

GREECE

Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

(2017–2019)

Preface

Introduction

Greece places particular emphasis on achieving sustainable development and is strongly committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as they provide an ambitious, visionary and transformative framework for a new, equitable and sustainable development path. Ensuring that “no one is left behind”, including Education, is a high political priority for Greece, as the country is now exiting a period of prolonged economic crisis.

The National Growth Strategy of Greece adopted in May 2018 (<http://www.mindev.gov.gr/greece-a-growth-strategy-for-the-future/>), is in line with the overall themes and provisions of the SDGs, including *inter alia* SDG 4 and in particular SDG 4.7 related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as well as other education-related SDGs, e.g. SDG 12.8.

In July 2018, Greece presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the 2018 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable development (HLPF). This VNR report covers all 17 SDGs (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19378Greece_VNR_Greece_2018_pdf_FI_NAL_140618.pdf) through eight National Priorities for adapting the SDGs to national needs and circumstances, also in line with the above mentioned National Growth Strategy. These eight overarching National Priorities have been defined, through an open dialogue within all government units and with a wide array of stakeholders, and by an in-depth mapping exercise carried out in 2017. One of the eight National Priorities focuses on “Providing high-quality and inclusive education”, linked to SDG 4, and covers *inter alia* all aspects pertaining to ESD (see Chapter 4.5 of the above VNR report of Greece).

Following the compilation of the VNR comprehensive report, a process that will lead to the elaboration of a National Implementation Plan for the SDGs, in 2019, is currently being launched. This National Implementation Plan is expected to be aligned with the provisions of the National Growth Strategy and will aim to promote cross-sectoral approaches and actions including further promoting ESD, in Greece, at all levels and of all forms, through the collaboration of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs with other sectorial line Ministries.

ESD implementation

The UNESCO Global Action Plan on ESD (GAP) provides the overall framework for ESD implementation in Greece, linking policies and activities with the UNECE Strategy for ESD as well as the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD and its endorsed Work Plan.

In this context, the Hellenic Ministry of Education is promoting policies and measures at all education levels, for the integration of the basic principles of sustainable development, in line with the overall national education policy, and is implementing concrete interventions at all levels of education, supported by a number of laws and Ministerial Acts, to this end.

Past experience has shown the necessity to move away from separated actions and activities towards a more integrated approach for applying ESD in Greece. To this end, the Hellenic Ministry of Education has laid out a new holistic plan for implementing ESD, aligned with the UNESCO GAP requirements and the priority axes of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

In this context, a new legislative framework for ESD has been designed, which integrates all related thematic areas (Environmental Education, Health Education and Cultural Issues) into a common sustainable whole-school approach, with the aim to provide schools with an overall unified framework equally applied for all sectors of education, under which any specific activity can be carried out in a concerted way.

Moreover, centrally, under the Hellenic Ministry of Education, a new Directorate has been established, in 2018, responsible for the “Support of School Programs and Education for Sustainability”, with the aim to better coordinate related activities at all levels and support further the notion of ESD in Greece.

Furthermore, in June 2018, the new law 4547/18 has established the “Centers for Education of Sustainability” as an evolution of the previously existing “Centers of Environmental Education”, thus covering all aspects of sustainable development without focusing only on the environmental dimension. With this change, the two separate previously existing and often overlapping strands of the “Environmental Education, Health Education and Cultural Issues Coordinators”, and the “Centers of Environmental Education”, are now integrated into a single agency, the new unified “Centers of Education for Sustainability” (CES). The new law mandates that CES will support schools for the design and implementation of their strategic plans, provide teachers training, promote the collaboration with the local community, develop initiatives towards the local sustainable development, and promote research and collaboration with Universities and research centers etc. To speed up the process, new “Coordinators for Sustainability”, who will support the work of CES, have already been appointed.

In the framework of inclusive education in Greece, students with disabilities and special educational needs, can follow the mainstream school: (a) in a school class of the general school; (b) in a school class of the general school with parallel support; or (c) in specially organized and suitably staffed Integration Teams operating in general and vocational schools. These arrangements aim to enhance equal access and the participation of all pupils in the education system, fight early school leaving and promote equality and social cohesion. If students with disabilities and special educational needs have particular difficulties to attend the general education or integration schools, they are able to attend Schools of Special Needs Education, the analytical and timetable programs of which are similar to those of the general and vocational education that integrate the objectives and themes of ESD.

Inclusive education programs, or so-called co-education programs, are also implemented in primary and secondary Special Education Schools. The aim of inclusive programs is to promote inclusion and equal opportunities in education, develop the cognitive, learning, emotional and social skills of pupils with disabilities and / or special educational needs, as well as to raise awareness among students of general education schools on human rights issues, on the respect for diversity and on safeguarding human dignity.

Regarding Higher Education in Greece, all post-graduate Master programs have been re-established in 2018. Today, there are five (5) official post-graduate Master programs on Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development running. However, there is an additional large number of Master programs in various University departments also addressing the issue of ESD. Regarding Ph.Ds, during 2010-2018, 37 Ph.D. dissertations on Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development have been concluded and deposited in the National Documentation Centre (which is the official depository of theses and dissertations). The result of the ongoing research in the field of

Environmental Education and ESD, for the period 2011-2018, is the publication of 43 papers in international journals (*source: Google Scholar database*).

Finally, with the momentum for closer inter-ministerial cooperation that the drafting of the national VNR Report on the SDGs presented at the 2018 UN HLPF, has created, the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs has taken the initiative to establish, in October 2018, an Inter-ministerial Working Group on Education of Sustainable Development that has been formulated initially on an ad-hoc basis but is planned to be officially formalized to operate and convene regularly as a horizontal coordination platform.

In order to compile the following Report, a letter was sent, by the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, to various involved Ministries and stakeholders, accompanied by the reporting template and the previous National Implementation Report. Ministries were asked to fill in the fields and indicators related to their activities in the template, and stakeholders to provide general information of their ESD related activities.

The coordination of the various responses provided by Ministries and stakeholders for the preparation of this Report was carried out by the Directorate of European and International Affairs of the Hellenic Ministry of Education where the national focal point on ESD is located.

The Governmental institutions that provided input for the compilation of the Report were:

1. The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs
2. The Institute of Educational Policy
3. The Ministry of Culture and Sports
4. The Ministry of Environment and Energy

The Stakeholders that provided input were:

1. The Museum of the Natural History of Lesvos (management body of Lesvos Island UNESCO Global Geopark)
2. The Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP.gr) – Network of nine Thematic Museums)
3. The National Observatory of Athens

The NGOS that provided input were:

1. The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE)
2. NGO Aeiforum
3. Hellenic Platform (of NGOs) for Development - National platform of CONCORD (the European confederation of Relief and Development NGOs)
4. Organization Earth
5. Action Aid Hellas
6. AISEC Hellas
7. KMOP - Social Action and Innovation Centre
8. Center of Life
9. Positive Voice
10. Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN)

Academic Institutes that provided input were:

1. UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean (University of Athens)
2. Department of Special Education, University of Thessaly
3. Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly
4. Department of Rural and Surveying Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki