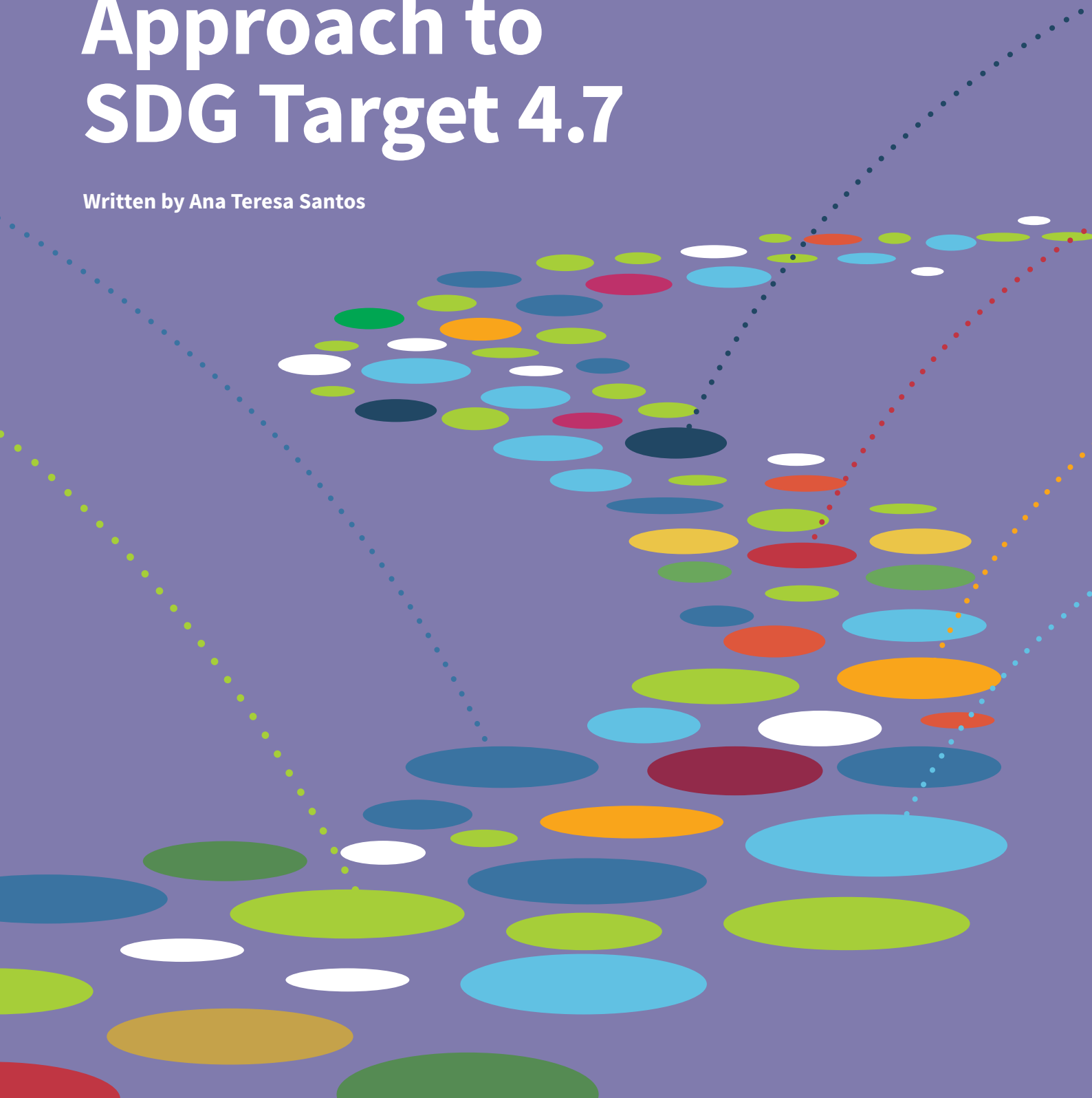




A Coherent European Approach to SDG Target 4.7

Written by Ana Teresa Santos



The contents of this publication are based on desk research and on interviews and conversations held during May/June 2021.

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BRIDGE 47

The Bridge 47 Network brings people of various backgrounds together to learn from each other and collaborate for advancing transformative learning and SDG Target 4.7. Bridge 47 – Building Global Citizenship Education is a project co-created by 14 European and global partner organisations, co-funded by the European Union. The project mobilises civil society to take action for global justice through Global Citizenship Education.

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Summary

Following the Envision 4.7 Roadmap’s general recommendation that “A pan-European overarching strategy for SDG Target 4.7 needs to be developed at the latest by 2021”, this document aims to showcase why a coherent approach to Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDG) will strengthen the European Union’s role in achieving the targets and goals set out in Agenda 2030. The report suggests some pathways to follow in order to make this coherent approach a reality.

The Introduction highlights the importance of SDG Target 4.7 to the achievement of the SDGs. This is followed by a section dedicated to exploring the several ongoing processes and initiatives taking place at European Union (EU) level, that our analysis reveals are connected in one way or another to SDG Target 4.7, but which would benefit from a clearer position and greater focus on the role they play in promoting the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (SDG Target 4.7).

Starting with the European Green Deal, through to the European Education Area and the European Consensus on Development, over fifteen EU-led processes, initiatives and funding lines are analysed from the perspective of SDG Target 4.7 and transformative education. This serves to demonstrate the relevance of the “educations for” included in SDG Target 4.7 to the European Union. The challenges that these diverse policies and processes pose are then explored, and the advantages that a coherent approach can bring to achieving SDG Target 4.7, and consequently Agenda 2030, are highlighted. In fact, the existence of an overarching policy that clarifies the overall goal of various initiatives, makes explicit the connection and complementarity among them, simplifies and clarifies language, and ensures coordination among different stakeholders, is key to achieving SDG Target 4.7 and consequently Agenda 2030.

In the second section, three possible pathways to ensure a coherent approach becomes a reality are explored: working towards a Council Recommendation; working towards a Communication from the Commission; and building a Civil Society initiated “shadow” strategy to influence the EU. An analysis of the possible processes that could lead to the desired outcome is made for each pathway, including the key stakeholders that should be involved, and the benefits and risks of following the specific pathway. Two case studies of similar initiatives illustrate the proposed pathways, serving as inspiration and demonstrating that it is possible for Civil Society-led processes to lead to changes in EU policies and initiatives.

