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Associated Schools
Network



UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet)

Strategic Framework for Action 2025-2029

**Building peaceful and sustainable futures through
transformative education**

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



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.



Published in 2025 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Designed and printed by UNESCO

Printed in France

1. About the Strategic Framework

This Strategic Framework for Action for 2025-2029 was developed to strengthen the linkage between UNESCO's strategic objectives for Education and the expected outcomes of the Associated Schools Network (ASPnet). It is, therefore, fully in line with UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029) and is intended to help structure and guide current and future work of the global Network.

The implementation of this Strategic Framework is a shared responsibility of all ASPnet stakeholders and involves a collaborative effort among students, teachers, headmasters, local communities, National Commissions for UNESCO and ASPnet National Coordinators. National networks are invited to prioritize their areas of work based on this Strategic Framework in order to achieve their national policy objectives.

As a framing document that spans over a four-year period, it does not describe specific global flagship programmes, activities or implementation targets. These will be determined in a biennial Action Plan to be developed by the ASPnet Unit in consultation with other UNESCO Programme Sectors and units.

2. The guiding vision and goal of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet)

Established in 1953, the [UNESCO Associated Schools Network \(ASPnet\)](#) is one of the oldest and largest global school networks. At the time of preparing this Strategic Framework, the membership stands at 8900¹ institutions that are active in 165 national networks. This number is however increasing as new ASPnet membership applications are validated by the UNESCO ASPnet International Coordinator.

The ASPnet is committed to promoting the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO and the Charter of the United Nations. It is guided by a vision where all people have acquired the knowledge, skills and agency through education to promote peace, sustainable development and engage with the world as creative and responsible global citizens. In short, it strives to create the conditions of lasting peace in communities around the world.

The ASPnet promotes the 2030 Agenda as a whole and all its 17 Sustainable Development Goals but directly contributes to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and in particular Target 4.7². It also aims to operationalize UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (2023)³ by supporting transformative approaches to education.

¹ This is based on information received from countries that have integrated or are about to integrate UNESCO's digital collaborative Platform – "[ASPnet Connect](#)" as of January 2025.

² SDG 4 on Education, Target 4.7: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, education for health and well-being, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

³ [Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development](#), adopted in 2023 at UNESCO, also known as the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.

3. The approach: transformative education ⁴

Education cannot directly solve all global challenges, but it can enable people and societies to find solutions to them – if it is supported and designed to do so. This requires ensuring education is understood as a common good and is a genuinely transformational and holistic experience for all learners.

One of the main purposes of the Network is to encourage and incentivize schools to be transformative, to be models for other schools and provide evidence on what works to inform policy changes.

ASPnet’s understanding of transformative education is guided by the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (notably paragraphs 1 (I) and 6) and its guiding principles (paragraph 8). Among the factors spelled out in the Recommendation is the need to ensure learners are given the opportunity to fully develop their cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural skills⁵. With these competencies, young people are equipped to take informed decisions and actions about their lives and address the root causes of contemporary challenges such as inequality, poverty, injustice, violence and environmental degradation.

Another factor is the extent to which learning institutions adopt a “whole-school-approach” that aligns their curriculum, pedagogies, learning materials, school policies and organization, partnerships and (physical) learning spaces. When these dimensions are mutually reinforcing, schools become authentically transformative for all – education personnel and learners.⁶

⁴ More on the specific features of transformative education can be found in the report [Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education](#) and in the [Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development](#), which contains a non-exhaustive list of guiding principles to be mainstreamed in education in order to ensure it is genuinely transformational.

⁵ “[Why the world needs happy schools: global report on happiness in and for learning](#)” (UNESCO 2024). See here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389119>

⁶ More on how to implement the whole-school-approach can be found in the documents “[Getting climate-ready: a guide for schools on climate action](#)” and “[Training Tools for Curriculum Development: A Resource Pack for GCED MODULE 6](#)”.

Transformative education also involves the meaningful participation of headmasters, teachers, education personnel, students and families - as and when possible - in the identification of needs and the implementation of activities.

Examples of promising school-based practices to foster transformative education

- Encourage learning in (and from) a diversity of environments - in and out of the traditional classroom (i.e. online, in natural environments, museums, libraries, etc); transforming our teaching and learning environments is a key action area.
- Envisage learning as a process of collaboration, participation and co-creation between different stakeholder groups, promoting equity, mutual respect, and a collaborative environment in which diverse perspectives are valued. Implement pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity and build capacities to work together.
- Promote holistic, whole-school and whole-community approaches that look beyond academic performance and assessment to value social and emotional learning and skills and pedagogical approaches that empower children and young people to succeed both in and out of schools.

4. ASPnet's three main thematic areas

The ASPnet will continue to focus its efforts on three interconnected thematic areas that are at the heart of SDG 4 on Education, Target 4.7, and the 2023 Recommendation.

