Ad hoc group “ESD and Youth”

Concept note for discussion: Actively engaging Young people in the UNECE Strategy for ESD

# Background

During the 14th meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development held in Geneva on 2 and 3 May 2019 a particular focus was given to the importance of engaging youth in advancing the education for sustainable development agenda and particularly in ECE processes, and the challenges that must be taken into account regarding youth engagement in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals[[1]](#footnote-1). As the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD is currently reviewing its own mission, objectives and framework for the new post-2019 implementation period, youth has taken a central role in this process.

## Why the focus on young people?

There are currently approximately 1.8 billion young people living on earth, the highest number in human history[[2]](#footnote-2). Whilst the number of young people is not evenly spread across the globe, this demographic population has provided to be both a challenge and an opportunity for governments worldwide. The provision of education, basic health services and an adequate labor market has proven challenging for governments in a world that is faced with challenges related to climate change, political instability and conflict worldwide.

Central to envisioning and shaping a more sustainable future is youth – the generation that must not only cope with the consequences of unsustainable development today, but also bear the brunt of unsustainable development tomorrow. Youth in many emerging countries are now clamoring for a greater say in how their societies are being configured. Youth also make up an important group in consumer societies, and the habits they develop now will have a major impact on future consumption patterns. The young have the potential to propel sustainable development more widely and urgently.

Young people have the potential and motivation to drive the sustainable development movement and young activists and leaders, are both beneficiaries and drivers of this action area. Youth are an important consumer group and the habits they develop now will have a major impact on future consumption patterns.

# Youth and ESD in the UNECE Region

In 2007 Ministers of youth and environment of the UNECE Region already called for ESD to recognize youth and their impact at diverse levels[[3]](#footnote-3), this was reiterated by the Bureau of the UNECE Steering Committee for ESD in 2008 with the call for the more direct involvement of youth in the future[[4]](#footnote-4).

As part of the efforts to realize this, the work plan for the post-2019 implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development aims to empower youth to have a greater say in decision-making processes that directly affect them. This is in line with UNESCO’s Global Action Program for ESD[[5]](#footnote-5) which aims to empower and mobilize youth leaders worldwide to inspire and mobilize their peers to take action to build more sustainable, just and resilient communities.

At the fourteenth meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, a significant portion of time was devoted to discussing the engagement of young people in ECE process on ESD to contribute achieving the 2030 agenda. The government of Austria proposed to host a meeting of an ad hoc group on youth “ESD and Youth” to support the development of the youth strategy integrated within the UNECE Strategy for ESD. This will be followed up by a youth conference supported by the government of Cyprus and subsequent implementation.

## The role of youth

The post-2019 implementation framework for education for sustainable development is currently envisioned to be focused on the four major strands/priority areas[[6]](#footnote-6):

* Whole institution approach to education for sustainable development – institutions as communities of transformational learning
* Quality education and education for sustainable development
* Digital education, information and communication technology and education for sustainable development
* Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development.

The aim of the engagement of youth is to contribute and shape the strategic framework on ESD in the region and to create an actionable work plan with young people within these four strands. As part of this process, the ad hoc working group and consequent youth conference are expected to discuss and agree on several key issues such as, but not limited to:

* The definition of ‘youth’: Currently there are many definitions of youth, however this group is not homogeneous and encompasses a wide range of individuals of different ages, backgrounds and interests; how will the engagement of young people capture this group and voice the many different opinions

Youth engagement: Youth engagement is the result of the process when young people are involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change. This means involving youth in planning and in making decisions that affect themselves and others. However, given the varieties of youth engagement mechanisms, the most agreeable and/or effective method for youth engagement must be found, for example, through the representation at the UNECE Steering Committee for ESD and cooperation with its national focal points.

* Synergies with other processes: Many actors are currently involved with ESD, the aim of the youth engagement mechanism is to be innovative and complementary to these processes, therefore it is necessary to define the composition, working and funding of a youth engagement mechanism and its relationship to other efforts such as those led by UNESCO or the Mediterranean Information Office (MIO-ECSDE)/MEdIES and those which are part of the Agenda 2030.
* The role of young people within the four strands of the post-2019 implementation framework and methods of engagement, including but not limited to the different youth actors and representatives to be involved in the process.

## Draft considerations for discussion from the 14th meeting of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD (Geneva, 2-3 May 2019)

During the discussion of the agenda item on youth at the 14th meeting of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD, the following ideas were expressed by the participants with regard to the recommendations on the ways of youth engagement throughout the different priority areas, as follows:

(a) *“Policy advancement”*:

* Making provision for the active involvement of youth in policy planning, implementation and evaluation.
* Policies should address the multiple dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic, fair and gender-responsive way.
* All relevant stakeholders should allocate resources to empower youth as change agents for education for sustainable development.

(b) *“Whole institution approach”*:

• Educational institutions and Governments should provide institutional support and resources for youth-led change processes towards sustainability.

• Enhancement of collective action among sustainability initiatives.

• Recognition of youth as equal partners to accelerate the operational transformation of educational institutions towards sustainability.

(c) *“Learning on education for sustainable development and youth”*:

• Educational institutions and Governments should encourage and support youth and educators to experiment with innovative learning approaches.

• Monitor and evaluate those learning approaches to determine their effectiveness and efficiency in promoting education for sustainable development.

• Scale the impact of successful learning approaches to different geographic and institutional contexts.

• Build capacities of youth as trainers and peer-to-peer educators for education for sustainable development.

• Enhance the capacity of existing educators and trainers to empower youth to engage on education for sustainable development.

(d) *“Local communities, youth and education for sustainable development”*:

• Respect the voices of youth in community-driven education for sustainable development initiatives.

• Support youth-led education for sustainable development initiatives in local communities.

• Encourage youth to engage with and learn through real life situations.

(e) *“Entrepreneurship, youth and education for sustainable development”*:

• Recognize the importance of entrepreneurship in contributing to the goals of education for sustainable development.

• Create policy and funding conditions for new start-ups.

• Develop the capacity of youth to set up and manage enterprises.

(f) *“Sustainability challenges, opportunities and youth”*:

• Enable all youth to understand and critically appreciate the complexities and uncertainties of sustainability challenges and opportunities.

• Empower youth to develop visions of a more sustainable future.

• Equip students with the competencies to transform their personal lives, educational institutions, communities and countries.

## The main objective of the meeting of the Ad hoc Group “ESD and Youth” in Vienna

- To discuss the draft “Concept note for discussion” and to consider the options/ways of youth engagement in the draft concept note for the new post-2019 implementation framework “Education for Sustainable Development Strategic Planning 2030”, elaborated by the ECE Steering Committee’s Ad hoc Group on Strategic Planning.

## The expected output of the meeting of the Ad hoc Group “ESD and Youth” in Vienna

- To draft recommendations with concrete proposals on including a reference to youth in the four strands of the draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework “Education for Sustainable Development Strategic Planning 2030”.

1. See section III of the Report of the Steering Committee on Education for

Sustainable Development on its fourteenth meeting at <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/14thMeet_SC/Doc/ReportE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the statement on education for sustainable development by the Ministers of Education and of the Environment of the UNECE Region adopted at the joint session on education for sustainable development in 2007 at https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.4.add.1.e.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See section II of the report of the fifth meeting of the bureau at https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2008/ece/cep/ac.13/ece.cep.ac.13.2008.3.add.1.e.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See UNESCO roadmap for implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development at [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230514](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000230514) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a complete overview please refer to: https://undocs.org/ECE/CEP/AC.13/2019/4 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)