The conclusion highlights that no matter which pathway is chosen to realise this European approach, it is important that all “educations for” are represented in the process and in the content. In this sense, it is essential to overcome the temptation of thinking in silos and highlighting differences instead of commonalities. It is essential and urgent to build bridges among all different SDG Target 4.7 stakeholders and the different EU policies and initiatives related to SDG Target 4.7. The EU has an important role to play in showing the world that it’s possible to create coherent and effective policies for an education that enables citizens to deal with the challenges of the future and to create a more just and sustainable world.



Introduction

Agenda 2030 represents the ultimate call for all United Nations' (UN) member states to achieve sustainable development and avoid the irreparable effects that climate change and injustice can have on our planet. 17 goals and 147 targets, along with accompanying indicators, build an agenda that is challenging and demanding, but that undoubtedly deserves a true commitment from all governments and citizens in its implementation in order to ensure our common future.

While all goals and respective targets are interlinked and are equally important, the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) Target 4.7 is particularly relevant as it aims to ensure *“that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (...)”*¹. As recognised among others in the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development, adopted in May 2021 by over 80 ministers and vice ministers and 2800 education and environmental stakeholders, *“Education for Sustainable Development, anchored in SDG 4.7”* is the *“enabler for all 17 SDGs”* and *“the foundation for the required transformation”*.²

It is widely acknowledged that without citizens' engagement, Agenda 2030 will not be achieved. It is for this reason that all transformative educations (education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, human rights education, peace education, etc.) play a central role in equipping everyone on the planet with the relevant knowledge, skills and competences to promote a more sustainable and fairer world and to implement Agenda 2030.

But almost 6 years after the adoption of the SDGs, transformative education practitioners feel that much is still to be done in this area, not only at a practical level in the day-to-day practice, but predominantly at a political level. For example, at European Union (EU) level Member States are lacking a common vision and approach towards SDG Target 4.7, resulting in scattered investment and action on all types of Education related to SDG Target 4.7.

Although the Agenda 2030 - Sustainable Development Goals is global in scope, in this paper, we will focus only on the European context, as participants in the Envision 4.7 event that took place in November 2019, considered that the existence of a Pan-European Strategy was key in supporting the implementation of SDG Target 4.7 in Europe.

Therefore, we will start by presenting the main arguments that support the need for a coherent approach for SDG Target 4.7 at a European Union level. We include an overview of the main related policy processes that exist or are being developed, and then explore three possible pathways to ensure a coherent approach becomes a reality, including the key stakeholders that should be involved, illustrated with case studies of similar initiatives.

It is important to clarify that in this paper when we use the expression “education” it includes teaching, training and learning in all contexts and levels — whether formal, non-formal or informal — from early childhood education and care, to adult and lifelong learning, including vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, as well as education in digital environments.

Relevance of a coherent European approach to SDG Target 4.7 and connections with other EU processes

The EU and its member states played a leading role in the process that led to the adoption, in September 2015, of the “Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in the United Nations’ General Assembly. The strong commitment of the EU to the Agenda’s implementation in a “full, coherent, comprehensive, integrated and effective manner”³ was reinforced in the European Council Conclusions of June 2017 “A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Under Goal 4 – Quality Education, SDG Target 4.7 encompasses an elaborate set of “educations for” that are related to a complex and diverse set of stakeholders. While traditionally these “educations for” worked in separate silos, and research tried to define the borders that ensured the distinctions among them, in the last ten years more attention has been paid to building

bridges and links among them. These efforts recognise the important work that has been done separately but assume that a holistic and values-based approach to these types of education would be of benefit in terms of gaining recognition and mainstreaming its implementation at all levels of society.

Hence, in the discussions that led to the adoption of Agenda 2030, there was an effort to ensure that the richness of “educations for” was included in the text, while assuming that all of them provide an important contribution in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

Although a lot of progress has been made in recent years, we are still far from having this holistic approach



mainstreamed, and at a practical and political level in the EU there is still a lack of coordinated action among all “educations for”. In fact, it is still common to find examples of partial interpretations of Education for Sustainable Development that only focus on the environmental approach, or for example “educations for” reclaiming that their approach encompasses all other “educations for”, focusing more on ensuring their space for action than on building bridges and learning from each other.

These discussions that often occur either at a civil society level or at a research level are then reflected at a political level. In fact, within the European Union each Member State has its own approach and individually decides upon the priority given to Education for Sustainable Development/Global Citizenship Education/Human Rights Education/Peace Education, etc. This leads to scattered initiatives that only have limited impact and lack the systematic and holistic approach that is required to achieve the Agenda 2030.

To enhance impact, a common policy guideline across the EU could stimulate a coherent approach that prioritises the implementation of actions at the national/local level towards promotion of knowledge and skills related to sustainable development.

According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU only has a complementary competence regarding Education. The EU can support Member States’ actions in a certain number of areas, but in the end Member States are the ones responsible for their own education and training systems. In practice, this means that the EU can assist countries in setting joint goals and sharing good practices, for example, through recommendations (Articles 165 and 166 TFEU), but it cannot pass legislation related to the creation of national curricula or recognition of competences in the framework of non-formal learning.

Taking this into consideration, in developing a coherent approach what could be aimed for is a policy guideline that encourages and motivates all Member States to develop, create and implement policies and actions at a national level towards the achievement of SDG Target 4.7. Such a guideline could also be used within the EU institutions to coordinate actions and ensure coherence among the different initiatives promoted by the EU itself. There are a number of processes and initiatives connected to SDG Target 4.7 which are already being promoted by the EU institutions and which would benefit from a clearer position and greater focus on the promotion of knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (SDG Target 4.7). The following section will analyse some of these processes and initiatives, highlighting their connection with SDG Target 4.7.



