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Progress achieved and challenges encountered in implementation of phase II of the Strategy and the way forward for phase III: achievements of the Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development

Report on progress made by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development

Report by the Co-Chairs of the Expert Group

Summary

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development was established by the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development at its fourth meeting and mandated to prepare a document to include:

(a) General recommendations for policymakers, so as to provide them with a tool to integrate education for sustainable development (ESD) into relevant policy documents with a view to creating an enabling environment for the development of competences across all sectors of education, with particular emphasis on formal education;

(b) A range of core competences in ESD for educators, including defining these, as feasible, to serve as a tool to facilitate the integration of ESD into all educational programmes at all levels, as well as guidelines for the development of these competences among educators;

(ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/7, paras. 9 and 10).
In accordance with its mandate, the Expert Group has met five times and has drafted general recommendations as well as core competences in ESD for educators.

Complementary to the progress report on the Expert Group’s first and second meeting, which was presented to the Steering Committee on ESD at its fifth meeting, this report outlines the progress achieved by the Group since then and also presents the Group’s recommendations for future action.
I. Introduction


2. The UNECE Steering Committee on ESD at its fifth meeting was informed about the progress of the Expert Group and acknowledged with appreciation the substantive results achieved. It welcomed the Group’s intention to divide the material it was drafting into three distinct parts: a preamble, a general guidance for policymakers and a more detailed part on competences for educators. The Steering Committee also endorsed the timeline that the group had developed for its work and welcomed the Group’s proposal to carry out consultations with external stakeholders.

3. Also at its fifth meeting, the Steering Committee requested that any competences the Expert Group developed should be as concrete and practical as possible. In addition, it suggested that the various parts of the document should be targeted towards their respective audiences.

4. In accordance with its mandate, the Expert Group since the fifth Steering Committee meeting held three more meetings — namely, a third meeting, from 28 to 30 June 2010 at the invitation of the University of Limerick, Ireland; its fourth meeting, from 25 to 27 October 2010, at the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands; and its fifth meeting, from 10 to 12 January 2011 at the UNECE in Geneva.

5. The Bureau of the Steering Committee considered the progress of the Expert Group’s work at its eighth meeting on 9 December 2010 and expressed its appreciation for the Group’s work. It brought forward the following suggestions for the fifth meeting of the Expert Group:

   (a) To restructure its outcome document so that recommendations for policymakers were presented first and competences for educators second; and

   (b) To emphasize the importance of ESD in the introduction of that document.

6. The Bureau suggested that, in addition to the outcome document, a guidance instrument e.g., in the form of a toolkit, could be produced to support the implementation of the findings presented therein. Moreover, it was noted that the drafting of such a toolkit might require an extension of the mandate of the Expert Group.

II. Recommendations for policymakers

7. Following its mandate, the Expert Group on Competences at its meetings in 2010 and 2011 defined and drafted steps necessary to support the implementation of ESD competences, so as to provide them with a tool to integrate ESD into relevant policy documents.

8. As regards respective audiences, the Expert Group concluded that, while national education and environmental authorities were relevant in terms of formal education, the target groups for policy recommendations related to non-formal and informal education
were less clear, although civil society organizations played an important role in this area. It made the decision to address recommendations to policymakers, such as members of the Steering Committee on ESD, the European Commission, ministries of environment and education, national curricula centres and also potentially legislative bodies. The Expert Group differentiated between target groups for recommendations and the possible channels through which these groups could be reached, the later including other ministries and other international organizations.

9. With a view to its mandate, the Expert Group focused on recommendations for formal education. The Expert Group defined four main areas for policymaker recommendations, i.e., professional development in education; governing and managing institutions; curriculum development; as well as monitoring and assessment, and drafted concrete recommendations for each of these areas (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6 paras. 15–38).

10. The Expert Group drafted recommendations in such a way that they allow for flexibility and adaptability to national and regional needs, since the particularities of relevant policies and policy-making bodies vary from country to country.

III. Competences for educators

11. The Expert Group produced a set of competences (hereafter called “the Competences”), which were as far as possible concrete, and of a nature and character that could be monitored and reasonably assessed (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6 paras. 39–54).

12. The group identified educators and policymakers as target audiences for this material. With regard to categories of competences, it included competences of education systems as well as those of individual educators. It concluded that it was particularly important to address those educators, individuals, groups and institutions that had a multiplier effect, and therefore decided that educators of educators were a primary target group for the document section on core competences in ESD for educators.

13. As regards language, the Expert Group ensured that the document was useful to as many people as possible by tailoring the language of the text to “educators” in general, rather than “teachers”.

