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Framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

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Towards a new society: 10 years of education for sustainable development

Framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

Note by the secretariat

1.   At its eighth meeting (Geneva, 21–22 March 2013), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development voiced its strong commitment to continue implementing the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development on the regional level beyond the third phase of implementation (see ECE/CEP/AC.13/2013/2, paras. 37–44). To assess the progress made under the Strategy, and to consider the continuation of the Strategy's implementation, the Steering Committee proposed to hold a High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

2.   At its ninth meeting (Geneva, 3–4 April 2014), the Committee reconfirmed its strong commitment to continuing implementation of the Strategy beyond 2015. It furthermore reconfirmed its decision to prepare a high-level meeting on education for sustainable development, including the preparation of a draft implementation framework for the future implementation of the Strategy and a draft ministerial declaration (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2014/2, paras. 35–36).

3.   It is important to note that the future implementation framework is not a new Strategy. The Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development is expected to remain in place, including the main objectives, definitions and the vision provided therein. The new implementation framework will rather follow on from the Vilnius implementation framework — adopted by ECE environment and education ministries in 2005 in Vilnius and reconfirmed at the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2007 — which spanned three implementation phases (2005–2015). The Vilnius framework defined the practical arrangements for the implementation of the Strategy.

4.   At its ninth meeting, the Steering Committee considered and decided upon basic elements of the new implementation framework based on proposals made by the Bureau. The present draft implementation framework (annex I) reflects these elements and is also

inspired by and aligned with the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Annex II contains proposed terms of reference for the Steering Committee for the period of 2016–2030.

5.   It is expected that ministers in Batumi will adopt the draft implementation framework, and extend the mandate of the Steering Committee so that it can guide the future implementation of the Strategy, as set out in its draft terms of reference.

Annex I

Draft implementation framework for the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2016–2030)

I. Progress made and challenges encountered in implementing the Strategy

1.   The progress made by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States in implementing the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development over the past 10 years has been an important contribution to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), and has furthered the recognition across global education initiatives that education systems must respond to the social, environmental and economic challenges facing the world today. In assessing the Strategy's progress, the third evaluation report (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2016/3)[1] of the Strategy's implementation highlighted five key findings:

(a)   Securing leadership and political will has been a critical factor in the Strategy's success;

(b)   Under the Strategy, important advancements were made on policy integration, curricula, tools, resources and networking;

(c)   Full integration of sustainable development knowledge, abilities and values, while well in progress, has yet to be realized across all levels and types of education;

(d)   The three priorities for phase III of the Strategy are proving to be challenging but necessary leverage points in whole-system change;

(e)   Recognition that education for sustainable development lies at the core of the purpose of education has increased, but remains to be secured fully across all member States.

A. Securing and sustaining leadership and political will

2.   Almost all ECE member States have participated to a lesser or greater extent in advancing education for sustainable development during the Strategy's implementation period 2005–2015, with the endorsement and support of their political and administrative leadership. Over 91 per cent of the 56 ECE member States have reported formally or informally to ECE and/or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on their work to advance the role of education in achieving sustainability. Furthermore, two thirds of ECE member States have provided indications of their interest and intention to continue to work towards full implementation of education for sustainable development. Leadership and political will have contributed to member States' ability to sustain their commitment to education for sustainable development. Efforts should be made so that changes in government will not have adverse effects on the continuity and level of implementation of education for sustainable development.

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[1]   The report reviews the data collected through national implementation reports submitted by member States (38 reports) at the end of the third phase of implementation of the Strategy, as well as supplemental information provided to the secretariat.

B. Advances in policy integration, curricula, tools, resources and networking

3.   Education for sustainable development is now reflected in national education policy documents by over 90 per cent of reporting member States, and 89 per cent of reporting member States consider that education is now part of their countries' sustainable development policies and planning. Member States (84 per cent) report that education for sustainable development has been included in national curriculum frameworks, with the majority of efforts focused on primary, lower and upper secondary levels. While the environmental dimension continues to receive most of the attention, it is encouraging to see the levels of effort to address social and economic themes as well. Government, academic and civil society stakeholders in all reporting member States are involved in the development and production of education for sustainable development materials. However, while the supply may be growing, the demand is also growing but not well documented: mechanisms to promote and disseminate the materials vary widely from country to country and to what extent these materials are being used is difficult to assess. Mechanisms to evaluate the quality of education for sustainable development materials are also limited.