→ [Peace through Global Citizenship Education \(GCED\)](#). GCED promotes a culture of peace and non-violence, inclusion, and celebrates cultural diversity while advancing respect for justice and human rights – the key pillars of coexistence. It encourages knowledge and critical thinking about global issues and the interconnectedness of countries and people, fostering a sense of belonging to a common humanity and of collective responsibility towards the goal of promoting lasting peace in communities.

→ [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity, as defined in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. UNESCO supports Member States through the [ESD for 2030 programme](#) and the [Greening Education Partnership: Getting every learner climate-ready](#) to take action to accelerate the implementation of ESD and climate change education, looking at policies, curricula, teachers and learning environment in a holistic manner, while promoting a whole community approach.

→ **Intercultural learning and the appreciation of cultural diversity and heritage** allows students to understand, value and take positive action regarding their own and other cultures and identities. It fosters empathy, self-awareness, multi-perspectivity, and enhances linguistic and communication skills. This work is guided by the [UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) adopted in 2024, which sets a new vision of the connections between culture, arts and education in our digital and multicultural world. The arts offer tremendous potential for transformative education, unlocking creativity, enabling the expression of emotions, thoughts, and experiences, and challenging us in profound ways.

Member institutions are not expected to work on all these thematic areas equally. It is up to each network to determine their priorities or interests and reframe the themes according to their national context. Furthermore, it is understood that work undertaken within these thematic areas imply

addressing a wide range of emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, waste management, ecological transition, disinformation, health and well-being and developing media and information literacy skills to address these contemporary challenges.

5. Actors, outcomes and pillars of action⁷

Actors

The ASPnet is a global eco-system of actors mutually supporting each other. These actors are the ASPnet National Coordinators, the member institutions within countries and the UNESCO ASPnet Unit.

Member institutions include early childhood care and education, primary and secondary schools as well as teacher training institutions. As of January 2025, this ecosystem is estimated to involve 4.9 million students and 320,000 teachers from around the world. These institutions and people interact, learn from each other and collaborate at international, regional and national levels to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Expected outcomes

The table summarizes a few of the main outcomes to be expected from ASPnet's coordinated actions at each level⁸:

For teachers and education personnel	For institutions (school level)	For education systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved capacity of teachers to confidently apply innovative teaching methods • New knowledge of school practices and of common challenges is used to improve practices • Enhanced motivation and engagement of teachers and learners in the co-creation of practices • Increased personal contacts and networking channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole school approach implemented • Improved coordination and knowledge/practice sharing within and between institutions • Increased participation of teachers, educators and learners in the co-creation of educational content • Increased collaborations and networking at all levels • Increased use of evidence to advance innovative practices • Improved sense of belonging to the school and ASPnet community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision for transformative education is well understood, taken up and guides policy development • Policy reforms are evidence-based and successfully implemented • Innovative projects are scaled-up to benefit a larger number of learners and teachers

⁷ This section summarizes the theory of change of the ASPnet developed by the [2024 Evaluation](#)- itself informed by consultations with National Coordinators.

⁸ These outcomes are based on the findings of the 2024 external Evaluation of the ASPnet Programme and do not include the individual learning outcomes of ASPnet activities for learners. These outcomes are also generic for the purpose of this global strategic Framework. National ASPnet Networks may want to determine more specific and context relevant outcomes.

In addition to the above, when students participate in ASPnet activities they acquire a range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours⁹ that help them navigate an increasingly complex, diverse and interconnected world.

Pillars of action

The Network achieves these and other outcomes through the following **four action pillars**:

- **ACTION PILLAR 1: SCHOOLS TO DRIVE INNOVATION.** Individual member institutions act as living laboratories and pedagogical innovation hubs to promote global citizenship and a culture of peace and non-violence, intercultural understanding and sustainable development. With the support of the Unit for ASPnet at UNESCO, promising practices emerging from the work of member institutions/national networks are identified, documented and disseminated so they can be scaled up, replicated and serve as examples to inspire other schools and national education policy change. As a collective, the Associated Schools Network also offers opportunities to coordinate experimental activities that contribute to a common goal and nurture solidarity among people.
- **ACTION PILLAR 2: CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH PILOT PROJECTS.** Teachers, headmasters, education personnel as well as students develop new competencies by designing, and participating in activities and communities of practice established to foster peer-to-peer learning and international cooperation among the Network members. Teaching, training and learning resources are shared with all members institutions to allow them to equally participate in ASPnet activities.
- **ACTION PILLAR 3: COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY.** ASPnet members at all levels engage in regular and meaningful communication activities to enhance the visibility of the Network's contributions, advocate for UNESCO's values, foster open dialogue, encourage constructive engagement and nurture a sense of community. Member institutions recognize the added value of their membership and fully grasp the implications of being part of the Network to drive their commitment and expand impact.
- **ACTION PILLAR 4: NETWORKING, COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION.** Digital and traditional networking tools and opportunities are created and maintained to allow ASPnet stakeholders to collaborate, learn from each other and exchange ideas across regions, fostering innovation, creativity, and international understanding. The digital collaborative platform "*ASPnet Connect*" is the main tool for keeping track of memberships and processing applications. If voluntary contributions are mobilized and national networks are sufficiently prepared to use the digital tool, the digital platform will be developed to promote the sharing of good practices and activities.

