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Transforming futures: Enhancing practice for ESD for 2030 through action research

Global Symposium

Bucharest, Romania; 19-21 January 2026



Background

The *Transforming Futures: Enhancing Practice for ESD for 2030 through Action Research* project aims to generate evidence and develop technical guidance tools in critical areas of ESD and transformative education, such as **1) whole-institution approaches in ESD, 2) transversal sustainability competencies and pedagogies, and 3) learning assessment for ESD**. This project seeks to strengthen knowledge and capacity among institutions and individuals to transform educational practices that promote sustainability and quality education. It will empower education stakeholders, foster innovative teaching practices, and facilitate the integration of sustainability principles in educational institutions and systems.

This initiative is implemented through the global ESD for 2030 Network, leveraging the expertise and collaboration of UNESCO Chairs, higher education institutions and ASPnet institutions from 10 participating countries, which includes **Brazil, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Germany, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Romania and Slovenia**.

From March 2025, **43 ASPnet schools, higher education institutions, and vocational and teacher training institutes** from the participating countries have been piloting, testing, and reviewing the guidance tools. Each country has selected 3-4 schools to take part in this process. Their feedback will contribute to refining these tools, ensuring they are effective in

practice, while also generating valuable case studies and evidence on the implementation of ESD strategies. The project is generously supported by the Government of Japan.

The global symposium will take place over **two and a half days (2.5 days)** and will include sessions to share key findings, present best practices, case studies, and facilitate discussions among all participants involved in the project. The meeting will also give a platform to selected teachers who will share insights and outcomes of the project from their schools. The project will culminate with the publication of the three tools and findings of the action research by UNESCO.

Objectives and outcomes

This event will bring together participants of the project from the ten countries to share lessons learned and exchange good practices and feedback on the project and tools before their publication. In addition to fostering this dialogue, the event aims to produce tangible outcomes, including a dissemination strategy and launch event for the publication of the 3 tools, proposals for scaling the project to other schools and countries to ensure long-term sustainability, and identifying opportunities for targeted capacity-building activities. Outcomes also include a compilation of good practices and multimedia resources, such as videos, photos, and an article to showcase key insights and promote the visibility of the project.

Date and venue

January 19-21, 2026

National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest
313, Splaiul Independentei Street
Sector 6, 060042
Bucharest, Romania
<https://www.international.upb.ro/>

Organizers

The Symposium is co-organized by UNESCO, the Romania National Commission for UNESCO and the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest.

Participants

The meeting will bring together approximately 50 in-person participants, including the authors of the guidance tools, national researchers, ASPnet coordinators, teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders from participating countries, along with selected UNESCO colleagues.

Working languages

The official working language of the Symposium will be English.

Modality

The meeting will be held in-person, and will include presentations, breakout room discussions, and a visit to one of the participating schools in the country.

Provisional agenda

Monday, January 19	
09:00-09:30	Registration
09:30-10:00	<p>Opening and introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mihnea Costoiu, Rector of the University of Science and Technology, Politehnica Bucharest• Ligia Deca, Secretary General, Romanian National Commission for UNESCO• Irina Danielescu, Secretary of State, Ministry of Education• Julia Heiss, Chief, Section of ESD, UNESCO <p>Setting the stage - objectives and explanation of agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Julia Heiss, Chief, Section of ESD, UNESCO <p>Ice-breaker and group photo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jenni Sippala, ESD, UNESCO <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1, 3rd floor</i></p>
10:00-11:00	<p>Session 1 - Sharing of country experiences – Round 1: Romania, Brazil, Malaysia, Cuba, Kenya</p> <p>The country teams will share their experiences and highlights from the project in two panel discussions, each comprising 5 teams, followed by Q&A.</p> <p>Moderator: Mark Manns, ESD, UNESCO</p> <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1, 3rd floor</i></p>
11:00-11:30	Coffee break, <i>Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i>
11:30-12:30	<p>Session 1 - Sharing of country experiences – Round 2: Cote d'Ivoire (online), Japan, Slovenia, Germany, Costa Rica</p> <p>The country teams will share their experiences and highlights from the project in two panel discussions, each comprising 5 teams, followed by Q&A.</p> <p>Moderator: Julia Heiss, ESD, UNESCO</p> <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1, 3rd floor</i></p>