4.   Member States (95 per cent) report that implementation of education for sustainable development is a multi-stakeholder process, and support a wide range of working groups, councils, networks and partnerships. Regional cooperation is strong, and the role of different stakeholders, especially regional networks of civil society actors, is recognized and appreciated.

C. Full integration of sustainable development knowledge, abilities and values yet to be realized across all levels and types of education

5.   There have been substantive good practices generated among a wide range of stakeholders in formal, non-formal and informal education in the region. Many of the indicators of success for the Strategy as set out by the Expert Group on Indicators have been met, but reporting member States nevertheless cautiously consider that they are still "in progress" or "developing" towards a comprehensive implementation of education for sustainable development across all levels of education. The majority of advances reported by member States are in explicitly addressing education for sustainable development themes in the curricula (97 per cent), competences and learning outcomes (92 per cent) and pedagogical approaches at the earliest levels of early childhood learning, as well as primary and secondary levels of formal education (95 per cent). Less is known about education for sustainable development in higher education, although member States report that higher education institutions in the region are increasingly engaged in education for sustainable development through high-level affirmations by university leaders and through networks of committed institutions.

6.   Close to 90 per cent of member States report that education for sustainable development methods and instruments are in place for non-formal and informal learning. Member States presented a wide range of non-formal and informal education for sustainable development learning initiatives, but acknowledged that many of these have been undertaken independent of, or in partnership with, Government agencies. Non-governmental organizations are playing a significant leadership role in the promotion of education for sustainable development in non-formal and informal settings. However, less is known about the extent and effectiveness of these efforts, as there is no central mechanism for reporting and documenting them and they are rarely evaluated.

D. The three priorities for phase III are proving to be challenging but necessary leverage points in whole-system change

7.   Nearly three quarters (71 per cent) of member States are promoting whole-institution approaches. Most continue to focus on enhancing sustainable development in the

curriculum and classroom through projects and/or promote voluntary schemes for individual schools to seek education for sustainable development recognition and certification. With respect to teacher education, close to 90 per cent of member States report that education for sustainable development is now a part of educators' initial and in-service training, although the qualitative comments provided suggest that many are cautious about how widespread and transformative the support might be for education for sustainable development, given the autonomous nature of teacher education institutions in many countries. It is also not clear whether significant numbers of teachers have been trained to date and the actual depth or quality of training.

8.   From 2012 to 2015, some member States have moved beyond discussions of what constitutes a green economy and green jobs to concerted efforts to retool technical and vocational education and training to support sustainability, in consultation and partnership with industry sectors and technical and vocational education and training institutions. However, while in some States new competences and skills are being defined, new courses developed and technical and vocational education and training programming revised, less than half of member States indicate that there has been significant progress made.

E. Recognition that education for sustainable development lies at the core of the purpose of education has increased, but remains to be secured fully across all member States

9.   Securing the recognition that education for sustainable development lies at the core of the purpose of education will require overcoming challenges and obstacles that have persisted throughout all three phases of the Strategy's implementation, including: the need for sustained leadership and political will among key decision makers; securing structural reform of education systems, including embedding education for sustainable development in mainstream budgets; preparing educators; strengthening mechanisms for cooperation and engagement across a broader cross-section of stakeholders; and supporting the need for more education for sustainable development research, monitoring and evaluation.

