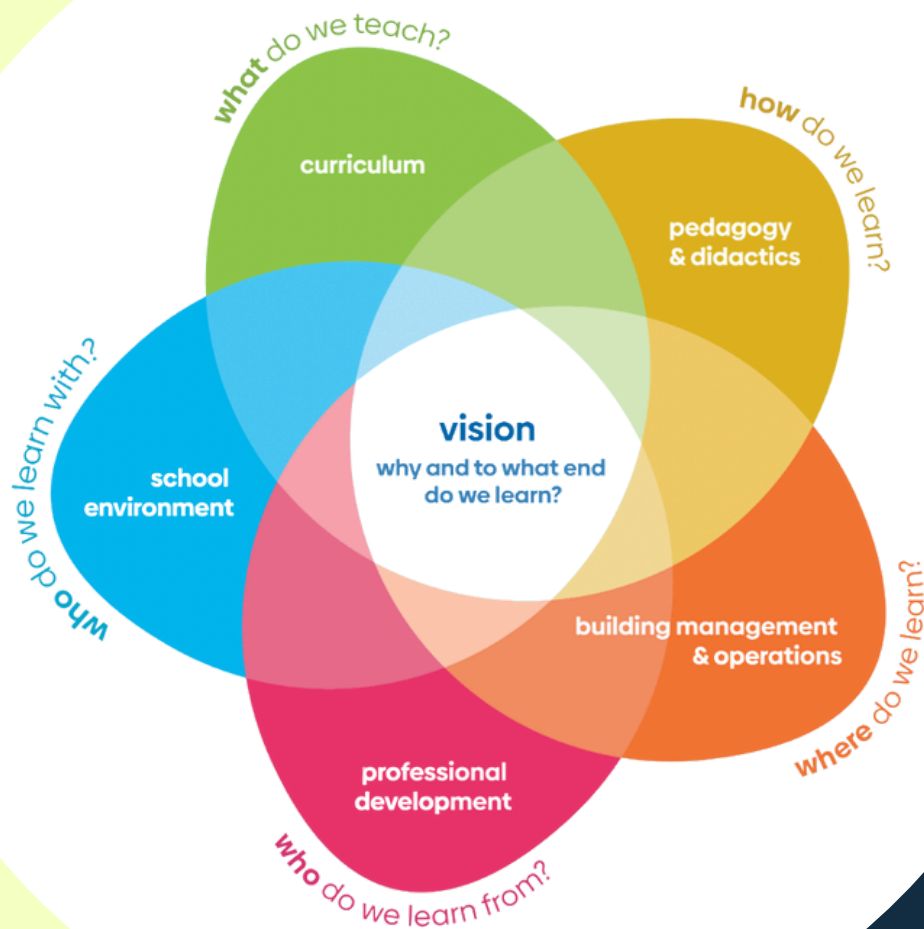


Whole Institutional Approach Toolkit Testing Conference

Concept note



5 February 2026, Montessori School Polná, Czechia
with optional networking dinner on 4 February in Jihlava, Czechia

Introduction

The Whole Institutional Approach (WIA) Toolkit Testing Conference will bring together diverse actors to explore whole-institutional approaches to sustainability, test and refine the new **WIA Toolkit**, and advance the **WIA Policy Framework**. Both the Toolkit and the Policy Framework are being developed under the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Together, they aim to integrate WIA across multiple layers of society, driving systemic change for ESD internationally.

The toolkit is a flexible library of tools designed to support the integration of sustainability across all aspects of educational institutions, from curriculum and pedagogy to governance, operations, and community engagement. It includes:

- Practical tools for each domain of institutional life (e.g., self-assessment, action planning, monitoring).
- Flexible resources adaptable to different contexts and types of institutions.
- Guidance for collaborative, participatory processes involving diverse stakeholders groups.

The toolkit will be an open-access, user-friendly, scalable, and internationally applicable resource, helping institutions become models of sustainability and agents of change in their communities.

Find the draft version of the toolkit at: <https://wholeinstitutionapproach.org>

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for ESD

The UNECE Strategy for ESD was adopted by 56 countries in 2005 to integrate sustainability into all levels of education. Its objectives are to:

- Ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD;
- Promote sustainable development through formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- Equip educators with the competence to include sustainable development in their teaching;
- Ensure that adequate tools and materials for ESD are accessible;
- Promote research on and development of ESD;
- Strengthen cooperation on ESD at all levels within the UNECE region.

