



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



# Education for Sustainable Development:

## Partners in Action

Global Action Programme (GAP) Key Partners' Report (2015-2019)



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## UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.



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## The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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# Introduction

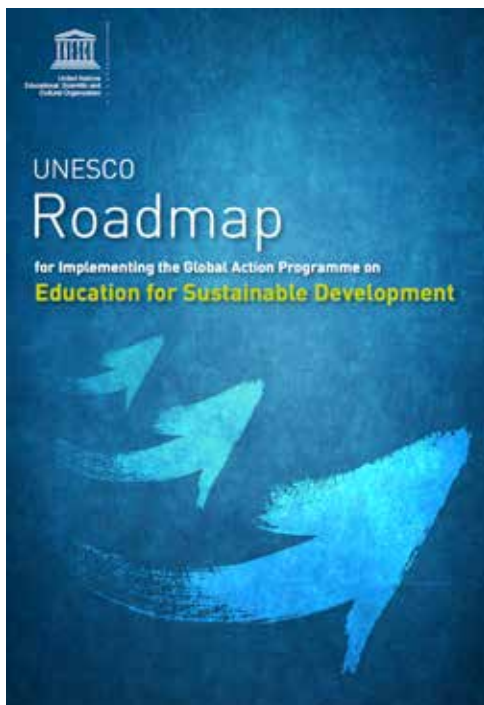
The Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was launched by UNESCO as a follow up to the United Nations Decade of ESD in order to accelerate progress on sustainable development and scale up ESD action in all areas of education and learning. Its duration was from 2015 to 2019.

UNESCO worked with a network of 97 GAP Key Partners from government, civil society, the private sector and academia active in five Priority Action Areas: advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building the capacity of educators, empowering youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level. GAP Key Partners committed to meet specific targets by 2019. Ten indicators – two for each Priority Action Area – were developed.

GAP Key Partners reported their progress against these indicators in three surveys sent to Partners by UNESCO over the course of the programme. Key Partners were also invited to rate the benefits of their participation in the GAP for their work and provide qualitative data concerning their implementation progress. Three progress reports were produced:

- The first report, covering progress from 2015 to 2016, was released by UNESCO in 2017
- The second report, covering 2015 to 2018, was published in 2019
- This third and final report, covers the entire period of the GAP, from 2015 to 2019.

The report presents the analysis of the quantitative responses of GAP Key Partners to each of the 10 indicators. Based on the qualitative responses provided by the GAP Key Partners, a short comment on the progress against each indicator is also provided. The short report concludes with some lessons learned from the GAP that can inform the implementation of the new global framework for the period 2020-2030 'Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030)'.



# Methodology

The report draws on both quantitative and qualitative data collected via online surveys sent by UNESCO to GAP Key Partners at three set points during the duration of the GAP. To measure progress in meeting the targets that GAP Key Partners set and committed to, 10 indicators were identified, two in each Priority Action Area. These indicators capture the nature and reach of the activities undertaken by GAP Key Partners:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  1. Number of strategic policy documents supported               |  6. Number of teacher training institutions supported by GAP partners                                      |
|  2. Number of programmes supporting ESD policy development       |  7. Number of youth leaders supported  |
|  3. Number of learning institutions supported                    |  8. Number of youth leaders trained as trainers  |
|  4. Number of learners directly involved in partners' activities |  9. Number of organizations conducting ESD activities with local authorities and GAP key partners' support |
|  5. Number of educators trained by partners                      |  10. Number of ESD programmes established by local authorities with GAP Key Partners' support              |

In total 92 out of 97 GAP Key Partner organizations were engaged in data collection, with around 50% of Partners completing all three surveys. In 2020, 54 GAP Partners (56%) responded to the survey; compared to 74 (76%) in 2018 and 80 (82%) in 2016.

Online surveys were chosen as the best means to collect data from the GAP Key Partners. Respondents were asked a series of questions linked to the indicators, with opportunities for both quantitative and qualitative responses for each indicator. Not all questions, however, were relevant to all Partners, and often respondents provided data related only to the Priority Action Area they predominantly focused on. It also has to be acknowledged that there was some variation in how respondents interpreted various terms (for example, 'support' to ESD) when providing their answers.