II. Joint Vision of the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries

10.   Among the different initiatives developed in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, established at the High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries in Vilnius (2005), is an outstanding example of regional implementation of education for sustainable development and has served as a blueprint for other regions.[2]

11.   Education for sustainable development is a part of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on education (Goal 4), with Target 4.7 requiring countries to ensure by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. However, the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in the period beyond 2015 will contribute not only to the implementation of SDG 4 and the accomplishment of Target 4.7, but also to the

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[2] A very concrete example is the endorsement of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development by the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change (Athens, May 2014), and its formal association with the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, adopted at the Nineteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Athens, 9–12 February 2016).

implementation of all the SDGs. Education for sustainable development is a cross-cutting process that will allow for a better understanding and enhanced competences related to all aspects of sustainable development.[3]

12.   The ECE region will continue to implement the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and as such make a tangible regional contribution to the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (Global Action Programme) adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its thirty-seventh session (UNESCO 37 C/Resolution 12). The Global Action Programme was acknowledged by the United Nations General Assembly as the follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in its resolution 69/211, which requests UNESCO to continue to provide coordination for the implementation of the Global Action Programme. Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 70/209 reaffirms education for sustainable development as a vital means of implementation for sustainable development.

13.   The Global Action Programme focuses on five priority action areas to enable strategic focus and stakeholder commitment: (a) policy support; (b) whole-institution approaches; (c) educators; (d) youth; and (e) local communities. The future implementation framework of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development is informed by the Global Action Programme, and this is reflected in the "vertical" and "horizontal" priority action areas of the implementation framework (see sect. IV below).

14.   The ECE Education and Environment Ministries gathered at the High-level Meeting in Batumi, Georgia, reaffirm the joint vision set out in the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (see box).

Vision of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

Our vision for the future is of a region that embraces common values of solidarity, equality and mutual respect between people, countries and generations. It is a region characterized by sustainable development, including economic vitality, justice, social cohesion, environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources.

Because achieving a sustainable future will require a change in mindset regarding how we relate to each other and to the ecosystems that support life on this planet, education systems must be realigned to support sustainable development. Education for sustainable development is an essential tool for good governance, informed decision-making and the promotion of democracy. It develops and strengthens the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations and countries to make judgements and choices that will improve the quality of life by making our world safe, sustainable, healthy and prosperous.

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[3] In addition, education for sustainable development could contribute significantly to the achievement of the United Nations 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme.

III. Governance body of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

15. The ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting also reconfirm the mandate of the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development to decide on the Strategy's implementation and review its progress. Representatives from environment and education ministries should remain at the core of the Steering Committee; however, countries are invited to include other ministries in their delegations, depending on their country situation. Also, countries are encouraged to consider including UNESCO National Commission representatives in their national delegations and other stakeholders to ensure the close alignment with the global education for sustainable development process.

16. To ensure efficient regional governance and communication, member States are requested to reconfirm or newly nominate focal points for education for sustainable development in education and environment ministries. They may also nominate, in addition, focal points in other departments or ministries, as appropriate, to participate in the ECE education for sustainable development process.

17. The Steering Committee should meet annually, preferably in person. If resources permit, funding will be provided to one person per eligible country to participate in these meetings, in accordance with the rules established by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. However, with a view to both environmental and financial considerations, the Committee may consider holding an electronic Steering Committee meeting every other year (see annex II for the Committee's terms of reference).

18. The Environment for Europe process should continue to be used as a platform for the regional high-level coordination of the implementation of the Strategy.

19. At its ninth meeting (Geneva, 3–4 April 2014), the Steering Committee extended implementation phase III until the High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi. At its tenth meeting (Geneva, 8–9 June 2015), the Steering Committee proposed the time frame for the next phase should run from 2016 to 2019.

IV. Priority action areas

20. While member States recognize the importance of continuing to implement all the objectives of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting stress in particular the importance of advancing three "vertical" priority action areas (subparas. (a)–(c) below), which focus on what should be done, taking into account the national or regional educational policies and education systems, and three "horizontal" priority action areas (subparas. (d)– (f) below), which focus on how it should be done:

(a) **Encouraging whole-institution approaches by establishing education for sustainable development school plans, or embedding education for sustainable development in existing school plans, for every school by 2019**: Education for sustainable development school plans are a crucial component of a whole-institution approach and in the ongoing process of implementing of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. Promoting whole-institution approaches by integrating education for sustainable development in capacity-building, governance, curricula, teaching and learning, campus facilities and their operation and the larger community is an important vehicle for achieving holistic and structural implementation of education for sustainable development in formal education (primary and secondary) and vocational and higher education, as well as facilitating a link between formal and non-

formal education. Therefore, the establishment of education for sustainable development school plans, or the embedding of education for sustainable development in existing school plans (i.e., education for sustainable development school planning), is strongly encouraged. The adoption of whole-school approaches in pre-school education is also considered beneficial;

