



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 March 2024

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Nineteenth meeting

Geneva, 29, 30 and 31 May 2024

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development – Final proposal for workplan activity on implementing the second priority strand on “Whole institution approach and education for sustainable development”

Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development – Final proposal for workplan activity on implementing the second priority strand on “Whole institution approach and education for sustainable development”

Note by experts supervised by the Steering Committee

Summary

At its eighteenth meeting (Geneva, 25–26 May 2023), the Steering Committee adopted the Workplan for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2025 (document ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/3) with the amendments (as in the “Revised document as of 23 May 2023”)^a. The workplan includes a road map of activities to be undertaken during the implementation phase of 2021–2025, focusing on the remaining three years (2023–2025) along the four priority strands: (1) quality education and education for sustainable development; (2) whole institution approach and education for sustainable development; (3) digital education, information and communications technology and education for sustainable development; and (4) entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development.

At the same meeting, the Steering Committee was informed about a proposal for developing an outline of activities for implementing the second priority strand on the whole institution approach and education for sustainable development outlined in the draft workplan.

The present document contains a final proposal for workplan activity on implementing the second priority strand, which includes an outline of selected tools and capacity-building activities to support the implementation of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development across member States.



The Committee will be updated about the outcomes of the process of elaboration of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and on the next steps for carrying out the planned activities for implementing the priority second strand outlined in the draft workplan.

^a corresponding footnote within summary box to read "ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/2, para. 72.

Background

1. The whole institution approach (or whole school approach) is a conceptual framework designed to guide the development and implementation of sustainable practices across entire educational organizations, ranging from early childhood centres to vocational schools and universities. The approach involves all stakeholders, including staff, students and community members, recognizing that every aspect of an institution contributes to sustainability.
2. The principles of whole institution approach are grounded in the recognition that all facets of an institution are interlinked and can significantly advance sustainability goals. This encompasses various elements such as curriculum, organizational development, leadership and management, cultural aspects, operational procedures, professional growth opportunities and community engagement efforts.
3. The evolution of the whole institution approach has been shaped by an expanding body of research emphasizing the advantages of sustainability education and advocating for a holistic approach. Education emerges as pivotal in nurturing sustainable communities, underscoring the imperative of adopting a comprehensive whole institution strategy to realize this objective.¹
4. To facilitate the advancement of the whole institution approach, it is imperative to establish frameworks that steer educational policy, governance and institution-based initiatives for whole institution approach development. These frameworks must embody the growing recognition of sustainable development's significance, emphasizing a holistic approach that encompasses all facets of an organization. By providing comprehensive guidance, such frameworks empower institutions seeking to embed sustainability across their curriculum, operations and community engagement, employing a whole-system approach.
5. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has long championed education for sustainable development in the region. Since the adoption of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in 2005, the Committee has focused on promoting a systematic and holistic approach to education for sustainable development, including the adoption of the whole institution approach. A report evaluating the implementation of the UNECE Strategy² has highlighted progress in member States, with many countries developing national strategies and action plans for education for sustainable development, often emphasizing the whole institution approach. Additionally, various initiatives and platforms have facilitated the sharing of best practices and experiences in the whole institution approach across the region.
6. A significant milestone in the ECE region has been the formulation of national strategies and action plans for education for sustainable development by member States, often incorporating a strong emphasis on the whole institution approach. The above-mentioned report indicates that at least 15 countries in the region have crafted such strategies, with several explicitly recognizing the importance of adopting the whole institution approach. Another notable achievement in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD at the national level is the production of guidance and training materials by numerous member States, aimed at aiding teachers and educators in implementing the whole institution approach methodology.
7. The UNECE Steering Committee on ESD has actively fostered the dissemination of best practices and insights within the realm of the whole institution approach. The above-mentioned report highlights several impactful endeavours, such as the establishment of ESD Peer Learning Platforms across various member States, including those within the UNECE region. These Platforms serve as collaborative spaces in which educators and policymakers can share their experiences and engage in mutual learning³. Additionally, numerous regional

¹ Stephen Sterling, Johnathan Dawson and Paul Warwick, "Transforming Sustainability Education at the Creative Edge of the Mainstream: A Case Study of Schumacher College", *Journal of Transformative Education*, vol. 16 No. 4 (2018).

² Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD across the ECE Region (2015–2018) (United Nations publication, ECE/CEP/196).