14. The Expert Group decided to aim at a work of transformative and ambitious nature.

15. The Group developed the Competences by drawing on essential characteristics of ESD, namely on:

   (a) The holistic approach: integrative thinking and practice;
   (b) Envisioning change: past, present and future; and
   (c) Achieving transformation: people, pedagogy and education systems.

16. The Expert Group based its work on the extended Delors framework,\(^1\) which includes categories of learning experiences (learners’ competences), including:

   (a) Learning to know;
   (b) Learning to do;
   (c) Learning to live together, learning to live with others; and
   (d) Learning to be.

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17. In order to make the core of its work accessible, the Expert Group presented the Competences in a table.

IV. Recommendations

A. Proposal for the development of two complementary sets of tools for developing educator competences in education for sustainable development

1. Recommendation

18. The Expert Group recommends that the mandate of the Group be extended for one year and that it be mandated to develop two sets of tools in order to complement its work, as well as to address the recommendations of the Bureau, namely:

(a) Tools supporting the implementation of the policy recommendations; and

(b) Tools supporting the understanding of the Competences.

2. Rationale

19. The Steering Committee asked the Expert Group to identify educator competences in ESD and means of their implementation. It furthermore asked that the Competences be as practical as possible without being prescriptive. This mandate has been fulfilled by the Group through the document Learning for the future: Competences in education for sustainable development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6). Subsequently, the Bureau asked the Group to provide a toolkit to support the implementation of its recommendations.

20. The document that the Expert Group has prepared includes, apart from the set of Competences, explanatory comments to facilitate their implementation by educators. However, there is a body of supportive literature and other materials that substantiate the proposed Competences which could not be included in the document, due to volume and the character of publications. In addition, there are many examples and materials concerning efforts to implement the Competences from across the region and beyond that have not yet been shared and considered.

21. Similarly, there is also a body of literature and case studies that support the implementation of policy recommendations of the Expert Group. These case studies have the potential to illustrate how these policy features can support the development of the Competences.

22. While an attempt was made by the Expert Group to draft illustrations to address some of these issues, time did not allow this task to be completed to the Group’s satisfaction.

23. The combination of these two sets of tools, i.e., tools supporting the implementation of the policy recommendations and tools supporting the understanding of the Competences, would comprise a body of work that will help policymakers, educators and multiplier agencies to implement the Competences.

24. While neither set of tools could fully answer every question in every context, these tools would address the urgent need to exemplify what both the recommendations to policymakers and the Competences look like in practice, and how the development of these Competences can best be achieved. Furthermore, it will illustrate examples of how the development of these Competences has been implemented to date in a variety of contexts across the UNECE region.
25. To conduct this work the mandate of the Expert Group would need to be extended for one year in order to ensure:

(a) That the detailed understanding of the Expert Group’s work informs the further work in this area; and

(b) The input of the Expert Group in the work of establishing tool sets for the implementation of the Competences, including illustrations that have already been collected by the Group. This will require the Steering Committee to mandate the Expert Group to organize its work so that it is completed within one year.

3. Methodology

26. Concerning tools for implementing policy recommendations, it is proposed that each policy recommendation have:

(a) A rationale with reference to literature/research evidence; and

(b) Case studies exemplifying what such policy recommendations look like in practice and their potential impacts.

27. As regards tools for educator competences, for each Competence there could be:

(a) A rationale with reference to literature/research evidence;

(b) Links to existing training materials and provision of pedagogical recommendations; and

(c) Case studies of the Competences in action.

28. These sets of tools would be useful for training/capacity-building across the region, following necessary adaptation for local contexts.

4. Resources and indicative timeline

29. The work would be overseen and driven by the members of the Expert Group. Members of the Expert Group would contribute case studies and reviews of research and literature. The Group would also review text during the development of the tool sets.

30. However, the process would require additional support from a researcher/editorial assistant who would contribute to compiling the review of literature, and would gather case studies and input from Expert Group members and others. Such research assistance could be provided by a member state in kind.

31. The Expert Group underlines that the work would require two or three meetings and proposes the following workplan:

(a) To review the existing illustrations, as well as develop a framework for the selection of case studies at a first Expert Group meeting in May 2011. Before the first meeting, an intersessional group could already outline the content of the tool sets which could be considered at the first Expert Group meeting;

(b) To develop the text body in intersessional groups and with the support of a researcher;

(c) To review the text for the tool sets as developed by the intersessional groups and a researcher, and to agree on case studies to illustrate the text at a second Expert Group meeting in October 2011;

(d) To review case studies in intersessional groups and with the support of a researcher; and
(e) To sign off on the sets of tools at a third Expert Group meeting in December 2011.

B. Proposal for the dissemination of the Competences and policy recommendations

   (a) Be published;
   (b) Be disseminated at national and regional levels; and
   (c) That it be used in the context of workshops to be organized on the Competences.

