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Updates on the outcomes of the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Strategic Planning:
Draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework

Information paper no. 6

Pre-final draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework: Strategic Document on ESD for the UNECE Region 2021-2030 [1]

Prepared by the UNECE Secretariat

1. Learning our way out of crisis

1. "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" said Nelson Mandela. He may never could imagine the enormous crisis that holds our world as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which according to WHO until now, 7/4/2021, resulted to over (132) millions of infected people and over a 2.9 million of confirmed deaths.

2. Since 2020 the entire world is facing not only a serious health crisis with a relative new disease, but also society in 223 countries, areas or territories is in lock-down, social contacts are restricted to minimum, schools are closed, economies are ruined, millions of jobs are lost, and significant travel restrictions prevail.

3. In drafting outlines for further development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for the next decade 2021 - 2030, these circumstances urge us to rethink and reconsider not only the challenges, but also emerging opportunities and needed changes. In order to consolidate the lessons learned from the current social disruption and to 'build back better' we must engage with futures thinking and collaborative decision making. Both are necessary to speed up the needed transformations.

4. Our Strategic Planning timeframe coincides with the global commitment made to deliver the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals which provide both the focus and momentum needed to align national and regional efforts towards a verifiably better future for all.

5. We should seize the extraordinary opportunity for global and regional collaboration offered by the SDGs and the needs accentuated by the COVID-19 crisis to strengthen and enhance ESD at all levels. ESD can be the powerful catalyst for our transition towards more resilient systems and futures for the benefit of current and future generations.

2. COVID-19 as another, but urgent, wake-up call?

[1] This document was not formally edited

6. It is naive to wait for this pandemic to pass, hoping that things will go back to "normal". Unfortunately, many people, including leaders, may follow this path. Some will tend to consider COVID-19 as yet another "nightmare to be forgotten" as we have virtually eliminated from our memory, teachings and strategic planning the "Spanish flu" pandemic, which affected 500 million of people out of the less than approximately 1.7 billion of the then global population and killed an estimated 20 to 50 million victims. There are also those who insist that we should "never waste a good crisis"[2] and that this momentum can, indeed become the start of a fundamental transition.

7. The COVID-19 crisis proved how vulnerable our societies are and how technological and scientific advances, economic models, military and defence systems, failed to provide us with the protection and security they promise. Instead, the international collaboration schemes which could have put in place strong precautionary mechanisms of solidarity and preparedness, were never supported adequately to provide the needed "safety net". This pandemic offered us a fast-forward experience of what our life could be under other, perhaps less "visible" but not necessarily less urgent, and eventually much greater crises as climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

8. Well considered, we have a system of major crises at the same time: health, environmental, social and economic ones. This calls for innovative and adaptable education systems, which are appropriate and able to effectively contribute to a realistic but fast transformation of our world towards a more healthy, stable, peaceful and fair place for wellbeing with conditions encouraging creativity and ensuring sustainable futures.

9. This is why we need to make sure that the present extraordinary situation will remain in our collective memory as a strong wake-up call, requiring a thorough, deep re-examination of the root causes behind this crisis, providing lessons for appropriate changes in our behaviour and, consequently, indicating transformations in education and learning which is a key process contributing to social change.

10. Without denying the considerable progress obtained during the last 100 years in medical and pharmaceutical research and the improvement of health conditions in large parts of the world, we should admit that infectious diseases, and the underlying causes, were largely underestimated. For many years scientists have warned of the potential danger from enhanced human exposure to unknown and emerging new viruses and zoonosis[3], mostly as result of neglecting the biosphere we all live in. However, governments and politicians concentrating for years on visible pressing current challenges and issues, downplayed or postponed proactive and precautionary approaches necessary for safeguarding the crucial and fundamental causal relationship between biosphere and the overall natural and cultural environment. [4]

11. The aforementioned reactions are symptoms of the more general lack of clarity about priorities. Globalization, with a blind-eye focus on economic growth, destruction of ecosystems, supply-driven high technology, excessive media development without social control and a linear economy, to some extend have led to a loss of a sense of what is important *vs* unimportant, facts *vs* fiction and essential *vs* irrelevant. Under these conditions, the natural links of our lives to their biological roots, history and culture have been damaged, while accelerated confusion prevails on what is real progress *vs* modernity and what are basic values and needs.[5] This represents the urgency to strengthen the fourth pillar of sustainable development – the culture of doing what is right, and the relevance of value-based education for sustainable development.

12. This is why it is crucial to view the current situation not only as a health issue, but also as an opportunity to comprehend the unveiled failure of the overall system we live in, and to raise fundamental and systemic questions related to sustainable development. By

[2] Sir Winston Churchill

[3] Preventing the next pandemic - Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission: https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and

[4] Footnote to warning reports

[5] Footnotes to reports as Climate, WWF, …

addressing these questions, hopefully we will be able to enrich and strengthen the very content and pedagogy of value-based ESD in addressing the critical for the future decade to 2030.