For the most part, data collection activities ran smoothly, but lower response rates particularly in the final survey meant the data presented is a partial picture and could lead to an underestimation of achievements. Conversely, it could also be the case that some duplicate data has been counted more than once within the three rounds of data collection, for example, when Partners supported the same education institution

or worked with the same students over multiple years. As this is the final report, UNESCO again carefully reviewed the three rounds of surveys, and reconfirmed the numbers of achievements.

In terms of the targets, while most organizations worked towards set targets and their work fit within the boundaries of the indicators, for a small number the indicator set was less suitable and these Partners were not able to fully respond to the survey.

The data presented in the report shows different levels of achievement against the targets, from significant overachievements to one target that was not fully met. Where targets were not met or greatly overachieved it could be a result of unrealistic target setting or in some cases difficulties in quantifying engagement. For example, reporting against indicators seemed easier in smaller organizations, but it became more complex and difficult to accurately provide data in some larger organizations, particularly where respondent did not have oversight across the whole organization.

Despite these caveats, it is hoped that this summary report provides a useful account of the truly impressive progress GAP Key Partners have made against the 10 indicators. We should nevertheless be aware that the data presented is an indication of output and engagement, but not the entire picture.

## GAP Key Partners' Achievements 2015-2019

Each Priority Action Area is monitored by two complementary indicators that capture the nature and reach of the activities undertaken by GAP Key Partners.



**1,514 strategic ESD policy documents**  
supported



**2,161 programmes**  
providing technical support for policy development, implemented at the country level



**139,093 learning institutions**  
supported



**37,669,951 learners**  
involved



**2,148,873 teacher educators**  
participated in capacity-building activities



**39,798 teacher training institutions**  
supported



**3,549,839 youth leaders**  
supported



**741,438 youth leaders trained**  
as trainers



**13,086 networks/civil society organizations**  
conducted ESD activities



**5,517 ESD activities/programmes**  
established by local authorities

## GAP Key Partners are active in 152 countries

GAP Key Partners reinforced ESD in national and international education and sustainable development policies, and worked with regional organizations to promote dialogue and harmonize responses to the changing environment.



**Africa (39):** Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.


**Arab States (13):** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates.

**Asia and the Pacific (32):** Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam.

**Europe and North America (43):** Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (25):** Argentina, Belize, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Uruguay, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.


## **Advancing policy:** Mainstream ESD into both education and sustainable development policies to create an enabling environment for ESD and bring about systemic change

1.  **Number of strategic policy documents supported**

**GAP Key Partners supported 1,514 policy documents, such as national action plans, guidelines and frameworks to advance ESD, exceeding their target by 160%**

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The additional qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners reveals that the increase of ESD within policy was fostered by a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and particularly the desire to reach SDG Target 4.7. GAP Key Partners contributed to strategic documents that included action plans, policies and curriculum frameworks in order to strengthen ESD at a national level and provide more localised policy support to ESD. Support came in a range of forms including technical input on drafting.

2.  **Number of programmes supporting ESD policy development**

**GAP Key Partners supported 2,161 ESD programmes, exceeding their target of 960 programmes by 125%**

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The additional qualitative information outlines the geographical reach of the GAP Key Partners in terms of providing support to ESD policy development. GAP Key Partners were helped by a favourable policy environment at the global, regional, national and local levels and significant progress was made. In some cases GAP Key Partners collaborated to provide help to policy development. Partners reported the increase of ESD in strategic and policy documentation, but also acknowledged the ongoing commitment needed to further this work.

## Transforming learning and training environments: Integrate sustainability principles into education and training settings

### 3. Number of learning institutions supported

**GAP Key Partners supported programmes and activities in more than 139,093 schools, training institutions and other organizations, exceeding their target by 167%.**

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The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners highlights the range of learning institutions they have actively supported. The majority of support focused on schools and higher education institutions, but a number of tertiary colleges, preschools and community groups also benefitted. Activities included capacity building, integration of awards programmes and technical support for whole school approaches to ESD.