12:30-14:00	Lunch, <i>Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i>
14:00-15:30	<p>Session 2 – Transforming Futures Guidance Tools Feedback – Lessons from the country cases</p> <p>This session will focus on feedback specific to the 3 guidance tools. UNESCO will present an overall summary of the usability and relevance of the tools. The guidance tool author teams will outline their suggestions for the revision and updating of the 3 tools, with an open discussion on suggestions from the country teams.</p> <p>Moderator: Jenni Sippala, ESD, UNESCO</p> <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1</i></p>
15:30-16:00	Coffee break, <i>Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i>
16:00	End of Day 1
Tuesday, January 20	
09:00-12:30	<p>Session 3 – Working sessions on the three Guidance tools</p> <p>UNESCO and the guidance tool author teams will lead breakout group discussions to explore how the tools can be revised and how they can best be used.</p> <p>The teams will rotate between these three rooms (45-60 minutes each), with one coffee break in between.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Institution Approach tool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Charles Hopkins & Katrin Kohl, York University - Hilligje van 't Land & Isabel Toman, International Association of Universities • Sustainability competencies tool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robert Didham, University of Inland Norway • Learning Assessments tool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daniel Fischer, Leuphana University Lüneburg - Aaron Redman, Sustainability, Climate, and Education Expert - Jordan King, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga <p><i>Central Library, Room 2.2, 3.1, 3.2</i></p>
12:30-14:00	Lunch, <i>Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i>
14:00-15:30	<p>Session 4 – Scaling the project and tools for sustainability</p> <p>This session will explore opportunities to scale the project and operationalize the tools in further schools, institutes and countries. Further discussion around scaling the action research methodology and collaborating across countries and institutions will be explored. Moderated discussion followed by small group discussions.</p> <p>Moderators: Mark Manns, ESD, UNESCO and Lydia Ruprecht, Head of ASPnet Unit, UNESCO</p> <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1, 3.2.</i></p>
15:30-16:00	Coffee break, <i>Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i>
16:00-17:30	Session 5 – Next steps and way forward

	<p>This plenary session will encourage a final stock-taking of the day's discussions, offering reflections from the guidance tool authors and the country participants on the finalization and publication of the tools, and scaling the project. This session offers a final discussion on the publication and dissemination of the tools and project outcomes, including a communication and dissemination strategy.</p> <p>Moderator: Mark Manns, ESD, UNESCO</p> <p><i>Central Library, Room 3.1, 3rd floor</i></p>
18:30-20:30	<p>Dinner Reception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mihnea Costoiu, Rector of the University of Science and Technology, Politehnica Bucharest • Ligia Deca, Secretary General, Romanian National Commission for UNESCO • Mimata Hiromu, Secretary 2 Embassy of Japan in Romania (TBC) • Andrei Luca, Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Julia Heiss, Chief, Section of ESD, UNESCO <p><i>Location: Central Library, Hall, 3rd floor</i></p>
Wednesday, January 21	
09:00-12:30	<p>School visit to Bilingual High School Olga Gudynn, Bucharest - UNESCO ASPNet School</p> <p><i>A half-day field visit to Olga Gudynn High School will be arranged to showcase the 'Transforming Futures through Action Research' project. With 900 students aged 3 to 19, the school is designed as a sustainable learning ecosystem that integrates green facilities, outdoor learning spaces, and innovative technologies to foster inquiry-based learning and environmental responsibility. The site visit will include discussions on the action research project, a tour of the school, classrooms, and observation of good ESD practices.</i></p>
12:30-14:00	Lunch, Central Library, Hall, 3 rd floor

Contact

UNESCO

ESD-Net 2030 Secretariat

Section of Education for Sustainable Development

Division for Peace and Sustainable Development

Education Sector

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With the kind support of:



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