3. Major questions that arise from our current state of affairs

13. Major questions that might start with health and go deep into ecology, governance, economy and education, and provide an entry to the UNECE work on promotion of SDGs, may include the following:

(a) "How do we address COVID-19 and how will we capitalize on lessons learned in order to revisit and reassess the relationship between society and nature, as we see that biodiversity and natural habitats are under serious risks and an increasing animal-human contact is the root cause of serious infections through zoonosis and other poorly understood transmission pathways?"

(b) "How do we make a coordinated transition towards healthy diets and sustainable food systems as we see on the one hand that people with obesity and diabetes are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and on the other hand, that the prevailing food production and distribution/marketing systems destroy biodiversity, while leaving millions of people in hunger?"

(c) "How feasible is to address the above two questions without improving the situation where 40 percent of the global population has no access to safe, clean water and sanitation, knowing that effective prevention requires at least frequent hand washing?"

(d) "How do we address the nexus of water, energy, food, ecosystem security without sound policies and lifestyle adjustments to mitigate and adapt to climate change?"

(e) "How can we connect this kind of questions in the broader context of sustainable development, as this is not only a health or ecological approach?"

(f) "How do we approach the critical issues of inclusion and equity, as we observe that many 'trade-offs' regarding health, nutrition, livelihoods and education affect mainly the most vulnerable and marginalized people, especially women, children and youth since sustainability goes deeply beyond environmental issues?"

(g) How can we use the Decade of Action for SDGs to build a culture of collaboration around ESD and focus minds on the systems changes needed to deliver educational outcomes relevant to SD?

14. Regarding these questions, the COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need for learners to develop a different set of skills that helps them to overcome crises. In this regard, some questions of a different nature are also raised:

(a) "How do we prepare educational institutions and organizations to inform their teaching contents by high quality scientific knowledge, complemented by ethical values and indigenous/endogenous knowledge and how the above could be reflected to transformative pedagogies that prepare learners for change?"

(b) To what extent emerging partners (e.g. business sector, CSOs) could be more closely involved in ESD addressing, at the same time, the needs of youth for work and their aspirations for a better future world?

(c) How do we develop our quality standards and support systems for educators and education administrators so that ESD is embedded as a core education concern?

(d) To what extent can we adjust the traditional predominant culture of accountability, performance, maintaining and evaluating in education, including more values in teaching & learning, and highlighting ESD competencies (e.g. system thinking, anticipatory, normative, strategic and collaboration competencies, and critical thinking) that are not always measurable in quantitative terms?

(e) "How do we pay attention to the role of digital learning, distance learning and ICT based education as integral tools of ESD, as the quarantine unveiled both strengths and weaknesses and demonstrated needs related to digital education systems in many countries"?

(f) "How do we make sure that digitalization and life-long learning are available for all, since currently very large groups of the most vulnerable people are virtually excluded from this type of education?

(g) How do we deal with the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 to young people forced to quarantine and go through confusion, anxiety, helplessness, etc and what is the long-term impact for this particular generation of young people?

15. All the above - and many more - questions extending from the prerequisites for healthy lifestyles to socioeconomic issues, conditions affecting vulnerable groups in slum areas, in areas under armed conflict and refugees, issues related to international cooperation and institutions, etc., call on those who deal with education to learn from the crisis and use the momentum created by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)[6] strengthening the connection between SDGs, ESD and value-based education in general.

4. The Consequences for education *per se* and the way forward

16. The pandemic has also "shocked" education *per se*. The education system, as such, was under great pressure, with temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 90% of the students worldwide and close to 1.6 billion children and youth being out of school, leaving children without access to education for months in parts of the world, and with a sudden transition to 'distance learning' and ICT based education in other parts of the world. But not only the organization of education changed. The questions raised, because of the situation point to the need for revisiting and adjusting the very content of education.

17. Indeed, UNESCO has started a very timely global initiative on the 'Futures of Education'[7] that asks the question 'education for what?' Can we use education for a more sustainable, just and healthy world? Which transitions are needed to reach that and who will lead us? What has to be replaced and what new possibilities might emerge? Can and will educational institutions and regulations be prepared, open and able to eventually re-invent themselves and appropriately adapt their curricula, pedagogy, methodologies, governance structures, operations and infrastructures to meet the challenge of sustainability as a compass? Do the aforementioned questions require a more urgent answer under the current conditions? Can we strengthen and reorient education through a lens of change in the post-COVID-19 period and beyond?