Council Recommendation on The European Green Deal

Launched by the Commission in December 2019, the European Green Deal is one of the Commission's priorities for 2019-24 and it *“aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. It also aims to protect, conserve, and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts”*.⁴

In this ambitious document, it is recognised that the European Green Deal is an *“integral part of this Commission's strategy to implement the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals”* and that *“(...) the Commission will refocus the European Semester process of macroeconomic coordination (...) to put sustainability and the well-being of citizens at the centre of economic policy and the Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of EU's policymaking and action”*.⁵

Recognising that *“Schools, training institutions and universities are well placed to engage with pupils, parents, and the wider community on the changes needed for a future transition”*⁶, the Communication clearly mentions that *“The Commission will prepare a European competence framework to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development”*⁷. Further in the document, it is stated that *“The Commission will launch a European Climate Pact by March 2020 to focus on ways to engage with the public on climate action”, as “Citizens are and should remain a driving force of the transition”*.⁸

Commission Communication: EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

In line with the European Green Deal, in May 2020 the European Commission adopted a new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and a respective action plan. The Strategy contains specific commitments and actions to be delivered by 2030, organised around four main pillars: Protect nature; Restore ecosystems; Enable transformative change; and Ensure a high-level EU ambition and mobilisation of efforts towards a global biodiversity agenda.

In summary, it aims to *“ensure that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and our economy, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change”*, recognising that *“protecting and restoring nature will need more than regulation alone. It will require action by citizens (...)”*⁹ and requires a *“whole-of-society approach”*.¹⁰ In this frame, the Strategy anticipates that, in 2021, *“the Commission will propose a Council Recommendation on encouraging cooperation in education for environmental sustainability (...)”*. This will provide guidance for schools and teachers on how to cooperate and exchange experiences across Member States on biodiversity teaching”.¹¹

Coherent EU Approach to SDG Target 4.7

The European
Green Deal

EU Biodiversity
Strategy For 2030

Initiative

European Climate Pact Empowering citizens to shape a greener Europe

Believing that “*the involvement and commitment of the public and of all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal*”¹², the Commission launched, in December 2020, the European Climate Pact¹³ an EU-wide initiative inviting people, communities and organisations to participate in climate action and build a greener Europe. The Pact seeks to “*encourage information sharing, inspiration, and foster public understanding of the threat and the challenge of climate change and environmental degradation and on how to counter it*”.¹⁴

Also mentioned in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the European Climate Pact focuses on connecting and sharing knowledge; learning about climate change; and developing, implementing and scaling up solutions. It aims to spread knowledge about climate action that is scientifically sound and provides a basis for action. It will showcase solutions for inspiration and learning and help networks and communities amplify their action and impact.¹⁵

Commission Communication and Council Recommendations

European Education Area

First endorsed by member states in the 2017 Social Summit in Gothenburg (Sweden) and prioritised in the Commission President von der Leyen’s “Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024”, the European Education Area builds on the previous strategic framework for European cooperation in this area ‘Education and Training 2020’ (ET 2020). “*Until 2030, the achievement and further development of the European Education Area will be the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, permeating all strategic priorities and priority areas (...)*”.¹⁶

The first communication from the Commission on this topic outlines “Green and digital transitions” as one of the six dimensions for the further development of the Education Area. The Commission recognises that “*there is a need to enable a profound change in peoples’ behaviour and skills, starting in the education system and institutions as catalysts*” and that “*actions should be geared towards changing behaviour, boosting skills for the green economy fostering new sustainable education*”.¹⁷ To deliver this dimension the Communication foresees, among others: the launch by the end of 2020 of an Education for Climate Coalition to mobilise expertise and resources to change behaviour regarding environmental sustainability, in synergy with the European Climate Pact; a proposal of a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability to provide guidance on how

European
Education Area

European
Climate Pact

to cooperate and exchange experiences on environmental sustainability education; and a proposal to a European Competence Framework to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development.¹⁸

Detailed further in a Council Resolution approved in November 2019¹⁹, the European Education Area aims to support greater cooperation amongst European Union Member States within education and build resilient and forward-looking education and training systems. In the Council Resolution it is recognised that *“The potential of education and training to contribute to achieving a climate-neutral and green Europe needs to be fully explored. Education and training are crucial in providing the knowledge, skills and competences and in fostering the values and motivation which are fundamental to enabling fair and equitable social transformation. European action for Green Europe, built on the Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, needs to involve all levels and all forms of education and training and all stages of life, enabling activities initiated at local and regional level and in cooperation with civil society, with the aim of moving forward towards the implementation of the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals”*.²⁰

In February 2021, the European Council approved the strategic framework of the European Education Area that encompasses five strategic priorities, including

“Supporting the green and digital transitions in, and through, education and training” and that mandates the Commission to *“work with the Member States until the end of 2021, in order to agree on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area”*.²¹

Initiative

Education for Climate Coalition

In the frame of the European Education Area, and strongly linked with the European Green Deal and the European Climate Pact, the European Commission created the flagship initiative “Education for Climate Coalition”.²² This Coalition aims to mobilise the education and training community to work towards achieving a climate neutral and sustainable European Union. In practice it will centralise, upscale, support and promote bottom-up, co-created actions involving pupils, students, teachers, education institutions and stakeholders.

The Coalition’s pledges and efforts will be centralised in an online platform launched in June 2021, that also aims to promote the sharing of knowledge and experience, connect stakeholders and stimulate innovation. National Coalitions shall also be created at national level.

European Skills Agenda

Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme

Education For Climate Coalition

Commission Communication **European Skills Agenda & Competence framework on Education for Sustainability**

In July 2020, the Commission communication “European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience” stated that “*Europe will only become a climate neutral continent, a resource efficient society and a circular economy with an informed population and workforce that understands how to think and act green*”.²³ As a result, the Commission is developing a European competence framework on education for climate change and sustainable development and a taxonomy to monitor progress in the development of skills for the ecological transition, in the context of the ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) Classification.

The goal of the competence framework on climate change and sustainable development is to establish a shared understanding and a conceptual model of the competences to be developed by learners in a lifelong learning perspective. For each competence area, levels will be provided – ranging from awareness to understanding and action. The common definitions and practical guidelines accompanying the framework will support education stakeholders in Member States to engage students and the wider community in contributing to a successful transition to climate neutrality and sustainable development.

The competence framework is also being developed within the framework of the European Education Area and the EU Strategy for biodiversity, and it is planned to be released in late 2021 or in early 2022.

