

Concept Note

UNECE FORUM ON ESD Empowering Youth for Sustainable Futures: *Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Engagement*




Introduction:

The future rests on the shoulders of young people and with a view to addressing the multifaceted challenges they face ahead, we must empower youth with the necessary knowledge and skills, fostering a mindset that will equip them to navigate through the complex challenges and to lead the change towards a healthier and more sustainable world for all.

This forum, hosted by the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus and organised in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), this UNECE forum seeks to harness the potential of entrepreneurship education in empowering youth to shape a sustainable future. Moreover, it aims to explore how education for sustainable development can influence entrepreneurship education to cultivate entrepreneurs who are not only driven by profit but also committed to creating positive environmental, social, and economic impacts for a sustainable future.

Current Landscape:

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Europe is currently engaged in a profound debate on the transformation of economic systems, recognizing it as a crucial step towards achieving sustainability. The European Union's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan represents a proactive response aimed at tackling youth unemployment through the promotion of entrepreneurship. Central to this strategy is the integration of entrepreneurship education throughout educational institutions, a measure endorsed by UNESCO-UNEVOC for its demonstrated capacity to stimulate sustainable economic growth and job creation, particularly within TVET systems. The UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) advocates for continued and intensified efforts towards implementing its Strategy until 2030 at the regional level. This strategy was adopted at the Third High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministers hosted by the Republic of Cyprus government in Nicosia on 5 October, 2022. The Steering Committee collaborates harmoniously with relevant initiatives at the global, subregional, and national levels. These collaborative efforts include partnerships with organizations such as UNESCO, UNEP, the European Commission, Global Education Network Europe, the Union of the Mediterranean, and other organizations working on the implementation of ESD, illustrating a coordinated approach towards fostering sustainable development through education across various spheres.

Framework for Action:

The new implementation Framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030 (2030 Implementation Framework) represents a pivotal step towards the holistic integration of ESD across all educational levels and societal sectors. This forward-looking framework serves as a catalyst for the development of agile yet robust policies, adept at addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by poly-crisis scenarios. By prioritizing the implementation of key policy directions, including the priority strand on “Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD”, the framework underscores the indispensable role of youth in shaping and implementing sustainable development policies.

In response to this imperative, the UNECE has initiated a three-year project aimed at promoting the implementation of this priority strand. The project will culminate in a comprehensive guiding framework for 21st-century competencies, tailored to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in the pursuit of sustainable and equitable economic development.

The Challenge:

Numerous challenges such as climate change, social injustice, limited skills and job opportunities, the digital divide, and economic instability hinder the ability of young people to contribute to a sustainable future for themselves and their communities. These pressing issues call for urgent and innovative solutions. Entrepreneurship education plays a pivotal role in nurturing creative, problem-solving skills, along with a spirit of risk-taking, skills which are needed to create positive change. In turn, ESD fosters critical thinking, promotes global citizenship and deepens understanding of economic, environmental, cultural and social issues. Integrating ESD into entrepreneurship education is crucial for empowering a generation ready to build a more sustainable and equitable future. However, realizing such integration requires full political and financial support.

Forum Objectives:

This Forum serves as a dynamic platform to bolster the capacity of UNECE member States in adapting education systems towards sustainable development by implementing the fourth priority area of the 2030 ESD implementation framework. Specifically, it aims to encourage the Member States to utilize education for sustainable development as a pathway for stimulating entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among learners, for accelerating transformations towards sustainable development and for enhancing youth employability. Additionally, it seeks to address disparities related to technological advances and to foster partnerships among stakeholders.

Hosted in the coastal city of Limassol, the event will attract an international audience from the UNECE member States and beyond, aiming to showcase good practices and policies, and strengthen partnerships. The Forum will be an opportunity to provide valuable insights on and examples of how education for sustainable development contributes to the integration of sustainability practices and entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, discussions will explore how to ensure that innovations and entrepreneurship contribute meaningfully to a sustainable and equitable future, particularly for future generations. The forum outcomes will feed into the consultations and discussions in the lead up to the upcoming Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024.