18. Thus, the questions about 'quality education' (SDG 4 and in particular SDG 4.7 both from the ESD perceptive, as well as greater relevance of global citizenship education, and combined with SDGs 12.8 & 13.3 on information and awareness on impact of our lifestyles and climate change) are now more relevant than ever, as we hope that in a post – COVID-19 society, things will not go 'back to business as usual'. The momentum of this crisis raises many fundamental questions frequently asked but not adequately or efficiently addressed until now (e.g. properly applying the "learning to learn, be, work with others and act approach)[8] and greater, new ones about sustainable living, healthy lifestyles, society, values, purpose of work and consumption, symbols of success, global situation, new economy and institutions, modernity *vs* tradition, jobs, etc. Addressing the aforementioned issues is in the heart of what education is for.

19. It is noteworthy that, while we were talking about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) distance learning, and other ICT's for years, in many countries within a few weeks complete learning and educational systems have been innovated and are now web-based; many educational tools are digitalized, teachers are in contact through tele-conferences with

[6] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/
[7] UNESCO project Futures of Education: https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/
[8] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000102734

students and other audiences. However, the issue of accessibility to technology by disadvantaged groups is intimately related to issues concerning e-learning.

20. What became clear in this period are also inherent inequalities this rapid shift has brought, e.g. on the access to digital infrastructures (computers, internet) as well as on the rural/urban divide.

21. So, there are still many questions to answer about what kind of education is NOT suitable for ICTs and how transparent and reliable ICT based learning can or cannot be. Are we "penny wise, pound-foolish"? or just hit by a transition by disaster? For ICT based education to succeed substantial and rapid progress in both SDGs 7 on access to reliable energy and SDG9 on resilient infrastructure needed, including in breaking the cycle of "Energy Poverty". (This means investing in renewables, tackle climate change and heal the planet).

5. The role of Youth

22. It is said that the present generation of youth is the first generation that can see the accumulated impact of crises in climate change and loss of biodiversity in the full scale, but also, perhaps, the last generation that can turn the tide and set compass for the needed transitions. This not only requires that they have to be appropriately educated, equipped and prepared for transitions towards a more sustainable world, but their active participation aspirations and creativity is needed now, during the formulation of critical policies, as major decisions of today will influence and, to some extent, will define their future, their role, their impact, and finally the shape of the world in which they will live in and are expected to manage. Young people cannot be the victim of our "growing first and cleaning up later" policy which is not an option anymore.

23. For this reason, youth should actively participate and be engaged in the different levels of decision making that directly and indirectly affect them. Policies and their implementation should be made "with" youth, not only "for" youth. Therefore, intergenerational dialogue is necessary to address the enormous problem of 'aging' in some parts of the world and the rapid growth of youngsters in other. Society should benefit from synergies between the wisdom and experience of elderly people (i.e. tangible and intangible cultural heritage) and the energy and innovation of young people. ESD should systematically cultivate these synergies.

24. To achieve many of the above, we cannot rely only on what traditional forms of education can offer: this requires new horizons in providing young people an enabling learning environment in which, while preserving their individual identity, are encouraged to act jointly for the community and make personal and collective choices for the needed changes and social transformation. In the process of change – and especially for the change of education systems towards ESD-based learning, the role, participation and enthusiasm of youth are essential for formulating the most sustainable pathways forward. This vision also refers to Global Citizenship Education.

6. The Process of the UNECE Strategy for ESD 2021 - 2030

25. Under the circumstances described in the previous parts and in curving a renewed and impactful ESD pathway that could also assist the Steering Committee in ESD international dialogues, the *Ad Hoc* Group on Strategic Planning (SPG) for 2030 has produced the present Core document. The drafting started upon the mandate given by the High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi (2016) to the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development to continue its work in stimulating cooperation on ESD across the region until 2030, aligned with other global commitments including the ESD for the 2030 Agenda of UNESCO[9] and the Agenda for Sustainable Development and

[9] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370215.locale=en

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[10], and other agendas like the Climate Change Agreement[11], the European Council recommendation on key Competences for lifelong learning (2018/C 189/01) and the initiative of integrating environment and health considerations into healthy school settings[12]

26. The Ad Hoc Group considered the UNECE Strategy for ESD per se (2004), with its seven objectives that reflect not on sustainable development contents as such, but on what are the prerequisites to deliver education for sustainable development that meets the need for change. Furthermore the Ad Hoc Group considered the six priority actions from the previous framework for implementation (2015-2019) that were organized in three vertical strands (whole institution approach (WIA) school plans; ESD in teacher education; strengthening TVET in support of sustainable development) and three horizontal ones (integration of ESD in policies; linking ESD in formal, informal and non-formal education; the role of networks).

27. As part of the process of constructing a new strategic plan, national focal points and experts of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, met in a series of meetings hosted by the Netherlands (The Hague, November 2018) and Cyprus (Nicosia, September 2019 and online in March 2020) and produced the draft document presented here for further consultation and approval.