Council Recommendation on **Education for Environmental Sustainability**

As foreseen in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and mentioned in the Communication on the European Education Area, the Commission is preparing a proposal for a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability. The recommendation will aim to help Member States strengthen policy development, learning and cooperation in the area of education for environmental sustainability and seek to serve as a reference point for Member States on how education and training can contribute towards a more sustainable and resource-efficient society and economy.

A public consultation will take place until mid-September 2021 in order to gather input and hear the views of interested individuals and organisations. After this, it is expected that the Commission will adopt the proposal for a Council Recommendation by the end of 2021. Once the proposal is adopted by the Commission, it will go to the Member States where it will be discussed and finally adopted by EU Ministers of Education in the Council of the European Union.²⁴

DEAR
Programme

Recommendation on Education For
Environmental Sustainability

Erasmus +

Commission Communication

A union of equality: EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025

Published by the Commission in September 2020, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 sets out a series of measures “to step up action, to help lift the voices of people with a minority racial or ethnic background, and to bring together actors at all levels in a common endeavour to address racism more effectively and build a life free from racism and discrimination for all”.²⁵ It recognises that “Children should be taught early about equality, respect and inclusion and be empowered to promote such values among their peers and their communities” and that “Schools have an instrumental role in helping to reduce racial stereotyping and prejudice among children”.²⁶

Commission Communication

A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

The Gender Equality Strategy, published in March 2020, presents policy objectives and actions to progress towards a gender-equal Europe by 2025. It sets out a vision, policy objectives and actions to make concrete progress on gender equality in Europe and towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including education and awareness raising to promote gender equality: “Effective prevention of violence is key. It involves educating boys and girls from an early age about gender equality and supporting the development of non-violent relationships”.²⁷

Commission Communication

EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

Adopted in March 2021, the first EU Strategy on the Rights of Child recognises, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the right of the child to express his/her views. It strives for inclusive quality education and in the document the European Commission invites Member States to (...) “strengthen education on citizenship, equality and participation in democratic processes in school curricula at local, regional, national and EU level”.²⁸

Initiative

Conference on the Future of Europe

Launched in May 2020, the Conference on the Future of Europe is an initiative that seeks a new agreement on the future of European democracy by stimulating a two-year (2020–2022) inter-institutional discussion and a citizens’ debate. “The Conference on the Future of Europe will open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe’s challenges and priorities. European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project”.²⁹ Several of the topics addressed in the digital Platform connect to SDG Target 4.7: Climate change and environment; Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Migration; EU in the World, etc.

Gender Equality
Strategy 2020-2025

EU Anti-Racism Action
Plan 2020-2025

EU Strategy On The
Rights Of The Child

European Consensus on Development

Adopted in June 2017 through a Joint Statement by the European Council and its member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission, the European Consensus on Development, is part of the EU response to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015). The consensus defines the EU's shared vision and framework for development cooperation. It recognises that *“Responding to the educational needs of children and youth is crucial to promoting responsible citizenship, developing sustainable and prosperous societies and boosting youth employment”*³⁰ and that *“The EU and its Member States will intensify their efforts to ensure everyone has the knowledge, skills, capabilities and rights they need to enjoy a life in dignity, to be fully engaged in society as responsible and productive adults, and to contribute to the social, economic and environmental well-being of their communities”*.³¹

The Consensus provides the context for the Commission's support to Development Education and Awareness Raising, recognising its interconnection with Global Citizenship Education: *“Development education and awareness raising can play an important part in raising levels of engagement among the public and in addressing the SDGs at national and global level, thus contributing to global citizenship”*.³² It states that *“The EU and its Member States will deepen their partnerships with CSOs in support of sustainable development. They will promote an operating space and enabling environments for CSOs, with full public participation, to allow them to play their roles as independent advocates, implementers and agents of change, in development education and awareness raising and in monitoring and holding authorities to account”*.³³



European Consensus on Development

European Solidarity Corps

Conference on The Future of Europe

Funding Lines

Erasmus +

With an estimated budget of €26.2 billion, “*the 2021-27 edition of the programme aims to be a key instrument for building knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development in the European Union and beyond.*”³⁴ It will also place a strong focus on social inclusion, green and digital transitions, and in promoting young people’s participation in democratic life.

Citizens, equality, rights and values programme

Formally adopted by the Council in April 2021, the rights and values programme will have an overall budget of maximum €1.55 billion. It sets out four specific objectives: to protect and promote EU values; to promote equality and rights, including gender equality, anti-discrimination and the rights of children; to promote citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the EU; to raise awareness of common European history, and to fight violence, notably against children and women.

Development education and awareness raising (DEAR) programme

The European Commission’s Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR), supports projects that engage the European Union public in worldwide issues of social, economic and environmental development. Given that the adoption process of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – ‘Global Europe’ for the period 2021-2027 only came to an end in June 2021, the only information so far is that €6.36 billion will be allocated for thematic programmes (Human Rights and Democracy; Civil Society Organisations; Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention; and Global Challenges). Specific allocation for the DEAR Programme is currently under discussion as the thematic multi-annual indicative programming documents are still being developed.

European solidarity corps

The European Solidarity Corps aims to foster solidarity in European society, engaging young people and organisations in activities that help address societal and humanitarian challenges through volunteering or by setting up their own solidarity projects.

Although not exhaustive, this list of policy documents, initiatives and funds, confirm that the topics addressed under the “educations for” included in SDG Target 4.7 are relevant for the European Union. In fact, even though there is almost never an explicit reference to SDG Target 4.7 in the formal EU documentation, in practice, all these processes and funding lines are already starting points for the EU and its member states to engage actively in the implementation of SDG Target 4.7, which is a positive sign for the initiatives that will follow.

However, it must also be recognised that this diversity of policies and processes also poses some challenges that need to be addressed:

- The absence of an overarching approach that encompasses all “educations for” mentioned in SDG Target 4.7 (education for sustainable development, human rights education, gender equality, peace and non-violence education, global citizenship education and appreciation of cultural diversity), prevents the EU from effectively contributing to this Target. For example, in most of the policies and processes, the language used tends to focus only on the green/ climate dimension of Education for Sustainable Development at the expense of the other important dimensions (human rights, global citizenship, respect for diversity, social justice, etc.), that are also relevant to achieving the needed transformation and save the planet.
- It seems that there is a lack of coherence and coordination among these policies. The fact that many of the policies/processes/funds are led by different Directorate Generals within the Commission, risks a scattered and “silo” approach that can

undermine impact and create confusion among citizens. It also increases the risk of duplicating actions and misusing resources.

