Envision 4.7 Policy Paper: Transformative Education

What is transformative education and how does it link to SDG 4.7?

Transformative education is a type of education that fosters engaged, active and critical learners and builds constructive and democratic approaches to difference. SDG Target 4.7 describes education as transformative when it is value-based and designed to promote global citizenship, sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace and appreciation of cultural diversity. This necessarily requires an action-oriented approach which bridges educator and learner through all the innovative forms of education leading to the notion of global citizenship. It inevitably builds a link between personal individual development and systemic change.
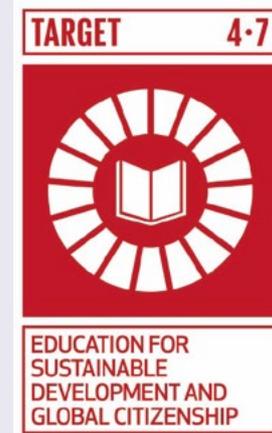
The Envision 4.7 Roadmap highlights that encouraging multi-perspectives through different disciplines, critical and creative thinking as well as action, participation and experiences is crucial to ensure that education is transformative. Such an approach enables a structural shift of knowledge and attitudes, transforming the learner into an agent of change.

TARGET 4·7

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship (GCED), and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

How can the EU promote transformative education?

Bridge 47 envisages the implementation of transformative education for sustainable development as a life-long learning process and a public good: promoting change and the necessary development of individuals, communities and systems.

This ambition is clearly in line with EU values as stated in its treaties and policy positions. The 2015 Paris Declaration of EU education ministers[1] recognised that education and training can address social exclusion and serves both to 'embed fundamental values' and to help people 'become active, responsible, open-minded members of society.' The 2019 Council Resolution on future-oriented education and training[2] stresses that 'education and training are crucial in (…) fostering the values and motivation which are fundamental to enabling fair and equitable social transformation.' Interinstitutional commitment to this approach has been operationalised through the common objective to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020).[3]

While national education curricula as such remain the remit of member states, the EU is able to prompt and coordinate efforts on this front. Crucially, some of the key priorities for the EU institutions clearly support the promotion of transformative education. To ensure the best outcomes, it is key that EU policy be coherent and integrate transformative education principles throughout its different priorities.

[1]Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.
[2]Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems 2019/C 389/01.
[3]Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, 2009.

A European Green Deal

For the EU to successfully transform itself from a high- to low-carbon economy, while improving people's quality of life, it will be fundamental to ensure all individuals build capacities to jointly create systemic change. The need for shifting mindsets through stakeholder involvement has been addressed to a certain degree by EU's LIFE programme,[4] but for this to effectively happen transformative education should be at the core of this agenda.

A Europe fit for the digital age

EU's commitment to ensure that the digital transformation serves people and the environment, in full respect for the principles of sustainable development, requires developing new capacities and capabilities. Both the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition,[5] aiming at improving the digital skills of the broad population through multi-sectorial cooperation, and the revision of the Digital Education Action Plan offers a step towards reaching this ambition. If no one is to be left behind in this process, participatory and learner-centred education must be mainstreamed throughout these initiatives.

An Economy that works for the people

For all Europeans to have the same opportunities to thrive, EU's social strategy needs to include all citizens as active players in defining how to turn their rights into reality – this has been a flagship ambition of the European Pillar of Social Rights and continues to be embraced by the communication on A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions. The upgraded European Skills Agenda also ensures the right to training and lifelong learning, which Is enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Transformative education enables critical and engaged contributions towards upholding social rights. Given its focus on students and teachers' training, the Erasmus+ programme has been another key EU channel to create this systemic change.

A stronger Europe in the World

With the new European Consensus on Development,[6] the EU committed to guarantee that everyone 'has the knowledge, skills, capabilities and rights they need to enjoy a life in dignity, to be fully engaged in society'. Transformative education is instrumental in ensuring the EU honours its pledge and serves the global development agenda also beyond its borders.

Promoting our European Way of Life

The EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union) – all key elements which target 4.7 aims to promote. If the EU is committed to protecting and promoting its core values, it should take the opportunity of the advances towards the creation of the European Education Area by 2025, to invest in the transformative power of education and ensure all EU citizens are able to access their rights in a systemic way.

A new push for European Democracy

The EU recognises that citizens need a stronger role in the EU decision-making process and priority-setting – this realisation is central to the discussions on the Future of Europe. For this process to result in meaningful engagement, citizens must be willing to participate as active players. Transformative education is crucial to ensure such agency.

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[4]Regulation for the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), 2014-2020.
[5]The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, from 2016.
[6]The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, our Future', 2017.

Recommendations

For the EU to successfully implement the SDGs while advancing its priorities, and in line with the recommendations of the Envision 4.7 Roadmap, **Bridge 47 calls on all actors to:**

1. Create a pan-European overarching strategy for Target 4.7, which includes transformative education, to be defined and implemented at all levels.
2. Raise awareness around how transformative education is defined, what it aims to achieve, how it links formal, non-formal and informal learning, who are the key players and how it is linked to existing policy areas among EU member states, EU political leadership and services.
3. Enable and create new opportunities for capacity building and upskilling of practitioners and learners linked to transformative education for sustainable development.
4. Share best practices and support the creation of Union-wide and member state-level coalitions reflecting the strengths and expertise of different components of transformative education and identify common interests, guidelines and actions that connect different actors in new ways to deliver outcomes of SDG 4.7.
5. Ensure a coherent approach to transformative education by integrating its principles into all relevant policy areas. Particularly European, national and sub-national educational policies should take into consideration the need for formal, non-formal and informal education to have a coherent and inclusive approach emphasizing intergenerational and intercultural learning across all levels of education.

Bridge 47 further calls on EU member states to:

6. Integrate transformative education in competence frameworks and teacher pre- and in-service training, in addition to formal school curricula. This should be done by weaving it through existing competence frameworks and making training more efficient and tailored to teachers' needs.

Bridge 47 further calls on the European Commission to:

7. Include or build on existing processes and programmes to include transformative education in inter-service consultations, in all guidance documents for joint frameworks and relevant funding decisions, in order to ensure continuity of policies and respective implementation.

Bridge 47 further calls on the European Parliament to:

8. Monitor and promote the implementation of the principles of transformative education across EU policy.