28. The Ad Hoc Group also took in consideration the UNESCO preparations within and beyond the new "ESD for 2030" framework for the period 2021 to 2030 to be formally launched in Berlin in May 2021 (date postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis) and through a series of regional online launching events starting in October 2020[13]. "ESD for 2030" provided a new global program for ESD, where UNECE can and will contribute by sharing the collective experience of the region which has a very significant tradition and work on ESD, as compiled and crystalized through the work of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD and its working groups. Obviously, the aim of "sharing" the UNECE experience is to benefit not only the region and its neighbours (as is the case with the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD) but also other regions and parts of the world. This also offers an opportunity to use the knowledge gained through the ESD process to influence and strengthen the work of the different Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs)[14] under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) to which UNECE, UNEP and UNESCO are active members.

29. Particular emphasis is given by UNECE to closely link ESD with the SDGs, beyond SDG4 for Education (and specifically SDG 4.7 for ESD) and SDG 17 (for promoting international efforts and cooperation, partnerships and knowledge platforms). This association presents unique opportunities for synergies among educators and various stakeholders at all levels, from global to national and local. This is becoming increasingly evident by the fact that both problems and solutions on environment and development having complex socio-cultural and economic consequences are to a very large extent of regional nature and dimensions rather than global or national.

30. The importance of regional approaches has been recognized also in recent Conference of the Parties (COPs) of the UN Rio Conventions on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification (Para's on CEPA: Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness)[15] , while efforts for Sustainable Futures are also taking place at regional or sub-regional level; further examples of significant regional approaches are e.g. the ambitious new "Green Deal" of the EU[16]; a regional cooperation as the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development under the Barcelona Convention and the relevant Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Agendas, or the cooperation in CAREC region.

[10] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs

[11] https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf

[12] WHO (2019). Integrating environment and health considerations into healthy school setting, background paper

[13] https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/ESDfor2030-workshops

[14] Environment and climate change, Health, Youth, and Gender equality http://www.unece.org/runcwelcome/un-cooperation-in-the-unece-region.html

[15] Make references to the right para in the conventions (e.g. CBD, article 13)

[16] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal:content/EN/TXT/?qid1588580774040&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640

31. Given this context, the UNECE ESD Strategic Planning for 2030 should be ambitious, but fully aware of the 'momentum of change and crisis' we are in. It needs to respond to many known and new challenges in a very rapidly changing world with considerable political and socioeconomic developments, both at national levels and global levels.

32. In the UNECE region, many efforts are inspired by knowledge, innovations and good practices of the ESD and SD communities, also recognized worldwide, despite the relative resource limitations of the regional framework within which the Strategic Planning is developed and operates.

7. Towards Four Strands

33. Under the current COVID-19 time and beyond, the Committee has decided to focus on a limited number of priority areas of regional and national, but also global, importance where UNECE expertise could trigger and facilitate adequate transformative mobilization and change.

34. Apart from the substantial sustainable development issues connected with the major questions raised in part 3 of the present document that need to be reflected in the way forward until 2030 within the regional context and in the pedagogy supporting ESD in each Member State (MS), the Strategic Document aims to encourage and promote:

(a) Regional priorities and agreed ways forward for ESD in the next ten years (till 2030) in synergy and in support to the outcomes of the UN World Conference on ESD (17-19 May 2021).

(b) Ways to strengthen the position of ESD in educational systems and in learning within and beyond schools, colleges, TVET and universities.

(c) Systematic monitoring and assessment of progress at national and regional level

(d) Tangible ways to improve ESD teaching and learning processes and sharing of experience among UNECE MS and other stakeholders.

(e) Drivers and opportunities for advancing the MS and other stakeholders' efforts on ESD as it concerns methodology, approaches, and means of achieving SDGs through inter-sectoral cooperation

(f) Realistic and measurable targets that could help to fulfil and advance collective commitments for ESD in the coming decade.

(g) Needed educational interventions for accelerating the necessary changes of lifestyles and economic models, towards sustained futures, and a safer and more sustainable post-COVID-19 era.

(h) Collaborative platforms and initiatives with UNEP, UNESCO and UNFCCC to take forward our joint ambitions in education and learning for sustainable development.

35. In 2019, four key regional priorities/strands were selected on the basis of discussions in the UNECE Steering Committee and equal number of sub groups were formed, based on the expression of interest by experts from countries, international organizations and stakeholders.

36. These strands reflect in a combined and complementary way many of the issues and needs for ESD, identified above and earlier and may contribute to improve educational systems and other mechanisms to enable people to learn, live and work in a planet and a region that are more prosperous, just, creative, healthy and sustainable.

37. These strands are the following:

(a) Quality Education and ESD.

(b) Whole Institution Approach/ Institutions as communities of transformational learning.

(c) Digital Education, ICT and ESD.

(d) Entrepreneurship, Employment, Innovation and ESD.