In 2022, at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, governments endorsed the Nicosia 2030 Implementation Framework, which sets four key priorities for ESD, including the Whole-Institution Approach (WIA). It calls for learning environments where “learners learn what they live and live what they learn,” ensuring that schools and institutions don’t just teach sustainability but actively demonstrate it in their practices, policies, and partnerships.

Participants

This conference aims to bring together diverse stakeholders from the Carpathian region and beyond. We expect up to 80 participants, including government representatives, education experts, school staff, students and youth, municipalities, NGOs, and academia.



Logistics and practical information

Objectives of the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate peer learning and regional exchange of best practices in WIA. • Reflect on the enabling conditions for WIA. • Test selected tools from the WIA Toolkit in practice. • Collect structured feedback from diverse stakeholders. • Support refinement of the toolkit for international use. • Suggest additional tools to enrich the WIA toolkit.
Format	Plenary sessions, parallel workshops, case study presentations, and interactive discussions.
Date	<p>February 4, 2026: Optional networking dinner</p> <p>February 5, 2026: WIA toolkit testing conference</p>
Venues	<p>Networking dinner: Jihlava (regional capital of the Vysočina region, 18 km from Polná), venue to be confirmed.</p> <p>Conference venue: Montessori School Polná, Polná, Czechia (Address: Alej svobody 1247, 588 13 Polná, Czechia).</p>
Accessibility	The school is wheelchair accessible. Please let us know about any additional accessibility needs when registering—we're happy to accommodate!
Accommodation	<p>Recommended: Stay in Jihlava, where a range of hotels and guesthouses are available.</p> <p>Adventurous Option: For those who love a unique experience, sleeping over in sleeping bags on the school premises is possible.</p> <p>Limited Support: A small number of participants with demonstrated need may receive accommodation support—indicate your request in the registration form.</p>
Catering	<p>Networking Dinner (4 February): Vegetarian catering will be provided by the organizers in Jihlava.</p> <p>Conference Meals (5 February): Vegetarian catering will be prepared by Montessori School Polná.</p> <p>Please notify us of any dietary needs via the registration form.</p>
Transportation	<p>Jihlava is conveniently located on Czechia's D1 highway and is directly accessible by train/bus from Prague and Brno.</p> <p>Group Travel: If many international guests arrive in Prague, we'll gladly arrange shared transport to Jihlava or help coordinate carpooling.</p> <p>Conference Day: Public transportation will be provided between Jihlava and Polná on 5 February.</p>
Language	English
How to register	Express your interest in participating by 5 January 2026 via this form . Confirmation of participation will be sent by the same date, 5 January 2026.



Organizers and partners

Carpathian ESD Expert Network

Created within the framework of the Carpathian Convention, the network's vision is a thriving, interconnected Carpathian region where ESD advances respect for natural and cultural heritage, builds a Carpathian identity, and promotes sustainable relationships between people and nature.

Špirála

Špirála is a Slovak network of organizations dedicated to environmental education. Founded in 2001, it is a member of the Foundation for Environmental Education, enabling the implementation of programs like Eco-Schools and Young Reporters for the Environment in Slovakia. Špirála advocates for its members' interests, and develops strategies, and for high-quality, accessible environmental education in Slovakia.

SME (Stichting Milieu Educatie)/GDO

The WIA toolkit is co-created by an international team of experts and coordinated by SME (Stichting Milieu Educatie), the executive organization of GDO (Gementee voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling). GDO represents 140 nature and sustainability education centers in the Netherlands. SME/GDO works to embed sustainability in both formal and non-formal education systems, fostering a culture of sustainability across the Netherlands.

VyHUB Network of sustainability actors in the Vysočina region

VyHUB is a regional platform connecting innovators, organizations, and individuals in the Vysočina Region who are working toward a better and more sustainable future. VyHUB believes that the region's success depends on cross-sector collaboration, education, and idea-sharing. Its mission is to help Vysočina become a resilient region that successfully addresses current and future challenges, inspiring others with its solutions.

Montessori School Polná

The event is kindly hosted by Montessori School Polná, which fosters an educational environment that respects the uniqueness of each student. The school combines the joy of learning with a sense of achievement, nurturing responsible and conscious members of society. It offers holistic education and supports the development of children, youth, families, and educators in a trust-based, collaborative, and friendly environment.

Acknowledgments

The organizers extend their sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus for their invaluable support of the activities of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network.

Their commitment to advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the Carpathian region and beyond is instrumental in fostering collaboration, and the implementation of whole-institutional approaches to sustainability.