- A recognition that these policies and funds partly (or completely) can contribute to SDG Target 4.7 is also lacking, which is a missed opportunity to showcase the European Union as a role model and leader in this Target that is essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is in response to these challenges that the Envision 4.7 Roadmap in 2019 included the general recommendation that “*A pan-European overarching strategy for SDG Target 4.7 needs to be developed at the latest by 2021. In order to guide this European strategy, a multi-stakeholder group with relevant expertise needs to be established.*”³⁵

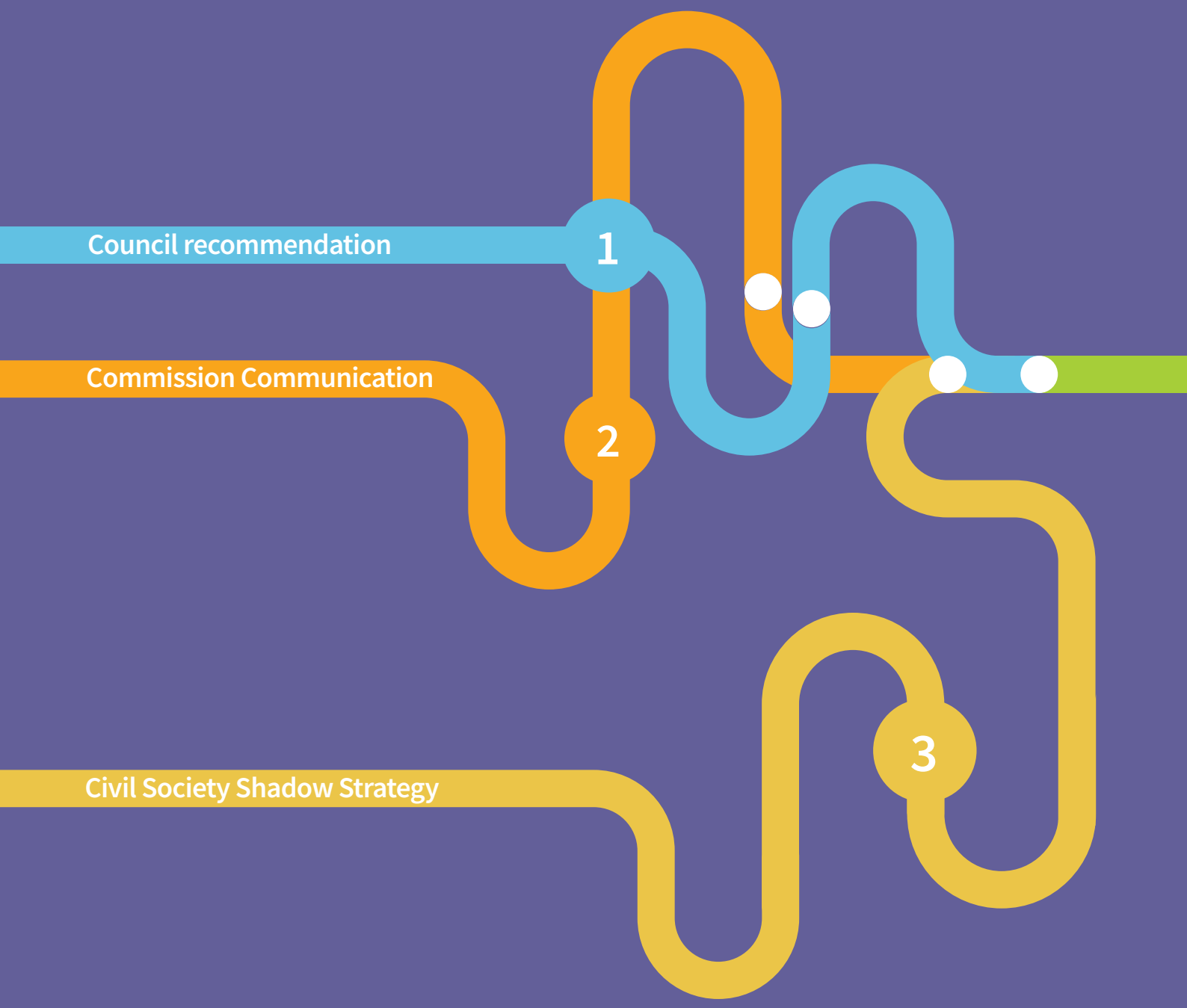
Experience shows that most of the time the existence of scattered policies and initiatives reinforce the silos



and reduce impact and real change. The existence of an overarching policy that clarifies the overarching goal of various initiatives makes explicit the connection and complementarity among them, simplifies and clarifies language, and ensures coordination among different stakeholders, is key to achieving SDG Target 4.7 and consequently Agenda 2030.

Advantages of having a common guideline that ensures a coherent approach for SDG Target 4.7

- Ensures a connection between all the policies and processes developed at the EU level regarding transformative education, allowing for better policy coherence and improved policy impact;
- Creates an overall benchmark that can be used as a reference point by national stakeholders, help to influence local debate and support interventions on the topic;
- Simplifies terminology and helps to create a common language around this topic across EU countries / EU Institutions / other stakeholders;
- Ensures that all European policies are explicitly supportive of SDG Target 4.7 and clarifies the available instruments in helping to achieve the Target;
- Ensures funding mechanisms to make SDG Target 4.7 a reality in the European Union;
- Has the potential of creating a joint monitoring and evaluation mechanism that assesses progress and quality in delivering SDG Target 4.7.



Possible Pathways to Make the Coherent Approach a Reality



The complexity of SDG Target 4.7 and the complexity of the EU system makes it difficult to propose one particular way of achieving an understanding at EU level of the SDG Target 4.7. We are therefore proposing three possible pathways to achieving a common guideline/orientation at an EU level that leads to the success of SDG Target 4.7. However, as mentioned, it is essential that any new process builds on existing policies and guidelines, promotes a truly overarching framework complementary to existing processes, and avoids any duplications that would only create entropy in an already complex context.