Strand A: Quality Education and ESD

38. This strand emphasizes the need for actors responsible for the formulation, enhancement, assessment and quality controls of educational systems to be aboard, in the responsibility to connect the content, processes and urgencies of ESD with the formal, informal and nonformal learning at all levels. Whilst great strides have been taken to transition our education practices towards sustainable development, changes to education systems are taking place at a much slower pace. Educational quality processes, and supporting measures could provide effective pathways for changing our learning systems, directing them to with sustainable development. While efforts continue to focus on teacher education and curriculum development less attention has been paid until now to quality assurance and enhancement systems. This strategic plan recognizes the need and significance of tackling this important aspect of education aligning it with SDG 4 and the UNESCO strategy "ESD for 2030".

Vision

39. The intention would be to embed ESD into quality standards, frameworks, mechanisms and resources (including available tools in-service trainings, etc.) associated with formal quality assessments and institutional reviews in all UNECE Member States.

Policy Framework

40. Despite wide diversity across the UNECE region in quality control and mandates/responsibilities of the respective professionals, education institutions have, in general, internal and external quality assessment mechanisms that add value to the educational experience of students and maintain certain standards and conditions. This strand is seeking to encourage UNECE MS to effectively involve in ESD all those who oversee the quality enhancement and assurance and have responsibility for this agenda in education. The latter include those who work in pre-schools, primary, secondary and tertiary education, TVET colleges and universities, government authorities or national agencies and who are trained specifically in order to recognise good practice, support educational change and ensure equal opportunities across the educational systems. Many of those quality professionals may have not encountered ESD and have limited engagement with SDGs but are committed to improve learning and teaching experiences more broadly in education. This stakeholder group is of core interest to the proposed strand of work.

41. There are some examples of national initiatives that have brought together ESD and quality education concerns. These efforts could be considered in detail to serve as good-practices and inspiration to others.

Strategic Directions and Goals

1. Engagement of education quality professionals, systems and authorities in ESD dialogues.

2. Advocate the presence of Ministries of Education at the meetings of the UNECE ESD Steering Committee and the strengthening of cooperation in ESD between the Ministries of Education, Environment and other Ministries involved in educational activities related to SDGs.

3. Embedding ESD into education quality systems.

4. Contribution to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of UNECE MS on the implementation of SDG 4.7 at national level as well as in UNECE ESD monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

5. Establish or strengthen ESD/SDG professional programme(s) for education quality professionals, authorities and agencies as well as education managers and leaders.

Strand B: Whole Institution Approach/ Institutions as communities of transformational learning.

42. This strand is to assure that ESD is more than a 'cerebral educational exercise', but requires equal attention to behaviour and connection with policies, maintenance, audiences, networks and partnerships throughout the various organisations, especially schools. ESD should also 'walk the talk' in all aspects of management and operations of schools and other organizations.

43. The concept of a **whole school approach** needs to further evolve into the concept of a **Whole Institution Approach (WIA)**, which embraces settings beyond formal education, not necessarily or directly associated with pedagogical practice such as institutions providing non-formal and informal education in public and private sectors. This learning process is fundamental for quality education in all aspects: learning programme, governance, infrastructure, connection to community and society. It is noteworthy that while the majority of UNECE countries reported progress in introducing the WIA, this concerned mainly primary and secondary schools rather than the other institutions of formal, non-formal and informal education (ECE/CEP/AC. 13/2020/6). COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need for healthy learning settings able to prepare countries and individuals for emergency situations.

44. The intention is that through WIA we prepare learners for a "whole system" view, opening their minds for systemic thinking, willingness and ability to conduct policies for addressing problems and act accordingly.

Vision

45. The intention will be to implement ESD as an integrated component across all educational and training programmes together with the sustainable management of the institution and its interface with the local community and system-wide interventions where youth (as agents of change) will acquire the knowledge, competences and support to undertake a more central role in leading institutions and communities to a more sustainable, just, resilient and healthy future.

Policy Framework

46. The WIA concept is based on the UNECE ESD Strategy. Its importance has been acknowledged and reconfirmed by the UNECE ESD Steering Committee, in 2016. It responds positively to the Rio+20 recommendations and the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 and aligns with the new UNESCO ESD framework (2021-2030) which identified the WIA as one of its Priority Action Areas. The UNECE ESD efforts to promote a WIA is also in line with and meets the challenges of other UN policies (e.g. WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change, 2019; UNESCO Associated Schools) that envisage the development of each institution into a "Community of learning for SDGs".

Strategic Directions and Goals

47. The WIA signifies orienting an institution's strategy and ultimately its overall culture towards sustainable development. This implies that each institution reviews its own actions in the light of sustainable development principles regarding the four overlapping spheres characterising this approach: Learning, Programme; Governance compatible with sustainability principles; Infrastructure; Relationships with Community and overall Society.

48. To facilitate the dissemination and implementation of the WIA, all MS of the UNECE region, as well as the competent regional and other international organisations, donors and programmes active in the region are encouraged to develop and support appropriate policies, measures and resources that facilitate institutions and organizations in formal, non-formal and informal sectors and at all levels to reorganize and transform themselves as "Whole Institutes" through the:

(a) Provision of competent and coherent frameworks that foster participatory approaches enhancing commitment, ownership and responsibility for promoting a WIA in diverse contexts.

