joint commitment to work together to make ESD a reality.

32. The Co-Chair updated the meeting on the process of elaboration of the draft Ministerial Statement by the experts of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, the

members of the volunteer drafting group, established by the decision of the fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee (Geneva (hybrid), 19–20 October 2020).³ He pointed to the underlying rationale of, and the main messages highlighted in, the Ministerial Statement, emphasizing that the group had been guided by the newly finalized Framework for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10). At its seventeenth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 30–31 May 2022), the Steering Committee had considered the draft outline of the Ministerial Statement, including comments received from the Committee members before the meeting, and agreed to approve the draft as a final document for further submission to the High-level Meeting should no further comments be received from members by 20 June 2022.⁴ As no comments had been received by that deadline, the ECE Steering Committee on ESD had reaffirmed the approval of the draft ministerial statement at its special session (Nicosia, 4 October 2022)⁵ held back-to-back with the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia, 5 October 2022) and agreed to submit it to the consideration of the High-level Meeting.

33. At the same time, the Committee’s special session had noted additional comments made by Austria and the representative of UNEP on the importance of including the following amendments to the text of the Ministerial Statement (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/7, ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11):

(a) Before paragraph number 5, beginning “*Also commit* to carefully consider global, regional, subregional and national studies and assessments ...”, to insert the following additional paragraph: “*Acknowledge* that the necessity for action should not be restricted to formal education, but that all areas of administration and society are obliged to make their contribution to education for sustainable development”;⁶

(b) In the paragraph beginning “*Recalling* General Assembly resolution 76/209...”, to include a reference to the “*Vision Statement of the Secretary-General on Transforming Education*” adopted on 19 October 2022. The reference could not be included before the deadline since it was issued after 20 June 2022. The new paragraph should read: “*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), the *Vision Statement of the Secretary-General on Transforming Education* (issued on 19 October 2022) and previous resolutions on ESD”;⁷

(c) The draft Ministerial Statement contained no reference to the two other main topics of the Nicosia Conference: “sustainable infrastructure” and “sustainable tourism”. The reference had been omitted due to an oversight and should be included under paragraph 8 (d), the new version of which should read: “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, including in the infrastructure and tourism sectors, as well as contribute to the necessary green transformations and sustainable development”;⁸

(d) The relevance and timeliness to acknowledge the critical role of other components of target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals in preventing and overcoming crises that threatened humanity’s collective future and in leading to a more peaceful future. That point should appear in a new paragraph, after the paragraph beginning “*Acknowledging* the importance of empowering marginalized and vulnerable populations...”. The new paragraph should read: “*Acknowledging also* the

³ ECE/CEP/AC.13/2020/2, para. 52.

⁴ ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/2, paras. 61–67.

⁵ ECE/CEP/AC.13/S/2022/2, paras. 8–22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 11.

central role of ESD in the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, and global citizenship.”

34. Taking into consideration that the above-listed comments had been received less than 24 hours before the High-level Meeting, for procedural reasons it had not been possible to include them in the final text of the Statement in the absence of a mechanism for holding ministerial negotiations at such short notice.

35. Ministers and heads of delegation adopted the Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development by acclamation.

36. The Co-Chairs congratulated countries and organizations participating in the High-level Meeting on the adoption of the two outcome documents, the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 and the Draft Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development, which would guide the member States and all involved partners in implementing ESD in the region up to 2030.