PATHWAY 1



Work towards a Council recommendation

This entails engagement of EU Member States that are involved in the next EU presidencies (for example France 1st semester 2022, Czech Republic 2nd semester 2022, Sweden 1st semester 2023) to start the process of developing a Council Recommendation on the achievement of the SDG Target 4.7.

As a first step to involving Member States in this process, national coalitions of civil society organisations and public servants/administrators engaged in European Networks, such as European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) or Global Education Network Europe (GENE) could come together to assess the feasibility of including SDG Target 4.7 as one of the priorities of the Presidencies.

Given that the agendas of the Presidencies are defined well in advance, this would need to be done during the second half of 2021 with the aim of influencing the programme of the next Trio. If accepted and included in the Presidencies' programme, the second step would be to involve the national coalitions in each Member State in encouraging their government to vote in favour of the recommendation when discussed in the Council. Advocacy work targeting the National Permanent Representations to the EU shall be considered, as it's the staff of these representation that, in the majority of the countries, attend the Council's working parties and committees' meetings and coordinate the decision process.

It is also important to involve the related Directorate Generals (DGs) in the process as they can be allies in showcasing the Council the need for more clear directives in order to ensure coherence. DG Education and Culture could play an important role, as it is responsible for education policy within the Commission. Involving Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) would also be beneficial, as they directly represent EU citizens and can have an influence on their respective countries' representatives in the Council.

When approaching the future Presidencies, it is important to assess which working party/ committee within the Council would be most appropriate to lead the process, and how the choice of working party could affect the content of the recommendation.

The working party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was established in the end of 2017 with the mandate to “ensure a proper follow-up, monitoring and review of the implementation at an EU level, across internal and external policy sectors, of commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”³⁶. It can therefore play a crucial role if the main argument used to put this recommendation forward is that the SDG Target 4.7 is an enabler of the whole SDG Agenda. It is also a working party that may have some ‘space’ in the agenda to discuss this topic.

The youth working party could also be engaged, but there is a risk of focusing SDG Target 4.7 on youth policies/education, losing the lifelong learning perspective encompassed in the target.

The Education Committee should also be involved, given that it is the body responsible for bringing to the table topics of discussion for EU education ministers covering all levels of education and training. However, directly tackling this Committee can be challenging as they tend to have a very busy agenda.

Benefits of this pathway:

- Strength of the Council’s recommendations;
- All EU Member States are involved in the discussion of the document before it is approved, so there is a greater chance of follow up at national level.

Stakeholders to engage:

- National Coalitions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) active in SDG Target 4.7
- Future EU Presidencies: France, Czech Republic, Sweden
- EU Council - Agenda 2030 working party
- EU Council - Youth working party
- EU Council - Education Committee
- Permanent representations to the EU

Risks of this pathway:

- Not being able to directly influence or control the process (it will always have to be through cabinets, public servants, etc.);
- Difficulty of adding topics to agendas that are often already packed;
- Resulting content is too general, because everyone must agree upon it.



PATHWAY 2



Work towards a communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

Another avenue to explore would be a formal communication from the Commission to the other EU institutions, especially the Parliament and the Council. This approach would advance the EC's work on the topic and would strengthen its role in promoting SDG Target 4.7 in Member States. This could be done by making a concrete proposal to one of the two DGs most involved in this topic (DG Education and Culture- EAC and DG International Partnerships- INTPA) to lead the process of developing the communication, all the while ensuring that a Commission-internal Inter-service Group (ISG) is built involving all Commission Services that work on this topic. For this it would also be essential to influence the European Commission Work Plan, since a reference to this process in the work plan means it will have to be implemented.

Our research reveals that DG EAC could be an important ally as it is the key stakeholder for all education-related topics and is the DG involved in many of the ongoing policy processes and initiatives mentioned above. DG INTPA is also a relevant stakeholder, but centring only on it could lead to a focus on global citizenship education at the expense of the other "educations for" encompassed in the SDG Target 4.7. Likewise, if advocacy work is directed only at DG ENV there is the same risk of focusing only on the environmental dimension of the SDG Target 4.7. DG EMPL also plays an important role, especially in the

undergoing discussions on competences, but it tends to see competences predominantly in terms of entry into the labour market, as opposed to a broader life perspective.

Given that it is essential to build on processes that are already underway, another option is to influence the ongoing development of the Council Recommendation on Education for Environmental Sustainability. This can be done through direct participation in the public consultation, defending a holistic approach to the topic and encouraging a broader range of ESD themes to be covered (not only environmental), including a specific mention of the contribution of the EC to SDG Target 4.7.

Stakeholders to engage:

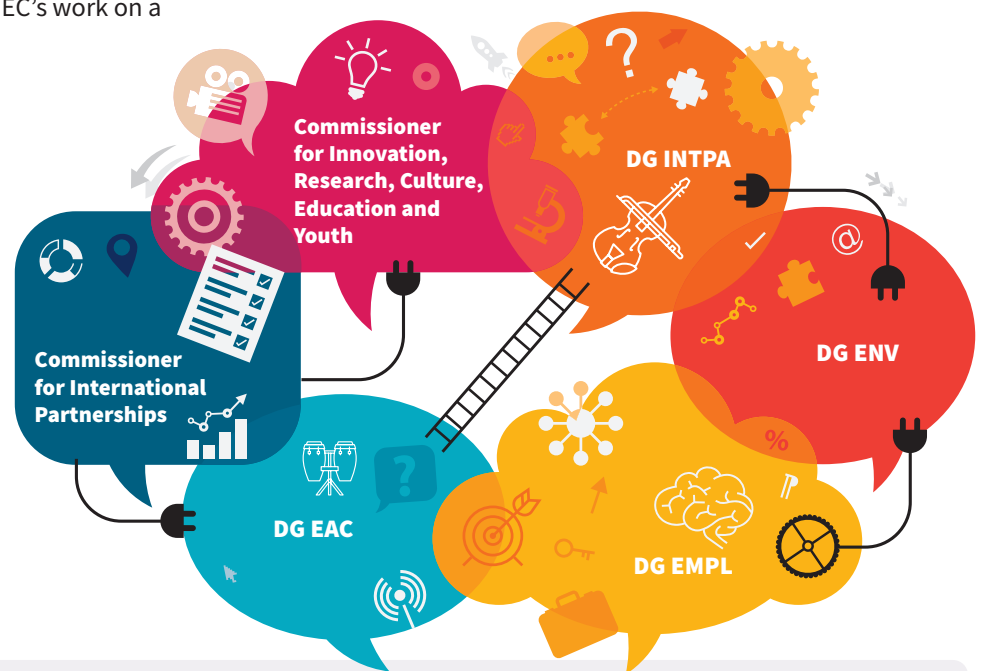
- Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth
- Commissioner for International Partnerships
- Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC)
- Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)
- Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)
- Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV)