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### 4. Number of learners directly involved in partners' activities

**GAP Key Partners reported that more than 37 million learners of all ages were involved in educational programmes and activities, greatly exceeding the original 3.7 million target.**

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The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners explores the incredible achievement of GAP Key Partners in involving such large numbers of learners in educational programmes and activities. This is partly explained by the geographical reach of GAP Key Partners, as well as the range of ESD initiatives on offer. While it was difficult for some partners to accurately report on the extent of their reach, the substantial overachievement of the target also suggests it may have been set too low originally.

## **Building capacities of educators and trainers:** Increase the capacities of educators and trainers to more effectively deliver ESD

### 5. Number of educators trained by partners

**GAP Key Partners reached almost 2.15 million educators, exceeding their target of 1.65 million by 30%.**

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The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners highlights how the drive to reach SDG Target 4.7 helped enable the achievement of this target. GAP Key Partners stated the importance of continued support to teacher education for ESD, both in relation to pre-service teacher education as well as support for in-service teachers. They highlighted the importance of educator training for the realisation of ESD in practice.

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### 6. Number of teacher training institutions supported by GAP Key Partners

**GAP Key Partners supported almost 40,000 teacher training institutions, exceeding their original aim of 23,000 by 73%.**

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The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners reveals how the favourable policy environment in many countries helped support teacher training on ESD. Support was provided to educators in the formal and non-formal education sectors and a range of local as well as national organizations worked with GAP Key Partners. GAP Key Partners highlighted some key challenges which included measures to encourage teacher participation and additional funding, and recognised the importance of continued support.

## Empowering and mobilising youth: Multiply ESD activities among youth

### 7. Number of youth leaders supported

**GAP Key Partners supported 3.55 million youth leaders, exceeding their target of 2.54 million by 45%.**

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The additional qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners reveals the range of support they provided to youth leaders. This included specific initiatives to engage youth leaders such as volunteering, youth fora and youth-led conferences, as well as participation in sustainable development project implementation. Youth leaders were also involved in a range of training programmes. These types of activities targeted skills and competences for youth leaders to take on the challenges of sustainable development.

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### 8. Number of youth leaders trained as trainers

**GAP Key Partners fell short of their target of training 1.73 million youth leaders, reaching 741,438, or 43% of their target.**

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The additional qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners suggests that although many youth leaders were involved in training and capacity building activities, there was less focus on supporting youth leaders to train their peers. Train-the-trainer programmes are more resource intensive than other initiatives and it is likely the initial target for this activity was set too high. Much training focused on youth leadership in ESD which could have had a train the trainer component.

## Accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level: Increase ESD programmes and multistakeholder networks in communities

9.  Number of organizations conducting ESD activities with local authorities and GAP Key Partners' support

**GAP Key Partners surpassed their original goal of supporting the ESD activities of 1,667 local organizations, reaching 13,086 organizations, greatly exceeding their target.**

The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners reveals that the achievement of this target was aided by the strong relationships GAP Partners often had with local networks, civil society organizations and local authority bodies. Local ESD activities included collaboration to implement sustainable development initiatives, such as realising sustainable urban plans and working towards SDG goals. Key Partners saw this collaboration of diverse stakeholder groups as important for progress towards ESD goals.

10.  Number of ESD programmes established by local authorities with GAP Key Partners' support

**Partners developed 5,517 ESD programmes and activities with local authorities, exceeding their target of 1,617 by 241%.**