Join us in Limassol on 27-28 June 2024, as we embark on a transformative journey towards empowering youth for sustainable futures through entrepreneurship education. Together, let's pave the way for a resilient, fair, and sustainable future.

Outline of thematic areas

I. ESD Policy for a Sustainable Future:

The session aims to explore the integration of ESD into national educational frameworks and how it can be anchored into the curriculum at various educational levels where entrepreneurship may be taught. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches to enhancing entrepreneurship education for sustainable development will be examined. The session will give an insight into the following issues:

- Policy and regulatory frameworks (with reference to the new 2030 Implementation Framework of UNECE Strategy for ESD, EU frameworks: GreenComp, EntreComp, DigiComp, and LifeComp, and other as relevant)
- Exploring research insights: understanding the impact of ESD on entrepreneurship education
- Curricula anchoring: introducing ESD in the curriculum of entrepreneurship education at different education levels (primary, secondary, vocational, tertiary) for developing required framework of educator competences and entrepreneurial skills for learners, combining a top-down and bottom-up approaches

II. Entrepreneurship Education for Sustainable Development: ESD Action Planning for Impact

The session will focus on discussing targeted topics aimed at elaborating an action plan for entrepreneurship education for sustainable development, complete with actionable steps and measures. Through a series of workshops and parallel sessions, participants will be prompted to explore innovative perspectives on ESD while fostering critical thinking and sustainability-driven entrepreneurship. Key areas of focus include examining tools, approaches, and experiences in entrepreneurship education that cultivate sustainable mindsets and behaviors, as well as fostering innovation for tangible impact.

Additionally, emphasis will be placed on understanding the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in achieving these objectives, with particular attention to the roles and significance of educational institutions and government bodies in promoting entrepreneurship and sustainability skills. The following topics will be explored:

- Evolving trends in entrepreneurship education: implications for educators, youth and the necessity of broader stakeholder involvement
- Integrating entrepreneurship with sustainability principles: opportunities and challenges
- Delving into various educational settings of learning entrepreneurship and sustainable development and sharing related learning experiences
- The role of political actors, educational institutions, business community and society in promoting entrepreneurship education for sustainable development.

III: Shaping Sustainable Futures: Empowering Youth through ESD

This session emphasizes the importance of ESD in empowering youth to become leaders in the creation a sustainable world. It will seek answers to the following questions:

- **Amplifying youth voices:** How can we ensure young people have a say in shaping the future of ESD? Are there examples of good practices for countries and institutions on meaningful participation and engagement of young people?
- **Bridging the gap:** How can we foster intergenerational dialogue and knowledge transfer to accelerate progress?
- **Building capacity:** What tools, means and networks do young people need to advocate for and implement their sustainability visions?

- **Multi-sectoral collaborative solutions:**

What partnerships and collaborative efforts are needed to drive transformative change in ESD? Reflect on the relevance of a whole-society, whole-government and whole-institution approach that puts the needs of young as the single most important priority of a country.

IV: Financing the Future: Sustained Investment in Youth

This session will look at possible actions and benchmarks to evaluate how decision-makers/ governments/ business invest in young people. It will explore:

- **Starting point:** How young is the nation?
- **Investment:** What is the percentage of national budget allocated to youth development issues?
- **Job Creation:** Is there an existing government policy to create job opportunities for young people?
- **Representation:** What is the level of youth representation in government and decision-making bodies?

Interconnected for Impact:

This forum adopts a holistic approach, fostering the cross-pollination of ideas among attendees from diverse fields, all aimed at equipping young people with the entrepreneurial skills necessary to translate solutions into tangible outcomes. By bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, the forum creates a dynamic platform for co-creation and collaboration. With its emphasis on entrepreneurship education and ESD, the forum empowers youth to emerge as future leaders, catalyzing positive change towards a sustainable world.