(b)   **Promoting the extension of education for sustainable development in teacher education and in the training of all educators**: Teachers and, more broadly, educators, are key drivers of change in the process of integrating education for sustainable development into education. Their capacities have to be strengthened through the inclusion of education for sustainable development in pre-service and in-service teacher education and through professional development that supports the acquisition of education for sustainable development competences by non-formal and informal educators. Therefore, ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting strongly support the further integration and extension of education for sustainable development in teacher education;

(c)   **Strengthening technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy**: Technical and vocational training provides promising opportunities to initiate and to foster the transition to a green, entrepreneurial and sustainable economy. In this respect, several concrete steps to prioritize could include: educating students about the importance of moving to a green economy and becoming ecologically literate; understanding the needs of industry to transition to a green economy, with an emphasis on sustainable production and consumption; and ensuring that policymakers' support for educators is sufficient to enable them to provide the requisite training for new skills. One of the first steps in these efforts is integrating education for sustainable development into national technical and vocational education and training policy. Against this background, ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting recognize the importance of strengthening technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development. In particular, they support the more active involvement of professional unions, vocational training centres and the business sector in the strengthening of technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development;

(d)   **Strengthening integration of education for sustainable development in both international and national education and sustainable development policies and other relevant processes**: Member States should foster the integration of education for sustainable development in both international and national education and sustainable development policies and other relevant processes. On the regional level, in particular, the link with the United Nations environmental conventions should be strengthened. Synergies should be developed with other relevant programmes and key stakeholders active in the promotion and integration of education for sustainable development policy in region. Institutional education for sustainable development-related policies should also be supported at different levels of education. Education for sustainable development is an effective tool to the support of implementation of the SDGs;

(e)   **Enhancing synergies between formal, informal and non-formal education**: Formal education needs to synergize with non-formal and informal education to effectively promote education for sustainable development in educational and environmental contexts. Non-formal and informal education promotes education for sustainable development by supporting education for sustainable development learning within formal education and by raising public awareness and learning about education for sustainable development outside formal education. It is essential that formal, non-formal and informal education systems work together in a complementary fashion, so that diversity and innovation is supported;

(f)   **Acknowledging the important role of networks, including those of civil society, academia and science, non-governmental organizations, business and enterprises, in implementing education for sustainable development:** The role of networks, including those of civil society, academia and science, youth, non-governmental organizations, companies and enterprises, in education for sustainable development should be considered as a vital part of the implementation framework. Empowering and increasing the capacity of civil society, and in particular of youth as critical agents of change, through networking and co-learning, is essential for a wide and participatory implementation process. Strengthening multi-stakeholder networks at the local level is one example of an action under this priority area.

It is important to note that these priority action areas for the ECE Strategy align with the priority areas of the Global Action Programme.

21.   In addition, the benefits of the possible collaboration of ECE with particular networks might be explored further, with a view to supporting the achievement of progress in the six priority areas.

V.   Time frame and monitoring

22.   ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting recognize that the implementation of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development is a continuous, long-term process. For the next implementation period, the first phase will align with the first five-year phase of the Global Action Programme, which ends in 2019. The Steering Committee should consider aligning the second phase of the new process with the next phases of the Global Action Programme.

23.   ECE Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting note that member States have had success in the three implementation phases since the Strategy's adoption in Vilnius in 2005:

(a)   *Phase I (until 2007)*: countries took stock of what was included within the remit of the Strategy and also identified priorities for action required to implement it;

(b)   *Phase II (until 2010)*: the implementation of the Strategy was advanced. Countries reviewed progress made in the implementation of their national strategies in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, and in putting the Strategy into action;

(c)   *Phase III (until 2015)*: countries made considerable progress, with a focus on practical steps and actions to implement education for sustainable development.