(b) Use of the lessons learned and expertise gained on WIA throughout the UNECE region, for the creation of a self-assessment mechanism that can support institutions and their members in their effort to advance sustainability in the framework of WIA.

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

(d) Mobilization and creation of opportunities for youth to participate actively in the design of WIA plans to promote ESD in their respective institutions and adopt a leading role in reinforcing the focus on SDGs (especially SDG 4.7).

(e) Strengthening of UNECE ESD SC synergies with organizations, mechanisms and networks (e.g. UNESCO, EU and WHO) that also develop policies for a WIA.

(f) Contribution to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of UNECE MS on the implementation of SDG4.7 at national level.

Strand C: Digital Education, ICT and ESD.

49. This strand is to assure that the opportunities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are developed to support the learning processes needed to enhance learning, in general, and on ESD in particular and, at the same time, raise awareness about both the positive and more critical or potentially negative impacts technology and ICT can have in learning for sustainable futures.

50. Technologies and ICT's develop fast in times of accelerating change. This can give both positive and negative impacts, particularly when little attention is paid on how 'modernity' can be compatible with sustainability. The challenge is to use them in a proper way to accelerate the necessary transformations towards more sustainable futures, in, formal TVET and non-formal settings, in learning schemes to respond adequately to (green) job requirements and employability of young people[17]. Although the recent increase in use of ICTs and other delivery mechanisms due to the COVID-19 crisis, was to a large extent successful, many key questions still remain about the limitations of digitalization: the appropriate learning and expression tool mix (e.g. avoidance of the dominance of image against abstract thinking, etc.); various issues related to the access of disadvantaged groups to ICT use and consequently e-learning programs; and the ways ICTs will help education and sustainable changes.

Vision

51. The intention would be for all UNECE MS to obtain a systematic, balanced and updated use of ICT and all digital tools and resources as a means for promoting ESD and new educational practices facilitating access to sustainable development learning, throughout life by offering everyone the possibility of capitalizing on accumulated knowledge and know-how deriving from good practices.

Policy Framework

52. Digital technology represents a powerful level for transformation to support the UNECE policy in all dimensions of ESD in order to meet current and future needs, whether in general education, vocational training or information. In parallel, in order to cope with the rapid changes and challenges brought by the introduction of ICTs in all areas and levels of education, training and information structures, appropriate institutional and operational frameworks should be in place to allow the educational process and the stakeholders involved to be mobilised, guided, supported and engaged in the profound educational and organisational transformations required.

[17] https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4

Strategic Directions and Goals

53. For the effective introduction and employment of ICT in the UNECE MS, due attention should be given in addressing a series of challenges faced by many education systems, such as lack of teachers, lack of skills in the implementation of digital tools and lack of infrastructure or access to digital tools, without forgetting the insufficient training of personnel of all kinds.

54. In parallel, the advantages of digital technology should be fully understood, particularly when it comes to teaching sustainable development and rethinking the processes implemented to develop ESD capable of responding to the current and future challenges of our societies, about the benefit of:

- learners who can thus have a personalized learning environment;
- teachers who have the opportunity to develop new pedagogies;
- researchers who could contribute to new educational tools and policies;
- managers of education systems and other actors, through the statistical use of data to assess practices and impacts of model changes.

55. Of strategic importance for all UNECE MS is to:

- develop procedures to combat illectronism (electronic illiteracy) and thus enable everyone to use digital tools and access digital resources;
- develop media education, to give everyone the ability to understand and appreciate, with a critical sense, the various digital messages and content dealing directly or indirectly with sustainable development, to comment on it and to formulate personal views. The latter is particularly important since the issue of misinformation, 'alternative facts', 'framing', and misuse of digital information by criminals is a fast growing major socio-political and cultural challenge.

56. Therefore, legal provisions and measures for a safe, just and objective use of ICT's should be part of further digitalisation development, coupled with systematic awareness raising and development of skills for self-protection by the users in the framework of ESD.

Strand D: Entrepreneurship, Employment, Innovation and ESD

57. This strand is to connect ESD with economic and social developments and address the business, financial and policy arenas that influence the sources of welfare and wellbeing. How to assure that innovations and entrepreneurship will contribute to a sustainable, fair future, especially for the generations to come.

58. ESD is expected to contribute in enhancing entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for people – especially youth – through the development of their creativity and willingness to transform ideas into concrete actions. ESD should provide them with competences and learning conditions to develop their personalities and contribute to personal and community change and transformation towards sustainable development. Starting with rethinking the current socio-economic conditions and their relationship to our eco-systems, there is a need for young people to be ultimately enabled and given proper space to develop their potential.