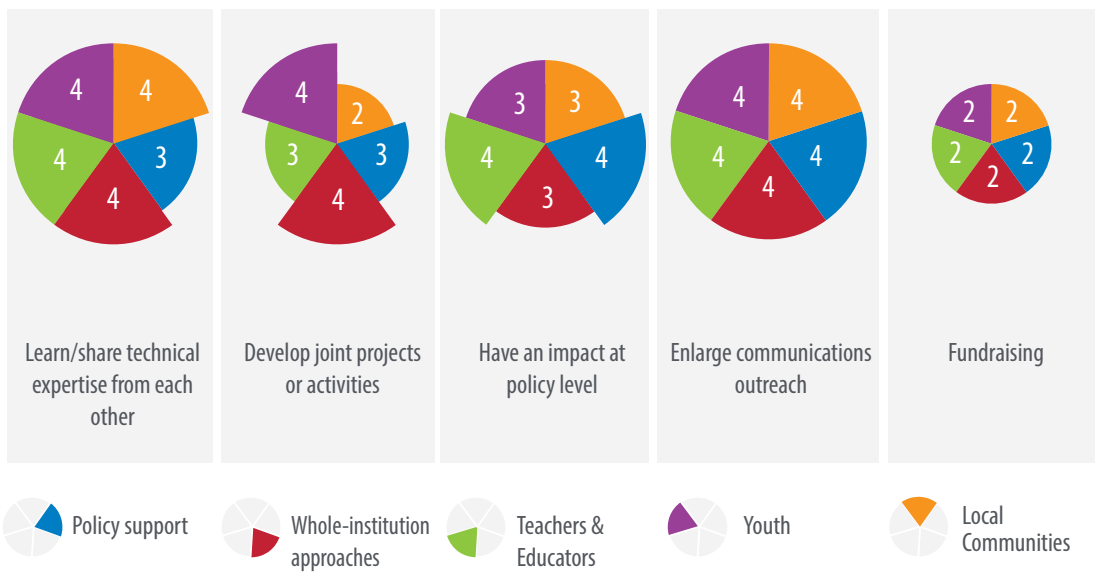
The qualitative information provided by GAP Key Partners suggests that the achievement of this target was encouraged by strong relationships at a local level. A range of projects involving diverse stakeholder groups provided support to ESD projects such as those linked to marine life, sustainable cities and climate change. ESD projects between GAP Key Partners and local authorities included initiatives to build capacity at a local level.

# Benefits for GAP Key Partners

**Belonging to the GAP promoted exchange among partners and accelerated ESD progress locally, nationally and globally.**

GAP Key Partners were invited to rate the usefulness of their participation in the programme against five indicators, which encompassed learning, impact and outreach. Partners saw the benefits of the programme most strongly in the mutual learning opportunities and increase in outreach. Partners indicated that more attention could have been paid to fundraising as a focus of activity.

5 = Very useful, 1 = Not useful at all



## Lessons learned and way forward

This report demonstrates the considerable achievements GAP Key Partners made between 2015 and 2019 in contribution to the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development. GAP Key Partners exceeded nine out of ten targets set in 2015, and in so doing raised the status of ESD in policy and practice, engaged multiple stakeholders around ESD and formed collaborations to accelerate local and global change on ESD. Key to the success of the GAP Key Partners was the momentum created by the SDGs and the drive to achieve SDG Target 4.7.

A number of lessons learned for the way forward can be derived from the data collected through the final GAP 2019 Key Partners survey:

- **Linking the local to the global**

GAP Key Partners Networks involved a range of organizations working across global, regional, national and local settings. Within the GAP, ESD policy makers were able to interact with local civil society, the private sector, education providers and youth leaders to ensure an important emphasis on the interconnectedness of ESD initiatives. A joined up approach built on strong relationships with local organizations supported context-appropriate approaches and interventions.

- **Favourable policy environment**

GAP Key Partners were helped by a favourable policy environment at the global, regional, national and local levels and significant progress was made. The SDG focus provided impetus and drive to ensure policy was realised, but this is ongoing work and many challenges remain. Awareness-raising around the importance of ESD, resourcing and capacity building continue to be a necessary focus in some contexts.

- **Reaching learning institutions**

GAP Key Partners successfully provided ESD support to schools and other education institutions, with many noticing a rise in their interest in ESD. Schools are important in the drive towards ESD, not only because of their access to students, but because of their potential to reach into local communities. Whole institution approaches to ESD can help embed sustainable practices across the institution, but rely on the commitment of leaders and teachers to enable this. A focus on building interest in hard to reach communities and or non-engaging institutions would be useful going forward.