24.   In education for sustainable development, developing capacity for monitoring as well as long-term evaluation of quantitative as well as qualitative aspects is critical. Therefore, at the end of the next implementation phase a mandatory national progress reporting should be carried out. The Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development will align future monitoring and evaluation work as much as possible with the Global Action Programme reporting scheme, while also allowing for the comparability of the reporting outcomes with previous ECE national implementation reporting exercises.

VI.   Financial arrangements

25.   Effective implementation of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development depends, inter alia, on the availability of sufficient financial and human resources. There is a need for stable and predictable sources of funding, while a fair sharing of the burden should be the guiding principle of any financial arrangements established for this purpose.

Annex II

Proposed terms of reference of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development for 2016–2030

I. Mandate

1.   The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Education and Environment Ministries at the High-level Meeting in Batumi, Georgia, mandate the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development to continue to decide on the implementation of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and to review its progress.

2.   ECE will provide secretariat support to the Steering Committee in accordance with ECE rules and practices, subject to sufficient funding being provided by the member States.

II. Composition

3.   The members of the Steering Committee will be designated by Governments of the ECE member States. The Committee will include at least representatives of the environment and education sectors and will be open-ended. Countries are invited, moreover, to include representatives of other ministries as well as those from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) National Commissions. Committee members will be responsible for representing the consolidated national position in the work of the Steering Committee. The reconfirmation or nominations of national focal points should be submitted to the secretariat by November 2016. Representatives of United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations will be invited as observers, as decided by the Steering Committee. Representative of UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will be invited with the status of permanent observers.

III. Purpose

4.   The Steering Committee will constitute the principal decision-making body for activities carried out under the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in the ECE region and be responsible for giving guidance and strategic directions to the implementation of the Strategy. It will also review the progress of its implementation. In particular, it will continue to:

(a)   Promote and coordinate the implementation of the Strategy in line with the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development and in consultation with UNESCO — the lead agency for education for sustainable development in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 69/211 and 70/209 — as well as other relevant international activities and processes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals process, seeking synergies and avoiding overlaps;

(b)   Advance the three vertical priority action areas:

(i)   Encouraging whole institutional approaches by establishing education for sustainable development school plans, or embedding education for sustainable development in existing school plans, for every school by 2019;

(ii)   Promoting the extension of education for sustainable development in teacher education and in the training of all educators;

(iii)   Strengthening technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy;

(c)   Advance the three horizontal priority action areas:

(i)   Strengthening integration of education for sustainable development in both international and national education and sustainable development policies and other relevant processes;

(ii)   Enhancing synergies between formal, informal and non-formal education;

(iii)   Acknowledging the important role of networks, including those of civil society, academia and science, non-governmental organizations, business and enterprises, in implementing education for sustainable development;

(d)   Monitor progress in implementation, preparing assessments of progress made, proposing priorities for action, identifying challenges and proposing corrective measures, where appropriate;

(e)   Liaise and cooperate closely with relevant key actors, i.e., intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations that are active in education, the environment and sustainable development, as well as education for sustainable development networks;

(f)   Establish ad hoc working groups, task forces and other bodies as needed to implement the activities;

(g)   Provide guidance on the need for possible new instruments promoting education for sustainable development;

(h)   Serve as a forum for the consideration of issues related to education for sustainable development at the regional and international levels;

(i)   Liaise, as required, with other regional commissions, including those of the United Nations, on matters related to its competence;

(j)   Keep the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and other relevant bodies informed about its activities.

IV.   Officers

5.   For the upcoming implementation phase a chair, vice-chair and the Bureau will be elected from among the representatives of the ECE member States present at the meeting. Officers should represent different sectors (e.g., environment and education). They shall serve as the officers of the Steering Committee until their successors have been elected.

V.   Meetings

6.   The meetings of the Steering Committee will be convened by ECE. They will ordinarily be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva, unless there is a feasible proposal by a member State to host the meeting. If resources permit, funding will be provided to one person per eligible country to participate in these meetings, in accordance with the rules established by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. However, with a view to both environmental and financial considerations, the Committee may consider holding an electronic Steering Committee meeting every other year. The Steering Committee will take decisions by consensus and vote on decisions, if required.