Vision

59. The intension would be to encourage all UNECE MS to use ESD in stimulating entrepreneurial and innovation mind setting in learners in order to accelerate transformations towards sustainable development and enlarge employability of young in existing or emerging new jobs.

60. Whereas significant technological advances across many fields have increased welfare globally, many communities within the UNECE region and across the world have difficulties to cope with this change whether that involves the economy (e.g. new economic

models), society (alternative jobs) and the environment (climate change). Educating and re-educating people to address these challenges is becoming of utmost importance and urgency.

61. Since, sustainable development is not achievable with isolated innovation actions, a systems approach is indeed within the context of ESD is, apparently, necessary according to which:

62. Individuals should acquire "green" skills and be able to constantly learn, including on "green" and ICT technologies, understand that there are social/economic/environmental challenges and drivers crucial in applying innovative solutions, disrupting the current state of practice (EIT Climate-KIC, 2019), and bringing about lasting solutions.

63. Entrepreneurial mindset implies: Thinking like an entrepreneur, which is a competence that allows individuals to "learn, unlearn and relearn" enabling them to solve problems and adapt in a radically changing environment whether being in business by themselves or within a company or an organization. However, entrepreneurial skills extend beyond learning how to run a business and in the context of ESD entrepreneurship should also promote ethical and responsible business.

Policy Framework

64. Employment, entrepreneurship and innovation, if placed in the politics framework of "green and circular economy", can lead the way to a radical shift of our consumption and production choices towards the much-needed sustainable models. In such a framework, well-articulated entrepreneurship and innovation could become significant job creating motors but also the output of an enlarged ESD approach, assisting learners to answer the questions of what kind of society and economy we want to live and work in.[18] The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR 2019)[19] states: building the capacities and skills of the next generation of researchers and change makers is one of the biggest leverage points towards sustainability at humanity's disposal. The need for fast transformation on a global scale according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report and the COP21 Agreement and other relevant UN initiatives requires radical changes which can be brought about through innovation, entrepreneurial activity and new employment routes. Employment or the lack of, has an important socio-economic, political and environmental impact. A sustainable transformation will see jobs disappearing and new jobs coming into play (Frey & Osborne, 2017), as the economy transitions into more digital and less carbon intensive ventures and services, create gaps and opportunities in skills and competencies.

65. As highlighted in the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015), policies for systematic innovation need to be in place at local authority and community level, including on local education which should stimulate entrepreneurial and innovation mind setting. Systems innovation is necessary to boost efforts in the transition while ensuring that people are adequately trained to be employable in an agile, future and competitive job market (including green skills and the promotion of green economy), since unemployment, and particularly youth unemployment, is a major concern (UN Agenda 2030).

Strategic Directions and Goals

66. For accelerating the employability of young entrepreneurship, skills and knowledge on innovation need to be enhanced among them.

67. It is therefore important to strategically address a series of challenges which are frequently present in the region, such as:

- Inadequate entrepreneurial ecosystems, including supporting legislations, platforms of interaction and funding mechanisms that enable entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial activity.
- Lack in sufficient preparation of students for the (future) labour market. To overcome these challenges thorough revision of the content and methodologies of

[18] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html
[19] GSDR 2019: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf

the curricula and learning conditions and standards is needed, according to what is described in the previous three stands of the present document. This encompasses the ability of learners to take responsibility for their own decisions, develop sense of initiative, soft skills, critical thinking, basic economic and legal education and the ability to solve problems, ability to actively search for, sort out and engage in various opportunities for their personal development. This, in turn, requires also a major re-skilling and up-skilling are required, in "training the trainers" especially in the case of the younger generation of educators.

- Gender inequality. This is a horizontal challenge which trickles down through all aspects of ESD. Increasing gender equality will boost employability for all, also through entrepreneurship.
- Insufficient intergenerational approaches, **and inclusive education** where policies for urgent employment for the young should not overlook the experienced older generations and people with disabilities or marginalised. Adequate provisions should be in place to allow the fast-technological advances to help as many as possible to improve their social situation, while decreasing the still growing social and economic differences which, to a large degree, are connected to unequal accessibility to education and employment opportunities.

8. Recommendations and proposed selected activities for the draft workplan for implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD for the period from 2022 to 2024

68. As explained in the Strategic Document on ESD in the UNECE Region 2021-2030, a considerable systematic and comprehensive effort should be made in substantially strengthening ESD introduction and enhancement in all its forms and levels and its proper implementation as a capital tool for achieving the SDGs. This could urgently address the very serious threats and challenges of the present and the emerging and future ones, if we don't want to find ourselves and our children forced to adapt to harder realities, where the natural and many social "safety nets" that protect us, collapse.

