Economic and Social Council

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 5 of the provisional agenda
Update on the outcomes of the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators:
the final draft of the Format for reporting on the implementation of the
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education
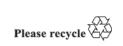**for Sustainable Development (2021-2025) and guidance for working with indicators**

Guidelines for the process of reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

Note by Ad Hoc Group on Indicators

Summary

The present guidelines for the process of reporting on implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development complement the template for reporting entitled "Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)" (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/4). The guidelines were drafted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Ad Hoc Group on Indicators, and provide national focal points and/or other national experts responsible for preparing the national implementation reports with brief guidance on how to complete the template for reporting for the fifth mandatory reporting cycle (scheduled for launch in 2023).

The guidelines should be also considered as a supplement to the initial Guidance for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/5), developed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Expert Group on Indicators with a view to facilitating the reporting exercises for the previous reporting cycles in 2010, 2015 and 2018.

Please recycle ♻

Introduction

1.   The present guidelines for the process of reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) were developed as a contribution to the monitoring and reporting mechanism under the UNECE Strategy for ESD. The present document complements the template for reporting entitled "Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)" (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/4) and was prepared by the ECE Ad Hoc Group on Indicators. It contains recommendations and remarks designed to help national focal points for ESD and/or other national experts to develop their respective national implementation reports on progress in the implementation of the Strategy during the fifth mandatory reporting cycle (scheduled for launch in 2023), and to complete the above-mentioned template for reporting.

2.   This document should be also considered as a supplement to the Guidance for reporting on the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/5), developed by the ECE Expert Group on Indicators in 2009 with a view to facilitating reporting exercises for the previous reporting cycles in 2010, 2015 and 2018.

3.   Monitoring and evaluating ESD is an interesting but demanding exercise because ESD is a broad and developing field that embraces formal education, from kindergarten to higher education, as well as non-formal education and informal learning. Furthermore, sustainable development encompasses all aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.   Preparing a national implementation report on the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD requires knowledge of both educational *and* environmental policy and policies on sustainability, as well as detailed information on practices in schools and in local situations involving many different partners and stakeholders. Thus, the completion of a national implementation report requires a dedicated group of collaborators.

5.   This document is intended to inform the national focal points[1] and other stakeholders involved in preparing national implementation reports how to complete the reporting template contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/4, annex I.

Brief guidelines for the process of reporting and structure of the reporting format

6.   Completing a national implementation report can be part of a national monitoring and evaluation policy, as it involves reviewing the relevant policies, organizations and impacts of national ESD programmes and activities.

7.   The monitoring and evaluation process relating to the UNECE Strategy for ESD is not intended to "benchmark" the performance of countries, but rather to enable learning and provide inspiration, for example, through sharing good practices.

8.   Coordinating the preparation of a national implementation report is a time-consuming but rewarding process, as it involves exploring what is happening in a given country under the broad umbrella of ESD and documents efforts that contribute to learning, innovation and transformation towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

9.   The template for reporting is provided in document ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/4, the introduction to which provides the policy background, followed, in annex I thereto, by the

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[1] Under the 2005 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), each country was asked to appoint a person in the ministry of education and/or the ministry of environment as "national focal point". As ESD has evolved, the relevant person(s) may have a broader mandate covering responsibility for ESD at the national level and leadership of this reporting exercise.

template for reporting, which is in three parts. Each part contains questions relating to specific indicators:

(a) Part 1 follows the structure of the UNECE Strategy for ESD as adopted at the First High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries (Vilnius, 17–18 March 2005) (CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1); it comprises indicators and subindicators. By answering the questionnaire, providing examples of good practice and referring to national documents, respondents will build a clear picture of their country's activities and achievements in ESD that should provide new questions and insights. The following points should be noted:

(i) At the start of each block of questions respondents are invited to provide a short description (max. 1,500 characters, except for issue 7 (max. 2,000 characters)) of the specific situation in their country. There is no need to reference ministerial statements; the focus should be on existing policies and current practice;

(ii) As Part 1 is structured in the same way as previous reporting, respondents may use older ECE national implementation reports as a reference, although it should be noted that some questions have been removed as they no longer provide new information. Other questions have been rephrased to solicit information relating to the latest reporting period and may refer to ESD concepts that have evolved over the years. In many cases, the most up-to-date information or details of changes occurring since previous reporting in 2018 are requested;[2]

(iii) Please note that, in many questions, respondents are requested to provide examples of good practice; a link to a document, report or website will suffice in most cases. In support of the selection of examples, please see notes on the "most significant changes" approach (see para. 15);

(b) Part 2 comprises indicators and subindicators that follow the update and new focus as agreed in the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10), adopted at the Ninth Europe for Environment Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022). The Framework highlights the following four strands of work or priority thematic areas:

(i) Quality education and education for sustainable development;

(ii) Whole institution approach and education for sustainable development;

(iii) Digital education, information and communications technology and education for sustainable development;

(iv) Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development. For each of these strands, first, information gathered through Part 1 indicators is highlighted, then there are additional questions about specific developments;

(c) Part 3 sums up the answers, indicating the progress, specific obstacles and needs in a given country. Lastly, there is a self-assessment page on which respondents gather together all the information and make a final judgement on national progress.

10. Quantitative data may be available for some indicators; for others, only qualitative information may be available or a question on an indicator can be answered through examples. In some cases, this national implementation report preparation exercise may inspire respondents to conduct further research and monitoring and evaluation activities to investigate the principles, organization, networks, methodologies, activities, results and impact of ESD.