³ Ibid. pp. 15, 30, 40, 44, 110, 113–114 and 116.

conferences and events have been organized to foster dissemination of knowledge and best practices, for example, the International Conference on the implementation of the whole school approach in ESD (Lunteren, Netherlands, 28–30 March 2022)⁴, the Capacity-building Workshop on Implementing UNECE Strategy for ESD (Baku (online), 21–22 April 2021),⁵ and the two virtual webinars jointly organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD and the European Commission for the Europe and North America region, as part of the ESD for 2030 Global Network “ESD-Net 2030” (6–7 March and 26–27 June 2023).⁶

8. In summary, the ECE member States have made significant progress in advancing the whole institution approach within the region, as can be clearly seen in the formulation of national strategies and action plans, the dissemination of guidance materials, and the fostering of knowledge exchange on best practices. Nonetheless, substantial groundwork remains to be carried out to fully embed whole institution approach principles into the educational frameworks of member States. Thus, the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD is striving to develop a whole institution approach framework for educational policy and governance characterized by flexibility, non-prescriptiveness and dialogue. Such an approach aims to facilitate a more nuanced and contextually relevant implementation of whole institution approach principles across ECE member States.

9. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the significance of integrating education for sustainable development into their systems in a holistic way throughout the ECE region, at the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia, 5 October 2022), member States reiterated their commitment to collaborate effectively in implementing the new Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030⁷ (2030 implementation framework), endorsed at the Third High-level Meeting.⁸ These countries affirmed their readiness to extend the requisite support for executing the activities outlined in the 2030 implementation framework’s workplan. Additionally, Cyprus and Netherlands formally announced their leadership roles in spearheading the second priority strand on the whole institution approach and education for sustainable development, pledging both in-kind and financial contributions towards the development of the approved deliverables.

Mandate

10. During the Third High-Level Meeting, it was agreed that an expert group, led by Cyprus and the Netherlands, would be established to develop a workplan activity for the second priority strand on “Whole institution approach and education for sustainable development” in the ECE region. This group will collaborate closely with the ECE Steering Committee on ESD and leading countries to develop tools and capacity-building activities to support the implementation of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development across member States.

⁴ See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Education-for-Sustainable-Development/events/368373>.

⁵ See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/capacity-building-workshop-implementing-unece-strategy-esd>.

⁶ See <https://articles.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/06/ESD-Net-2030-ENA-Regional-Meeting-Concept-Note.pdf>.

⁷ Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/ECE_NICOSIA.CONF_2022_10_E_0.pdf.

⁸ ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11, para. 9 (c).

Synthesis of the expert and support groups

Expert group

11. To move forward with the advancement of the development of the whole institution approach framework, adaptable across various contexts within the ECE region, an expert group will be established, comprising individuals with profound expertise and insight into the whole institution approach in sustainable development contexts. This expert group will: assess and amalgamate existing frameworks supporting the whole institution approach within education for sustainable development contexts, along with other education for sustainable development-related domains, such as citizenship education, health education and climate change education; engage in consultations with educational policymakers from selected member States to explore strategies for involving ministries of education and regional and local school boards in strengthening whole institution approach support; and take on responsibility for formulating the whole institution approach framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

12. The expert group will comprise internationally recognized scientists and academics specializing in the field of education for sustainable development and will be composed of the Chair, Mr Arjen Wals (Professor, Education and Learning Sciences, Wageningen University, Netherlands, and Visiting Professor, Sustainability Hub, Norwegian Life Sciences University) and five other members (to be invited), as well as one assistant to both the expert group and the support group.

Support group

13. The work of the expert group will receive backing from a support group representing member States of the ECE region. The support group's role will involve critical reflection and the provision of constructive feedback, suggestions and comments on documents. In order to set up the support group, the ECE secretariat will issue invitations a week following the conclusion of the nineteenth Steering Committee meeting, inviting member States and relevant organizations to express their interest in participation. The selection criteria for support group members will prioritize individuals with experience in the whole institution approach and education for sustainable development, aligned with strategic frameworks.

Purpose and objectives of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development

Purpose

14. The primary objective of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development within the ECE region is to provide a comprehensive blueprint aligned with the new 2030 implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. The Strategic framework is designed to offer robust support to member States, organizations and institutions across formal, non-formal and informal education settings at all levels of the ECE region. Its overarching goal is to facilitate the development of relevant policies, measures and resources essential for the reorganization and transformation of entities into "whole institutions" committed to education for sustainable development principles.