Benefits of this pathway:

- Ensures that several DGs are engaged in the process and are coordinated;
- Ensures appropriation of the topic by the DGs involved;
- Carries weight in terms of recommendations to the Council and Parliament;
- Is usually followed by a Staff Working Document that aims to further detail the EC's work on a specific issue.

Risks of this pathway:

- Can take a lot of time;
- Is dependent on the willingness of the DGs and on the engagement of EU staff.



Case Study

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Roma equality, inclusion and participation and COMMISSION COMMUNICATION to the European Parliament and the Council on the new Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030

The Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on Roma equality, inclusion and participation adopted on 12 March 2021 followed the European Commission's Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on the new Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030. This new framework for action replaces the previous EU framework for national Roma integration strategies 2011-2020 and is a result of long-term advocacy work done by several Civil Society organisations working to combat antigypsyism and promote Roma participation.

In 2008, several CSOs working on the topic created an EU Roma Policy Coalition that aimed to create specific EU antidiscrimination policies targeting Roma Communities. This coalition worked with MEPs to

propose and get approval for a series of Parliamentary resolutions encouraging the Commission and the Council to produce policies on this topic. They have also supported data collection related to the Roma Community, including shadow reports that included data enabling comparisons to be made with the data formally communicated by Member States to the Commission.

All this continuous work meant that this Coalition has been recognised by the European Institutions as the main interlocutor regarding Roma issues. It has enabled them to build working relations which have been key to influencing the content of the new strategic framework and allowed the CSOs to be recognised as a formal part of the strategy.

PATHWAY 3



Build a Civil Society initiated “shadow” strategy to influence the EU

Building on the work done by Bridge 47, this pathway would involve creating a coalition of CSOs and academia spanning the several sub-areas encompassed in the SDG Target 4.7, with the aim of developing a common strategy towards SDG Target 4.7. The strategy would be supported by all participant entities and would be widely publicised. Interested national stakeholders and EC DGs could also be involved in the drafting process in order to obtain their support for the document, thereby increasing its possible impact.

Once finalised, this strategy could be presented to all EU institutions in order to gain their input/agreement on the content. One possible avenue is involving MEPs in demonstrating their support to the document.

Stakeholders to engage:

- Broad coalition of CSOs including Human Rights Education Networks, Education for Sustainable Development Networks, Global Citizenship/ Development Education Networks, Lifelong learning/ Adult Education Networks, Students' Associations, Teachers' Associations, Environmental Associations Networks / Social Movements, Youth Associations, Women's Rights Associations (See Annex for a detailed list of organisations to involve)
- Civil Servants from the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Environment, Social Affairs, Culture...) from EU member states;

- Technical staff from EC DGs;
- MEPs (specifically from CULT, DEVE, FEMM and ENVI Committees).

Benefits of this pathway:

- Engages all relevant non-governmental stakeholders that are key to the implementation of the SDG Target 4.7 in practice;
- Allows for the inclusion of technical staff from Member States and DGs in a more informal way;
- It is a faster process;
- Can later be used to influence the EU institutions to initiate a policy process on the topic.

Risks of this pathway:

- It might be challenging to reach a consensus among so many different stakeholders;
- The process carries a small risk of creating divisions, rather than unity among the stakeholders in the several “educations for”;
- It lacks the political weight needed for Member States to implement policies at a local level, but it can still be an influential document, as it can be used by CSOs to lobby national governments and the EC.