33. Those activities are of crucial importance in order to promote the Competences, to build capacity and to raise awareness. To implement these recommendations the Expert Group proposes the following actions:

   (a) **Compilation of a publication.** The outcomes of the Expert Group should be presented in such a way that it appeals to educators as well as policymakers. At the international level, this requires care in establishing the layout. At the national level, it may require translation and adaptation to national priorities. To produce the publication requires extra funding at both levels. At the international level, the Steering Committee might take up this responsibility;

   (b) **In order to raise awareness, the outcomes of the Expert Group’s work should be disseminated at the national and regional levels, paying particular attention to groups with multiplier effects.** This should be done using existing networks such as the Mediterranean Education Initiative for Environment & Sustainability (MEdIES), the Environment and School Initiatives (ENSI), the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, the Central Asian Working Group on Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development and national education networks. The outcomes of the Expert Group’s work should also be disseminated through existing websites, newsletters and other means. These actions will not require extra funding, as it should be supported by existing bodies like ministries, agencies and non-governmental organizations. The Steering Committee should urge these bodies to do so;

   (c) **In order to build capacity it is crucial to organize workshops on Competences for ESD for policymakers and teacher training institutions at the local, national and the subregional levels.** The Steering Committee should prioritize the implementation of these workshops in phase III of the UNECE Strategy for ESD at the subregional, national and local levels. Funding for the workshops should be provided from national and international sources. Outcomes of the capacity-building activities could be presented at a side event at the Ministerial Conference in Astana.

C. Proposal for monitoring of the implementation of the policy recommendations

1. **Recommendation**

   34. The Expert Group recommends:

   (a) That a monitoring and evaluation process be instituted that serves both accountability and learning processes for implementation of the policy recommendations;
(b) That the monitoring and evaluation process for the implementation of policy recommendations be integrated into existing UNECE reporting processes for the Strategy for ESD; and

(c) That member States provide information on their experiences concerning the implementation of policy recommendations on the basis of a short template developed by the UNECE secretariat and vetted through the Steering Committee, and that such experiences could be shared annually with the secretariat. Key findings would be summarized in a short report prepared by the secretariat to be presented and distributed at Steering Committee meetings as well as on the UNECE website.

2. **Rationale**

35. Monitoring is important as a means of tracking the extent to which policy recommendations are being implemented. In this way those responsible for implementation are held accountable.

36. This same information, however, can also be an important source of learning both for those responsible for implementation and those who are not. The learning happens because experiences, both successful and less successful, are shared and discussed.

37. Monitoring implementation in this way — a way that seeks to ensure accountability and facilitates learning — naturally leads to an evaluation of each experience in terms of the original objectives (learning through self-assessment) and others’ experiences (learning from others). Hence the monitoring and evaluation process should be of value to both those directly responsible for implementation and those with a broader, more indirect interest.

D. **Proposal for promoting synergies between international processes on ESD**

38. The Expert Group recommends the encouragement of cooperation among non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations working at the global, regional and subregional level for the development and implementation of educator Competences, in order to promote synergies. In particular the coordination mechanism established by the Steering Committee at its fourth meeting (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/2, paras. 57–58) should be used to this end.

39. To make implementation of policy recommendations effective and efficient it should be aligned with relevant international, regional and national strategic processes and actions. In order to achieve this goal, the following steps need to be considered by non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations:

   (a) Identification of the areas (processes, policies, etc.) that are or might influence implementation of the policy recommendations;

   (b) Sharing information on strategies in order to identify common purposes and areas of interest;

   (c) Facilitate development of cross-cutting working groups for coordination of joint activities;

   (d) Synergize activities that might lead to win-win situation while implementing policy recommendations; and

   (e) Ensure that the Competences are integrated into sustainable development strategies.
E. Proposal for encouraging research on the Competences

1. Recommendation

40. The Expert Group recommends that the Steering Committee reaffirm to member States the important role of research on ESD in the UNECE Strategy for ESD and highlights the necessity for research on the implementation of the Competences and recommendations for policymakers.

2. Rationale

41. In order to find out what is available and what is missing to implement the Competences, to define realistic ways for improvement of policy and practices and to build knowledge on how implementation can be performed in areas that are lacking, research is clearly necessary. Learning and capacity-building can be enhanced through research, such as action research; practitioners need professional institutional support with regard to research methodology (i.e., theoretical background, instruments, criteria for measurement) and resources (i.e., funding) for research to be possible on a broad scale. The Expert Group emphasizes that there are some areas that need particular focus in research, for example: on assessment of ESD competences; on methodology in the development of competences; on different strategies in implementing policy recommendations; and on whether the suggested framework of Competences is actually effective in achieving ESD.