

# UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development

Learn for our planet. Act for sustainability.

#ESDfor2030



## Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development

### Preamble

1. We, participants from governments, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society, youth, the academic community, the business sector and all spheres of teaching and learning, convened online from 17 to 19 May 2021 for the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, organized by UNESCO in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, and with the German Commission for UNESCO as advisory partner, adopt this declaration.
2. We are convinced that urgent action is needed to address the dramatic interrelated challenges the world is facing, in particular, the climate crisis, mass loss of biodiversity, pollution, pandemic diseases, extreme poverty and inequalities, violent conflicts, and other environmental, social and economic crises that endanger life on our planet. We believe that the urgency of these challenges, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, requires a fundamental transformation that sets us on the path of sustainable development based on more just, inclusive, caring and peaceful relationships with each other and with nature.
3. We are confident that education is a powerful enabler of positive change of mindsets and worldviews and that it can support the integration of all dimensions of sustainable development, of economy, society and the environment, ensuring that development trajectories are not exclusively orientated towards economic growth to the detriment of the planet, but towards the well-being of all within planetary boundaries.

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4. We are confident that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), anchored in SDG 4.7 and as an enabler for all 17 SDGs, is the foundation for the required transformation, providing everyone with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to become change agents for sustainable development. ESD enables learners to develop their cognitive and non-cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and competences for collaboration, problem solving, coping with complexity and risk, building resilience, thinking systemically and creatively, and empowering them to take responsible action as citizens, fulfilling their right to quality education as defined in SDG 4 -Education 2030. We believe that ESD must be based on and promote respect for nature, as well as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, non-discrimination, equity and gender equality. In addition, it should promote intercultural understanding, cultural diversity, a culture of peace and non-violence, inclusion and the notion of responsible and active global citizenship.
5. We welcome the new 'ESD for 2030' framework and its Roadmap for implementation as our guiding documents for the next 10 years to mobilize action on ESD in the areas of policy, transforming learning environments, capacity development of educators, youth empowerment, and local level action.

### Our commitment

1. We, within our respective mandates and in our areas of responsibility, taking into account our needs, capacities, available resources and national priorities, commit to the following:
  - a) Ensure that ESD is a foundational element of our education systems at all levels, with environmental and climate action as a core curriculum component, while maintaining a holistic perspective on ESD that recognizes the interrelatedness of all dimensions of sustainable development;
  - b) Integrate ESD into all levels of education and training from early childhood to tertiary and adult education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and into non-formal education and informal learning, so that all individuals are provided with lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for sustainable development;
  - c) Implement ESD with joint emphasis on the cognitive skills, social and emotional learning, and action competences for the individual and societal dimensions of transformation, promoting individual behavioural change for sustainable development, equality and respect for human rights as well as fundamental structural and cultural changes at the systemic level of economies and societies, and also promoting the required political action to bring about these changes;

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- d) Harness the power of ESD for the redesign of our societies, encouraging, inter alia, access to scientific knowledge and data sharing to facilitate research, evidence-based policies, democratic decision-making and the recognition of indigenous knowledge, to promote sustainable and transformative economies centered on respect for the well-being of people as well as for the planet, and to enhance resilience and preparedness for future global crises;
- e) Promote a whole-institution approach, recognizing that learners and the school community become meaningfully engaged in sustainable development through democratic participation when their institutions become living laboratories for participation and active citizenship, equity and gender equality, health, connections with nature and respect for the environment, energy efficiency and sustainable consumption, and where learning is experiential, action-oriented, localized and culturally specific, allowing learners to learn what they live and live what they learn;
- f) Recognize climate change as a priority area of ESD of particular importance to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as they require special attention in terms of ESD implementation due to their increasing vulnerability to climate change and natural hazards;
- g) Also recognize the crucial role of teachers to promote ESD and invest in the capacity development of teachers and other education personnel at all levels and to ensure a whole-of-sector approach to the necessary transformation of education;
- h) Harness the potential of new, digital and 'green' technologies to ensure that the access, development and use of technologies is responsible, safe, equitable, inclusive and based on critical thinking and sustainability principles with a proper assessment of risks and benefits, as well as promotes open educational resources, open science and affordable eLearning facilities for ESD;
- i) Empower young people as change agents for sustainable development, by creating opportunities for learning and civic engagement, and providing them with the competencies and tools to participate in ESD as co-creators of individual and societal transformation;
- j) Prioritize marginalized populations, including persons with disabilities, refugees and persons affected by conflict, crises and natural disasters, through an inclusive approach by promoting innovative ESD policies which are contextualized and embedding ESD in emergency education;
- k) Emphasize gender equality and non-discrimination in access to knowledge and skills, and ensure gender mainstreaming in ESD which enables a more profound and holistic understanding of sustainability challenges and potential solutions;

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- l) Mobilize ESD to combat poverty, particularly extreme poverty, and provide learners with relevant competencies to meet individual and societal demands, including through TVET and skills development for sustainable livelihoods to ensure human dignity and the right to live decently;
- m) Enhance multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration on ESD at all levels of governance, with Ministries of Education collaborating with all other Ministries that have an impact on sustainable development, to ensure a whole-of-government approach, with strengthened cooperation between Ministries of Education and Environment at the core, as well as with all other relevant stakeholder groups, such as non-governmental organizations, the academic community, the business sector, youth, and others;
- n) Support the further alignment, at global, regional and national levels, of the education, environment, climate, sustainable economy and other relevant development agendas, and enhance networking between different stakeholder groups in order to ensure that efforts are mutually supportive and complementary and support structural mainstreaming of ESD;
- o) Allocate sufficient resources and protect the domestic and international financing of ESD at the time of Covid-19 and beyond, and emphasize the role international development cooperation plays in promoting quality education and youth empowerment in developing countries in ways that strengthen the power of education in making all societies more just and sustainable;
- p) Monitor ESD progress, in the context of the overall monitoring of the SDGs and Target 4.7 in particular, in order to ensure that implementation is continuously improved and helps ensure that no-one is left behind, put in place assessment systems on ESD and enhance research on how to evaluate ESD progress.

## Way forward

7. We invite UNESCO, as the lead United Nations agency for ESD, to support the implementation of this declaration in cooperation with Member States, mobilizing its networks, including UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs, UNESCO Associated Schools and UNESCO designated sites, among others, and ensuring regular reviews of implementation progress.
8. We commit to taking this declaration and its provisions forward through relevant global, regional, national and local processes, looking ahead to important milestones such as the 2021 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP 15), the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) and beyond.
9. Transformative learning for people and the planet is a necessity for our survival and that of future generations. The time to learn and act for our planet is now.

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