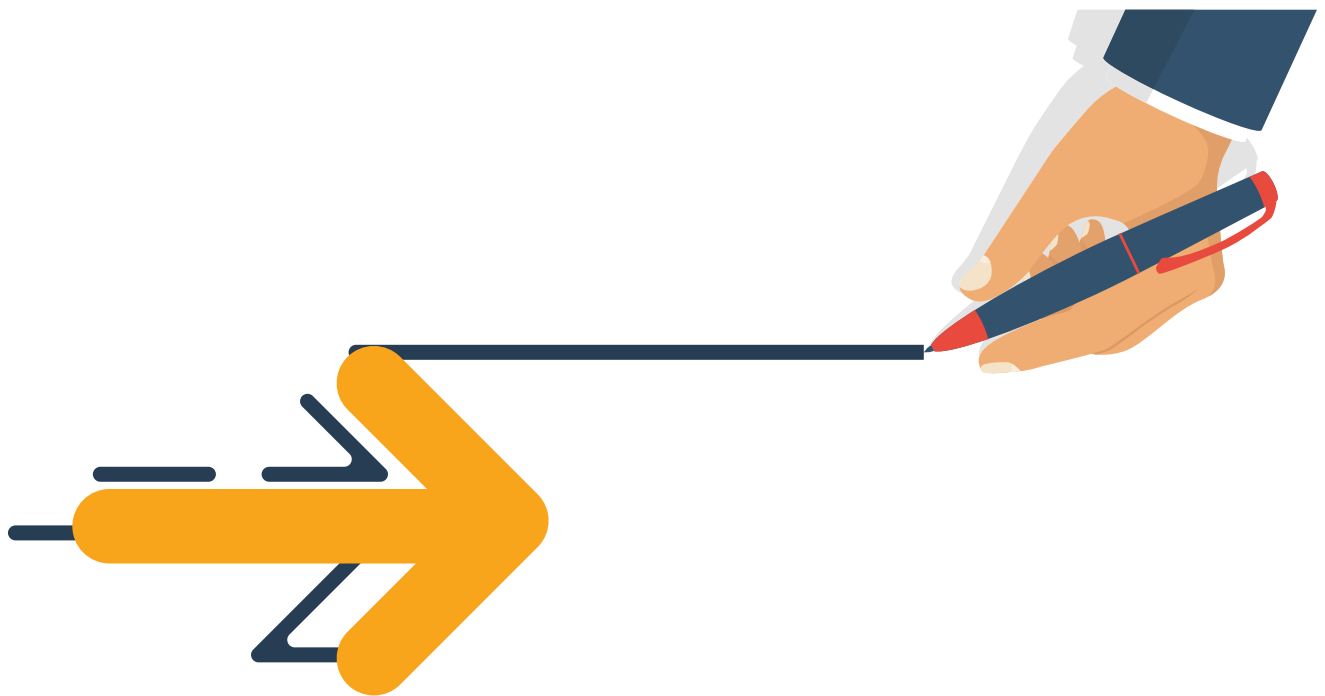
Case Study

The civil society shadow European strategy for sustainable textile, garments, leather and footwear

With the aim of contributing to an upcoming comprehensive EU Strategy for Textiles, a broad coalition of 65 social and environmental CSOs has developed a Civil Society European Strategy for Sustainable Textiles, Garments, Leather and Footwear. This non-official (or “shadow”) strategy looks at the social, environmental and governance implications of the textile sector and includes a set of proposals regarding legislative and non-legislative actions that the EU can undertake to contribute to fairer and more sustainable TGLF value chains.

After agreeing on the content of the document, the 65 organisations have started to engage in large-scale advocacy work, calling on the European Commission, MEPs, and EU governments to back the strategy. As a result, a group of 53 MEPs from across the political spectrum wrote a letter to Commissioner Sinkevičius, Hogan, Reynders, and Urpilainen endorsing the Civil Society European Strategy for Sustainable Textiles. In the letter the MEPs “invite [the Commission] to follow the approach of this civil society proposal in the development of the comprehensive EU textile strategy”.³⁷





CONCLUSIONS

The complexity of the EU system and the complexity of SDG Target 4.7 represent the two main challenges in creating a coherent European approach to achieving the SDG Target 4.7. The wide range of “educations for” that are encompassed in the SDG Target 4.7 requires a diverse range of EU institutional stakeholders to be involved.

Our research identified several existing EU policies and guidelines that tackle some of the contents of the SDG Target 4.7. However, it was interesting to note that only one of them clearly states its contribution to this specific Target. This validates the perception that a coherent European approach is required in order to achieve the SDG Target 4.7.

No matter which pathway is chosen to realise this European approach, it is important that all “educations for” are represented in the process and in the content. Therefore, even if Pathway 1 and 2 are selected, the suggestion in Pathway 3 to create a broad coalition of CSOs should always exist in parallel. This broad coalition would have the power to influence and hold the EU accountable to the recommendations included in the strategic documents. In fact, all pathways can be explored in parallel, if there are enough resources to do so.

However, in order to make all of this possible it is essential that some commonality in language is achieved. Notwithstanding the different historical conceptual differences between all the “educations for”, it is important to recognise that the (sometimes slight) differences are often not understandable to a wider audience and are in practice less relevant to the achievement of the intended goal. It is essential to understand that a scattered approach to the several “educations for” hampers the educations’ advancement and the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Building bridges among all different SDG Target 4.7 stakeholders and the different EU policies and initiatives related to SDG Target 4.7 is essential and urgent. Education plays a key role in shaping our future. The EU has an important role to play in showing the world that it’s possible to create coherent and effective policies for an education that enables citizens to deal with the challenges of the future and to create a more just and sustainable world. The world we want.

Footnotes

- 1 UNGA (2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1
- 2 UNESCO (2021), Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development
- 3 European Council (2017a), A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Council conclusions 10370/17, p.6
- 4 European Commission (2019a), Communication “The European Green Deal” COM(2019) 640 final, p. 2
- 5 Idem, p.3
- 6 Idem, p.19
- 7 Idem, p.19
- 8 Idem, p. 22
- 9 European Commission (2020b), Communication “EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives” COM(2020) 380 final, p. 3
- 10 Idem, p.16
- 11 Idem, p.19
- 12 European Commission (2019a), Communication “The European Green Deal” COM(2019) 640 final, p.22
- 13 For more information on the European Climate Pact: https://europa.eu/climate-pact/about_en
- 14 European Commission (2019a), Communication “The European Green Deal” COM(2019) 640 final, p.22
- 15 European Commission (2020b), Communication “EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives” COM(2020) 380 final, pages 13 and 16
- 16 European Council (2021), Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 6289/1/21 REV 1, p. 7
- 17 European Commission (2019b), Communication “on achieving the European Education Area by 2025” COM (2020) 625 final, p. 9
- 18 Idem, p.17
- 19 European Council (2019), Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (2019/C 389/01)
- 20 Idem, p. 2
- 21 European Council (2021), Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), p. 24
- 22 For more information on the Education Climate Coalition: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/education-climate-coalition_en
- 23 European Commission (2020), European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience, p.12
- 24 For more information on the process: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/education-for-environmental-sustainability_en
- 25 European Commission (2020b), Communication “A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025” COM (2020) 565 final, p. 2
- 26 Idem, p. 11
- 27 European Commission (2020c), Communication “A Union of Equality. Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025” COM (2020) 152 final, p.4
- 28 European Commission (2021), Communication EU strategy on the rights of the child COM(2021) 142 final, p.5
- 29 More information: <https://futureu.europa.eu/>
- 30 European Council (2017c), Joint Statement “The New European Consensus on Development ‘Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future’” - Official Journal of the European Union, 2017/C 210/01, p.9
- 31 Idem, p.11
- 32 Idem, p.54
- 33 Idem, p.43
- 34 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en
- 35 More information on the Envision 47 Roadmap: <https://bridge47.org/resources/01/2020/envision-47-roadmap>
- 36 European Council (2017b), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Establishment and Mandate of a Dedicated Working Party. Note: 14809/17, p.4
- 37 More information available at: <https://fairtrade-advocacy.org/our-work/eu-policies/textile/>

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