These pillars of action can lead to meaningful outcomes if ASPnet stakeholders and their partners, namely the National Commissions for UNESCO and national education authorities are supported, committed and work in a coordinated manner. It also requires that they are sufficiently resourced, in terms of funding, capacity and stakeholder engagement, to act.

Under these conditions, the effectiveness of the Network will improve, enabling teachers to develop their capacities to apply and co-create innovative teaching methods. Networking among members

⁹ For more on the expected learning outcomes of ASPnet actions, we advise the reader to consult UNESCO's guidance on how to translate Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into practical and age-specific topics and learning objectives in a way that allows for adaptation to local contexts. See here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993> and <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>

will increase, and the whole-school approach promoted by the ASPnet to achieve its outcomes will gain momentum.

The International Centre for UNESCO ASPnet (Category II Center) in Sanya, Hainan, China, will play an active role in supporting the Network's efforts to undertake these actions.

6. Role and contribution of the Unit for ASPnet at UNESCO

The Unit for ASPnet at UNESCO is responsible for the global coordination, management and strengthening of the Network, providing National Coordinators with technical and quality-assurance guidance.

More specifically, the three core functions of the Unit are:

- **Membership management:** The International Coordinator of ASPnet, heading the Unit for ASPnet, certifies new members¹⁰ and ensures the integrity and accuracy of the global membership list. The Unit maintains the collaborative platform "ASPnet Connect" as its main tool to coordinate, manage and engage with the membership. The Unit also onboards new National Coordinators. (Action Pillar 3 - Communication & Advocacy and 4 – Networking, collaboration and coordination).
- **Community engagement:** Encourage National Coordinators and members to collaborate and exchange good practices that advance UNESCO's values; provide technical and quality-assurance guidance to members; steer global projects and activities in line with UNESCO's programme objectives, and in collaboration with UNESCO's Programme Sectors, field office network and institutes (Category 1 and 2); foster partnerships and monitor global network activities (Action Pillar 4 - Networking, Collaboration and Coordination).
- **Learning and innovation:** Create learning opportunities for ASPnet stakeholders; identify, document and disseminate innovative practices emerging from the Network to inform policy changes. (Action Pillars 1 & 2 - Schools to Drive Innovation and Capacity Building).

¹⁰ Members' certificates are issued by the digital platform "[ASPnet Connect](#)" when the application has been formally approved by the International ASPnet Coordinator in UNESCO Headquarters. Until the certificate has been issued, entities are not considered members of the Network.

Over the next five years, the Unit for ASPnet at UNESCO will roll out its programme of work in line with the findings and recommendations of the 2024 Evaluation in three phases:

- i) **2025 – Reinforce the foundations of the global network:** Finalize the inventory of active ASPnet national networks and ensure the accuracy and regular update of membership data. Develop digital tools to process applications and facilitate communications among National Coordinators. Update the two operational Guides (for National Coordinators and for Member Institutions) and monitoring tools in line with the recommendations of the 2024 Evaluation. Stimulate regional collaborations and strengthen the connections with UNESCO’s field offices, networks and programmes. Identify and launch a small number of flagship programmes that can federate efforts and inspire network engagement.
- ii) **2026-2027 – Consolidate actions and strengthen the strategic linkages between the ASPnet’s actions and UNESCO’s programme priorities** as set out in the Programme and Budget (43 C/5), notably through the implementation of the flagship programmes. Develop impactful synergies with UNESCO’s Sectors and networks (i.e., UNESCO Chairs, UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, etc). Foster learning and innovation inspired by the work of the ASPnet. Put in place realistic performance indicators to keep track of progress.
- iii) **2028-2029 – Conclude actions undertaken over the period and take stock of progress.** Carry out and conclude the flagship programmes. Undertake consultations to take stock of achievements and draw lessons from the implementation of the Strategic Framework in view of designing the next Strategy for 2030-2038.

7. Roles of the ASPnet National Coordinators and member institutions

The specific responsibilities and tasks to be undertaken by the ASPnet National Coordinators and member institutions are spelled out in two UNESCO operational Guides¹¹. Here below are brief descriptions of their respective roles and relationships to each other and UNESCO.