- **Training teachers and teacher educators**

GAP Key Partners rightly had a focus on training teachers and teacher educators in ESD. Increasing teacher awareness of ESD, related pedagogies and confidence

to incorporate ESD into teaching, are key to successfully developing informed and active global citizens. Going forward, it is of crucial importance to ensure opportunities for teacher education are universal, incorporating the formal and non-formal sectors, of high quality and relevant to the local contexts of teachers.

- **Reaching young people**

GAP Key Partners successfully provided support and training to youth leaders to encourage youth empowerment and action on ESD. Key Partners offered youth opportunities for critical reflection, mutual learning and collaboration and spaces for individual and collective action to address local and global challenges. Many youth are at the forefront of engagement with global movements on climate change and sustainability and ESD stakeholders need to be reactive to the evolving needs of young people.

- **GAP Key Partner Networks**

GAP Key Partners noted the benefits of working together towards common goals and the synergies created as a result of the collaborations. Working together enabled mutual learning, raised the visibility of ESD and scaled-up ESD action. Moving forward, multi-stakeholder partnerships should continue to play a key role in ensuring high quality, relevant ESD.






- **Going forward with UNESCO**

GAP Key Partners noted the benefits of working with UNESCO in terms of providing opportunities for collaboration and enabling synergies for impact. GAP Key Partners saw the continued and ongoing need for UNESCO to bring partners together so the vision and expectations related to ESD remain coordinated globally. They called for stronger regional networks, financial support for ESD initiatives, platforms for collaboration, and case studies of good practice to support mutual learning.

In response to the heightened importance placed on ESD, UNESCO launches the new framework 'Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs' (ESD for 2030) and its roadmap for implementation from 2020-2030, as the follow-up to the GAP. The new framework, approved by the 40th Session of UNESCO General Conference and acknowledged by the UN General Assembly at its 74th Session, places emphasis on ESD as a key enabler for the achievement of all SDGs. More information on the new framework can be found under the following link: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370215.locale=en>

## UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD

The UNESCO-Japan Prize honoured outstanding projects related to ESD developed within the GAP framework. Funded by the Government of Japan, the prize of US\$50,000 recognises the role of education in connecting the social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It was awarded for the first time in 2015, since then three projects per year have received the award. From 2021, the Prize will be given to laureates biennially.

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<p>rootAbility (Germany), "Green Office Model"</p> 	<p>CCREAD (Cameroon), "Integrated ESD schemes in schools and communities"</p> 	<p>Zikra (Jordan), "Zikra for Popular Learning"</p> 	<p>Let's Do It Foundation (Estonia), "World Cleanup Day 2018" and "Keep It Clean"</p> 	<p>The Camphill Community Trust (Botswana)</p> 
<p>SERES (Guatemala and El Salvador), "ESD Youth Ambassadors"</p> 	<p>Okayama ESD Promotion Commission (Japan), "Okayama ESD Project"</p> 	<p>Hard Rain Project (United Kingdom), "Hard Rain" and "Whole Earth"</p> <p>Aligning human systems with natural systems</p>  <p>www.hardrainproject.com</p>	<p>Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (Namibia), "NaDEET Centre on NamibRand"</p> 	<p>The Sustainable Amazon Foundation (Brazil)</p> 
<p>Jayagiri Center (Indonesia), "Eco-Friendly Entrepreneurship for Youths and Adults"</p> 	<p>National Union of Students (United Kingdom), "Green Impact"</p> 	<p>Sihlengeni Primary School (Zimbabwe), "Permaculture"</p> 	<p>Kalabia Education Program (Indonesia), "Environmental Education for the Heart of the Coral Triangle"</p> 	<p>The city of Hamburg (Germany)</p> 

## Connect with the Global Action Programme on ESD

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From  
the People  
of Japan

# Education for Sustainable Development:

## Partners in Action

### Global Action Programme (GAP) Key Partners' Report (2015-2019)

This brochure presents the main findings from GAP Key Partner monitoring surveys which capture the achievements of the GAP between 2015 and 2019.

GAP Key Partners working in five Priority Action Areas reached 9 out of the 10 targets they set in 2015. This represents an important and impressive achievement in progress towards SDG Target 4.7 as well as the 2030 Agenda more widely, with ESD an important element of quality education and an instrument to make progress on all Sustainable Development Goals.