15. At the core of the 2030 implementation framework of the ECE Strategy for ESD lies the crucial whole institution approach to sustainable development, which aims to revitalize and enrich education, learning and capacity-building across a broad spectrum of institutional contexts. It strives to enhance every facet of a given institution, encompassing its vision, services, human resource development, leadership, sustainability practices and connections

with communities. Special emphasis is placed on fostering mutual learning around sustainability issues among individuals within these institutions.

16. The whole institution approach entails aligning a given institution's strategy and overall culture with the Sustainable Development Goals. This necessitates a critical review of the institution's activities through the lens of sustainable development principles, focusing on four intersecting spheres: the learning programme; governance compatible with sustainability principles; infrastructure; and relationships with the wider community and society.

17. The strategic directions for the whole institution approach are outlined in the 2030 implementation framework,⁹ which encourages member States and international organizations to develop and support policies, measures and resources to facilitate the transformation of institutions into "whole institutions". It underscores the importance of competent and cohesive frameworks, self-assessment mechanisms, opportunities for participation of stakeholders and in particular youth. The ECE Steering Committee on ESD aims to create synergies with whole institution approach-related initiatives spearheaded by organizations such as UNESCO, the European Union, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Global Education Network Europe.

18. In essence, the whole institution approach is a pivotal element of the UNECE 2030 implementation framework for ESD. It aims to holistically enhance education, learning and capacity-building by empowering learners to adopt a systemic perspective and actively engage in identifying and addressing sustainability challenges. Member States and international organizations are encouraged to develop and support policies, measures and resources conducive to the effective implementation of the whole institution approach.

Objectives

19. Paragraph 56 of the 2030 implementation framework outlines key objectives aimed at facilitating the dissemination and implementation of the whole institution approach across the ECE member States. These objectives are geared towards developing and supporting policies, measures and resources conducive to the transformation of institutions across formal, non-formal and informal sectors education settings and at all levels into holistic entities responsive to sustainable development challenges and opportunities. Specifically, these objectives include:

(a) Competent and coherent frameworks: providing competent and coherent frameworks that promote participatory approaches fostering commitment, ownership and responsibility for promoting a whole institution approach across diverse contexts;

(b) Lessons learned and self-assessment: utilizing lessons learned and expertise gained on the whole institution approach throughout the ECE region to develop a robust self-assessment mechanism. This mechanism aims to support institutions and their members in advancing sustainability within the framework of the whole institution approach;

(c) Stakeholder engagement and resources: facilitating the participation of stakeholders, particularly youth, and institutions in whole institution transformation by providing the necessary tools, resources and opportunities;

(d) Youth empowerment: creating opportunities for and mobilizing youth to actively participate in designing whole institution approach plans to promote education for sustainable development within their respective institutions. This empowers youth to take a leading role in reinforcing the focus on Sustainable Development Goals, especially target 4.7 thereof;

(e) Strengthening synergies: strengthening synergies between the ECE Steering Committee on ESD and other organizations, mechanisms and networks such as UNESCO, the European Union and WHO, which also develop policies for a whole institution approach.

⁹ Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/ece_cep_ac.13_2022_3_e.pdf.

This collaborative approach aims to maximize impact and foster collective action towards sustainable development.

Deliverables of the framework

20. Implementation of the Strategic Framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development will provide the following outputs:

(a) A comprehensive framework for the development, implementation and evaluation of the whole institution approach will be designed to address a diverse range of contexts, particularly targeting educational policymakers, leadership and governance bodies. This framework will be formulated through an in-depth analysis of existing frameworks, consultations with key stakeholders from ECE member States responsible for education for sustainable development, and a thorough review of scientific research on the whole institution approach in the context of sustainable development;

(b) The deliverables will include a compilation of best practices derived from an extensive review of whole institution approach practices across ECE member States, along with exemplary practices on each component of the whole institution approach. These components encompass various aspects such as physical infrastructure, organizational vision and culture, interactive learning methodologies, community engagement and professional development strategies. The emphasis will be on documenting approaches that offer critical insights and transparently address challenges and setbacks, rather than merely presenting idealized success stories. In essence, the deliverables will feature critically reflexive case studies, serving as companion vignettes within the framework to illuminate different facets of the whole institution approach. Additionally, a template will be developed to facilitate the compilation of these case studies;

(c) Guidelines will be formulated to assist various stakeholders, including policymakers at the national, regional and local levels, school leaders, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, coordinators, human resources management officers and teachers. These guidelines will accommodate stakeholders at different stages of engagement, ranging from those pioneering the adoption of the whole institution approach to those with more advanced experience.