- **Member Institutions** are expected to operationalize UNESCO’s values¹², principles and objectives in their organization, management, policies, activities, projects, classes and lessons (through a whole-school-approach). They should also collaborate and create synergies with other schools (within the country, region and at global level) to encourage institutional learning, foster friendly relations between school communities and people and share good practices that can improve the quality and relevance of education.
- **ASPnet National Coordinators (NC)** oversee the management of their national network of member institutions. This includes quality assurance of the network’s engagement at the

¹¹ At the time of preparation of the Strategic Framework, these documents are being updated. Until the new editions are released the documents can be found here: [UNESCO Associated Schools Network: guide for national coordinators - UNESCO Digital Library](#) and [UNESCO Associated Schools Network: guide for members - UNESCO Digital Library](#).

¹² And in particular the guiding principles identified in the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.

country level and ensuring the accuracy of the national membership list. Under the authority of the National Commission for UNESCO, they link ASPnet schools with national authorities, the relevant UNESCO Field Offices, and the ASPnet Unit at UNESCO. With the support of the National Commissions for UNESCO, National Coordinators are expected to support the development and implementation of ASPnet activities in their country and visit member institutions, not only to conduct spot checks or to monitor their work, but also to accompany the members and make them feel that they are appreciated for their efforts.

Keeping with the spirit of the Network, NCs are encouraged to promote diversity among their members in terms of educational level, geographic location (urban/rural and covering all regions of the country) or administrative status (public/private).

8. Partnerships

The ASPnet is anchored in UNESCO's Education Sector. However, it works in an intersectoral manner across UNESCO's Programme Sectors, building impactful partnerships with various UNESCO networks and programmes such as [UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN](#), [UNESCO Global Geoparks](#), [Biosphere Reserves](#), [World Heritage Sites](#), [Creative and Learning Cities](#) and the [Memory of the World](#).

Furthermore, ASPnet may cooperate with other partners, such as UN entities, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, youth organizations, the private sector, cultural institutions, artists, the media, and individual experts.

The Unit for ASPnet cultivates synergies between the National Commissions for UNESCO, the National Coordinators, Associations and Clubs for UNESCO. This is to help ASPnet institutions broaden their collaborations and fully leverage UNESCO's programmes and networks for the achievement of ASPnet's expected outcomes.

These partnerships can be initiated from and at all levels (local, national and international level):

- between an ASPnet Member and a UNESCO site (e.g. cultural heritage site or biosphere reserve close to the school) or with another network (e.g. UNESCO Chair at a university);
- between an ASPnet National Coordinator and UNESCO sites, other networks, Field Offices, Institutes, Centres, etc. for engagement of ASPnet members.
- As appropriate, between ASPnet members (schools and institutions), who are the main actors of the Associated Schools Network. This can involve school twinning or the joint implementation of initiatives through online exchanges, joint research projects, participation in conferences and seminars, or the organization of cultural events.

ASPnet supports meaningful youth participation and engagement in education and all its activities, on the understanding that teachers and learners are co-creators of knowledge and holders of shared knowledge.

9. Monitoring

The monitoring of the relevance and effectiveness of ASPnet activities is a shared responsibility between the different actors of the network.

National Coordinators are responsible for the monitoring of their national networks, while the Unit for ASPnet at UNESCO Headquarters reports to the Executive Board on the implementation of the global ASPnet Programme and its Strategic Framework through the EX/4. It will also monitor activity trends, challenges, needs and achievements of the global Network through the analysis of annual country reports provided by the National Coordinators. The findings of this analysis will be shared with ASPnet members in view of informing programme implementation and encouraging collaborations between ASPnet institutions.

10. Funding

ASPnet is not a funding programme and cannot commit to providing grants for its members. UNESCO can, however, collect and share examples and tips on effective fundraising practices. At different ASPnet events, opportunities will be created to allow members to share examples of community level fundraising efforts. National Coordinators and National Commissions for UNESCO are invited to work together to find funding opportunities within their countries and regions to sustain the dynamism of their networks.



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Strategic Framework for Action 2025-2029

The ASPnet Strategic Framework explains how UNESCO's pioneering Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) contributes to the achievement of UNESCO's strategic objectives for Education. This Framework outlines the key thematic areas, innovative educational approaches, and the anticipated outcomes of this dynamic community of educational innovators. It also delineates the roles and responsibilities of its primary stakeholders.

The three thematic areas are : "Peace through Global Citizenship Education," "Education for Sustainable Development," and "Intercultural Learning and Appreciation of Cultural Diversity and Heritage." Through initiatives in these areas, ASPnet members inspire and empower teachers, principals, students, families, education professionals, and policymakers to champion transformative education. This prepares learners to become responsible global citizens in an ever-evolving and complex world. Ultimately, the goal is for all participants in this ecosystem to learn from one another and promote international understanding.

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