11. It would be advisable to form a working group of experts tasked with preparing the national implementation report to complete the format for reporting. As preparation of national implementation reports is a Government responsibility, representatives of the ministry of environment and ministry of education should be involved as a minimum, as well

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[2] Most national implementation reports for 2018 are available at https://unece.org/national-implementation-reports.

as representatives of other ministries, local governments or authorities responsible for taking action on ESD. As ESD involves interministerial and intersectoral collaboration, the report may be the result of multi-stakeholder inputs from education, the private and public sectors, non-governmental and/or community organizations and academia.

12. As ESD in a "formal education" context extends from kindergarten to post-doctorate level, it is important to involve respondents from all levels of education in providing the requested information. This will inform reporting according to the different International Standard Classification of Education levels.

13. As ESD also embraces non-formal education and informal learning, it is advisable to take a multi-stakeholder approach to the reporting process by including the national implementation report working group, co-researchers and other informants.

14. The working group concept could be expanded further by establishing a national multi-stakeholder ESD forum. This would involve representatives from different sectors (private, non-governmental, academic and local government) and from different parts of the country. Rather than sharing the whole reporting format with forum members, it might be advisable to share relevant sections, or even specific questions, for relevant forum members to answer. In each case, sufficient time should be allowed to clarify the question and explain the context. In this way, stakeholders should be fully aware of what is expected of them when providing data.

15. It might be difficult to decide on which examples to report and which to leave out. One way of resolving this issue would be to use the "most significant changes" approach, which can be broken down into the following steps:

(a) Identify the stakeholder organizations who could (and who wish) to be involved in reporting, share with them the question(s) that applies(y) to their area of activity;

(b) Ask said stakeholder organizations for their most significant examples of change and their rationale for why they have chosen those changes as the "most significant". In this way, external stakeholders are asked to justify their choices, rather than having criteria imposed upon them. Stakeholder organizations might in turn delegate application of this approach to their own stakeholders to identify the most significant changes among their own local actors. In each case, those closest to the activity should have the freedom to choose examples, but with this freedom comes the responsibility to justify their choices;

(c) National focal points are advised to convene an online or in-person stakeholder workshop,[3] in order to make the final selection of examples for the ECE report. At this point, a decision could be made on which stories to highlight in the report and those that would be referred to in a summary paragraph. Any summary could include links to websites where further details could be found on each of the stories; in this way, no organization needs to be excluded from the report.

16. Questions on each subindicator can be answered at two or three of the following levels:

- Level one – a simple "Yes/No" answer.

- Level two – more detailed information is requested, which may require filling in a table or addressing questions in greater depth. For some questions, detailed information may be provided in an annex. Should no quantitative information be available, respondents may provide qualitative, descriptive responses on their country's work on the specific issue in question. When providing qualitative data, while avoiding being overly descriptive, respondents should include sufficient detail to enable others to understand the example; they should give examples of actions and their impacts rather than focusing on supportive descriptions.

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[3] It might be advisable to consult colleagues from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this regard; they may well have experience of participatory approaches.

- Level three – provision of examples of current practice is required, or of links to other documents (e.g., policies, reports, websites, materials or project reports) that can support the submission. In many cases, this may form part of the answer at level two, but it can also be a way of providing information for more open questions that arise at the end of each indicator. When selecting examples, the "most significant changes" approach described above may be used.

- Respondents should ensure that they complete all the tables in the appendices; these are extensions for specific subindicators.

17. Where a question has been left unanswered or a table left blank, a proper explanation for the corresponding gap should be provided; such explanations also constitute valuable information. If no data are available, this may also challenge respondents to conduct further research or monitoring and evaluation activity in relation to their country's ESD-related activities. Such exploratory work may be conducted on a voluntary basis.

18. Although the format for reporting is designed to provide information about the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD, respondents may be able to reflect on and use the data collected for monitoring and evaluation and reporting on other international ESD activities such as:

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) "ESD for 2030" framework

- The European Sustainability Competence Framework (GreenComp)

- Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals and specifically on Goal 4 and target 4.7

- Reporting on global education, specifically the UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms[4]

19. Similarly, reports to other ESD-related processes may be used to provide information or to contribute to reporting on the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD and the elaboration of national implementation reports.

20. In the past, member States have been informed by the UNECE Strategy for ESD, the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development and, more recently, the Council of the European Union recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development.[5] These efforts engage particular stakeholders and support key actions in relation to policy, curricula, teacher and educator competences and ESD materials, as well as whole institutional approaches, quality education and youth engagement. It is for this reason that specific questions are focused on these dimensions and, where appropriate, connections are highlighted through footnotes and references to documents.

21. ECE will support actors who take on the responsibility of national reporting and preparing national implementation reports. The members of the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators are available (via the ECE secretariat) to address specific questions and provide guidance relating to the process. Training and other reporting support mechanisms will be put in place in the coming years. In this connection, the ECE Steering Committee on ESD may consider setting up an assistance framework, which could include, subject to the Steering Committee's decision, establishing a "support group" for monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy's implementation, comprised of the experts and the experienced national focal points of the Steering Committee, which would assist the member States in realizing their monitoring and evaluation process through capacity-building activities, such as organizing advisory

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[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Records of the General Conference, Eighteenth Session, Paris, 17 October–23 November 1974, vol. 1: Resolutions* (Paris, 1975), pp. 147–154.

[5] Council of the European Union, Proposal for a Council recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability, Interinstitutional file No. 2022/0004(NLE), Brussels, 25 May 2022, 9242/22, annex.

workshops (in-person and online) at the regional, subregional and national levels, with the latter particularly targeting interested countries' specific needs. The funding for organizing such workshops and providing assistance by external experts could be provided through member States' financial or in-kind contributions.

22.   Lastly, the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators recognizes that the journey can be as important as the destination and that this reporting forms a crucial part of the implementation process itself.