21. The deliverables of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development will be aligned with the second workplan activity of the second priority strand “Toolkit on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development”, ensuring complementarity and mutual enrichment between the two initiatives.

Implementation process and proposed timeline

22. The initial step entails consensus-building on task framing and deliverables, along with the development of a comprehensive workplan for the period December 2023–December 2026.

23. In 2024, a template for critical reflexive practices and case studies will be elaborated, drawing on literature and interviews with key stakeholders. This template will be presented, elucidated and deliberated upon during a two-hour webinar scheduled for 2024, tailored for the members of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD. Subsequently, the template will be disseminated to all countries by the secretariat, accompanied by a deadline for completion.

24. Throughout 2024, case studies will be gathered and analyzed. Preliminary findings will be presented to the Steering Committee by the end of 2024. Essential components for developing the Strategic framework will be outlined during a three-day session coinciding with the ECE Steering Committee on ESD meeting, facilitated either in person or through virtual platforms. These sessions will involve members from both the expert group and the support group. The expert group will then embark on drafting the initial version or first draft of the Strategic framework and guidelines to support its implementation.

25. Between May and December 2024, the pre-final draft of the publication on good practices will be developed, scheduled for presentation and approval at the twentieth meeting of the Steering Committee in 2025.

26. During the first half of 2025, efforts will focus on refining the draft Strategic framework and guidelines. Concurrently, a meeting, either virtual or in-person, will be organized with the expert group and the support group to deliberate on the drafts.

27. In the second half of 2025 pre-final drafts will be prepared for presentation at the twentieth meeting of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD for final approval.

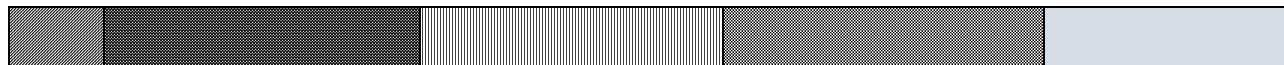
28. By the end of December 2025, the finalized framework and guidelines will be submitted to the secretariat for publication.

29. From January to March 2026, a series of webinars will be organized to inform countries and stakeholders about the tools developed. Additionally, a regional conference and various capacity-building activities will be arranged, with countries invited to express their interest in hosting these events.

Phasing, activities and outputs

2023 (June–December)	2024	2025	2026

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8)



Preparation	Organization of expert group and support group and agreement on workplan (1–3)
Framework development	Inventory of existing whole institution approach frameworks. Interviews with key stakeholders from different institutions. Elaboration of draft framework (3–4).
Case study research	Development of case study template (3), compilation of case studies (4)
Finalization of framework (5),	Integration with case studies, elaboration of guidelines for framework utilization (6)
Capacity-building and dissemination (7–8)	Series of webinars (7) and (online) capacity-building workshops (8) for informing countries and engaging stakeholders (mainly policymakers and institutional leaders), a regional conference. Throughout 2024–2026, the progress and products of the framework development progress will be shared via social media and key websites, but the main dissemination will take place in the second half of 2025 and the first half of 2026.

Capacity-building and dissemination activities

Capacity-building activities

30. Drawing on the insights selected from case study analysis and the guidelines for utilizing the framework, a series of both online and, where feasible, in-person capacity-building activities will be organized, primarily targeting policymakers and institutional leaders. Subject to preliminary planning and logistical arrangements, face-to-face workshops, organized back-to-back with ECE Steering Committee meetings, will be also held. These online workshops will be open to all ECE member States, as well as to other countries expressing an interest in the development of whole institution approach and education for sustainable development. Depending on availability of resources, there is potential for an international conference or national workshops hosted by countries willing to contribute to project implementation.

31. Joint events with other member States, as well as organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union, are also envisaged.

Dissemination activities

32. Throughout 2024 and 2025, progress updates and outcomes from the framework development will be disseminated via social media channels and prominent websites. However, the principal dissemination efforts are planned for the second half of 2025 and the first half of 2026. Additionally, dissemination activities will occur during various regional events and conferences.

Countries supporting the initiative

33. Cyprus and the Netherlands have formally pledged support for the development of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development, through both in-kind and financial contributions.
