

Higher Education Summit, Bordeaux, 28/08/2026

Advancing Transformative ESD through a Whole-Institution Approach

**Promouvoir l'EDD par une approche
institutionnelle globale**

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Understanding the WIA

*“A whole–institution approach to Education for Sustainable Development is a **form of reflective institutional learning** in which an education organisation continually re–aligns its **teaching, research, governance, operations and stakeholder relationships** in response to sustainability challenges, so that a **culture of change** enables sustainability transformation across the whole institution, within the community and the local ecosystem.”*

UNESCO, 2026 (forthcoming)

Frameworks

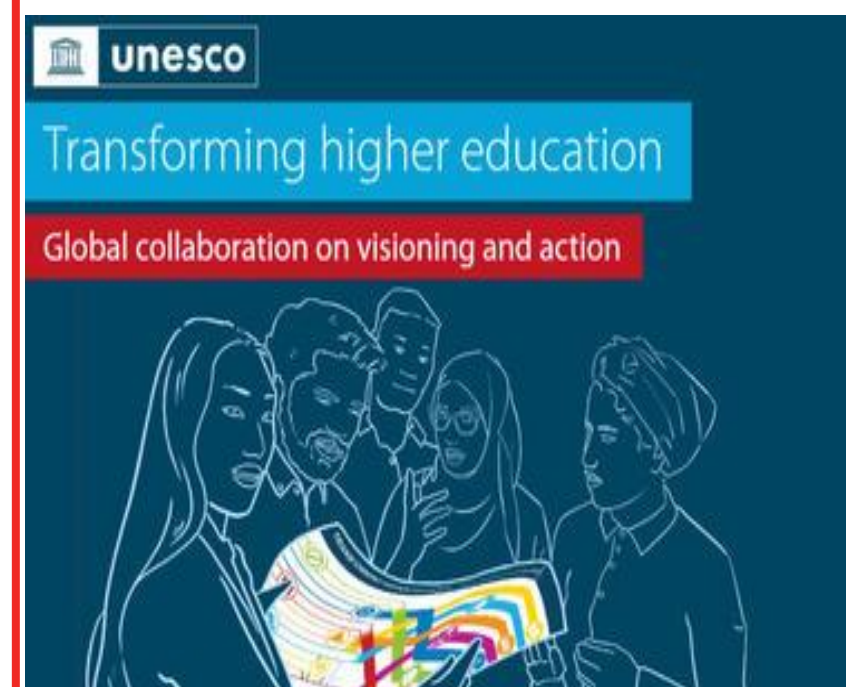
Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

- UNESCO ESD for 2030 Roadmap (2020)
- UNESCO Recommendation (2023)
- Guidance tools on the Whole Institution Approach (WIA) –
to be launched on 17 September 2026

United Nations 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

- Transforming Education towards a more sustainable and just future (UNESCO, 2022; UN Pact for the Future, 2024).

UNESCO HE Roadmap (2026): ‘Centering sustainability, stewardship and regeneration’ –one of 6 guiding principles