69. What is included in the UNECE's Strategy of 2005 is still valid, while through the present document it is **primarily recommended that** the UNECE MS revisit their national education and sustainable development policies, strategies, programmes, projects, activities and resources to make sure that they are fully fit for accelerating the transformation towards achieving the SDGs, having ESD as a fundamental driver and enabler. In order to facilitate the MS's prioritization, four strands were collectively chosen, that according to their combined visions, cover a very large spectrum of the needed transformations. Based on existing or still developing political frameworks, a set of strategic orientations have been identified and suggested.

70. Therefore, the **second main recommendation** is for UNECE MS to consider these strategic orientations and adjust, if needed, and as appropriate their related strategies accordingly.

71. Furthermore, in the document, an in view of the fact that a series of interventions are necessary either as prerequisites or enabling conditions or "encouragement" opportunities by "picking the lower hanging fruits" **a third set of recommended interventions** directly linked with the four strands is included herewith, intended to prepare the initial part of a living work plan addressing activities that are proposed to be carried out, via participatory processes that create ownership and embed good practices by MS and stakeholders at both national and/or regional UNECE level though the SC and its working groups, provided that resources become available either through country contributors and/or through grant authorities and donors.

On Quality Education and ESD, it is recommended to:

(a) Collect good practice examples from countries and invite heads of national quality agencies to a meeting in Geneva to share their experiences and involve them in efforts for potential collective work on "quality and ESD" from the very beginning.

(b) Develop quality criteria frameworks for embedding ESD into each educational level - early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and TVET colleges and universities. This could consist of learner attributes that are discipline based and that are accompanied by guidelines for integrating ESD into learning experiences; For a two-year period, efforts may focus on one of the above sectors.

(c) Develop a "benchmarking tool" to assess practice.

On the Whole Institute Approach (WIA), it is recommended to:

(a) Create and promote a Whole Institution Framework based on areas of generic interest and shared experiences including: (i) Leadership at the learning place; (ii) Quality assurance - any place of learning needs to have a vision of how to use ESD as a transformative process and what kind of monitoring and evaluation need to be established; (iii) Involving youth as part of the participatory processes; (iv) ESD for staff development; (v) Opportunities for further training for everyone; (vi) Developing sustainable infrastructures such as waste management practices, energy conservation, purchasing policies; (vii) Innovation – being open to change and collaboration with other entities through networking opportunities at all locals; and (viii) Communication networks within and outside the institution.

(b) Develop an evaluation scheme or a set of quality criteria for institutions seeking to adopt a WIA to help them identify what they have achieved; what they still need to work on; what obstacles they face and how to overcome them; how the adoption of the approach is improving the performance and the quality of life in the institution.

(c) Create a guide that mobilizes and supports youth in the design, development and implementation, in close-collaboration with all interested parties, a WIA plan to promote ESD, within the institutions they study or work.

On the ICTs and digital methods, in general; it is recommended to:

(a) Identify and address educational barriers related to access to digital technology and systematize the use of digital tools to enhance the current potential of ICTs in formal, non-formal and informal learning;

(b) Generalize e-learning and blended learning that combine face-to-face training and e-learning;

(c) Strengthen the production of and access to Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) which are key factors in facilitating ESD; integrate an Open Science framework allowing the use, reuse, creation and sharing of OER and good practices at all levels of training;

(d) Apply Learning Analytics and other AI techniques to ESD in order to measure, collect, analyze and process data associated with progress of interventions, learners and their environment;

(e) Develop and "add value" to social networks as key instruments, keeping in mind that social networks are of insignificant value without an educational goal and framework;

(f) Collect good practices and develop specific pilot programmes for media education and *illectronism* for those who do not have the keys to the use of electronic resources.

On Entrepreneurship, employment and ESD innovation, it is recommended to:

(a) Identify new qualifications and skills in the field of sustainable development, green and circular economy and green technologies in order to integrate them into professional profiles and facilitate the effective integration of learners, in initial training as well as in continuing training, cooperation could be developed with UNEVOC-TVET which provides a platform for exchange on technological, social and environmental changes (e.g. BILT program).

(b) Promote, through the competent/relevant state institutions, proven and functional educational approaches, projects and organizations that support the required skills for the development of entrepreneurship, employability and innovation. This support could involve various dimensions and resources to increase the means (financial, operational, technical, etc.) and improve conditions for educators and learners to acquire the necessary skills for successfully responding to new employment challenges and opportunities.

(c) Create guidelines and an assessment tool to benchmark the level of education institutions' readiness in infusing/ encompassing entrepreneurial skills and support employability related to innovation.

(d) Establish and/or use existing funding mechanisms to support networking of ESD settings with other stakeholders and local communities with the aim to develop and strengthen an ecosystem of champions agile in employability, entrepreneurship and innovation, which could then diffuse widely its know-how in the region and beyond.

(d) Create or enhance ESD synergies with regional (in UNECE), national, and local initiatives and bodies (including SDG Accelerator hubs) in tackling environmental, social and economic challenges particularly at local level, by enhancing the role of education institutions working with local governments and businesses in developing and implementing appropriate policies and actions.