Transforming Futures Project

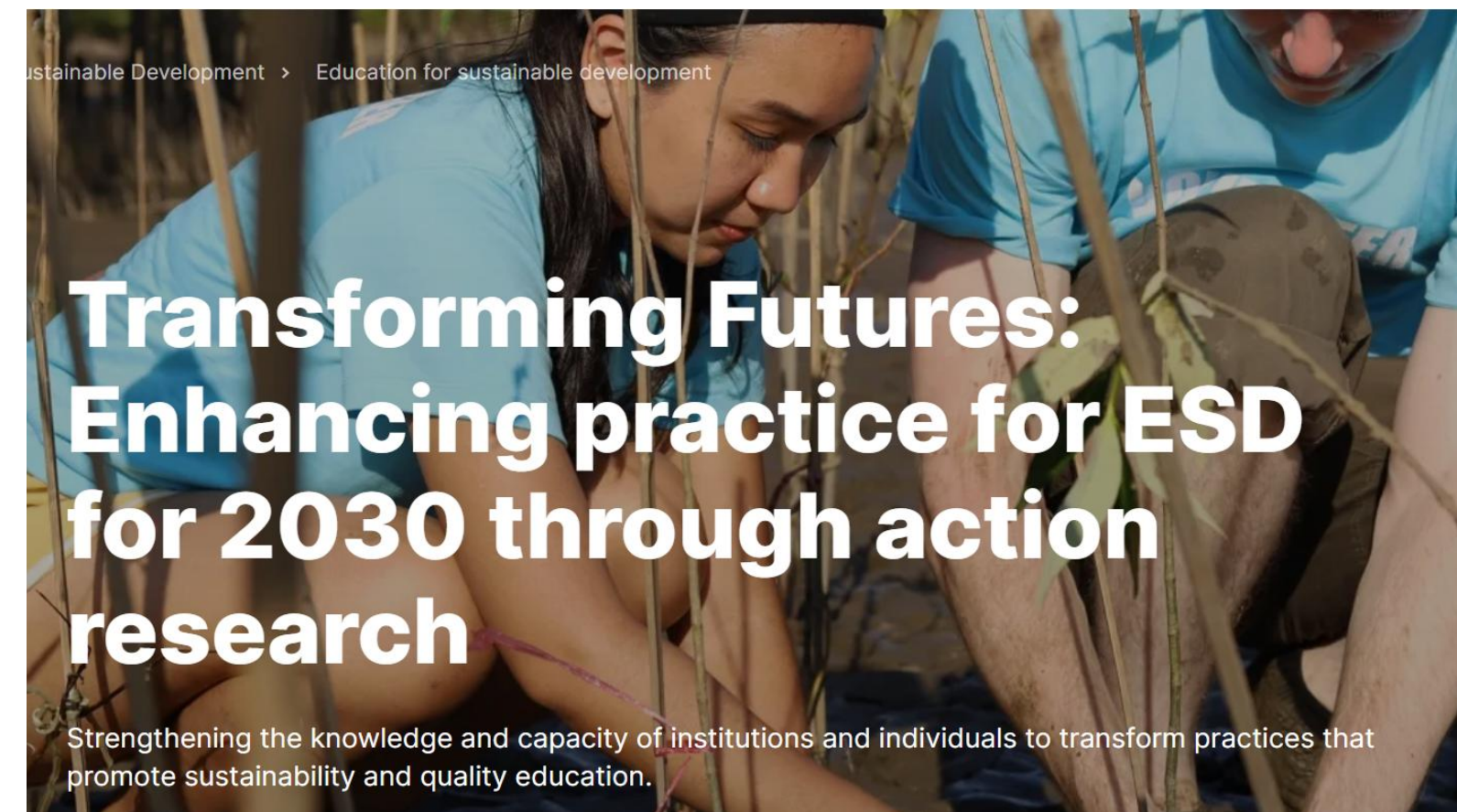
Project context

- Overall project coordination: UNESCO ESD
- Start 2024, consultations, meetings with authors and national commissions, testing in practice 2025, revision phases, publication 09/2026

Three guidance tools:

- **Whole-institution approaches (WIA) to ESD,**
 - **Transversal sustainability competencies and pedagogies**
 - **Learning assessment for ESD**
-
- **Action Research with 10 countries, 41 educational institutions** (e.g. ASP NET schools, HEIs)
 - Global Symposium in January 2026
 - Policy briefs/explanatory notes to go with tools

Publication launch on 17 September 2026 (UNESCO Webinar)



In partnership with

Transforming Futures Project

Guidance tool on WIA to ESD

- For **practitioners** (educators, but also administrators, school/university leaders) in different educational contexts (from primary to higher education)
- **14 components** to help institutions "build their WIA"
- A visionary and strategic process (**top-down**), through curriculum, governance, or processes (**lateral**), and empowered by a caring community (**bottom-up**)
- **Flexible with different entry points** to allow adaptation to local contexts and needs



Image: Action research activities on 'WIA cubes' in Costa Rica, 2025

In partnership with



#ESDfor2030

iau.global/sustainable-development

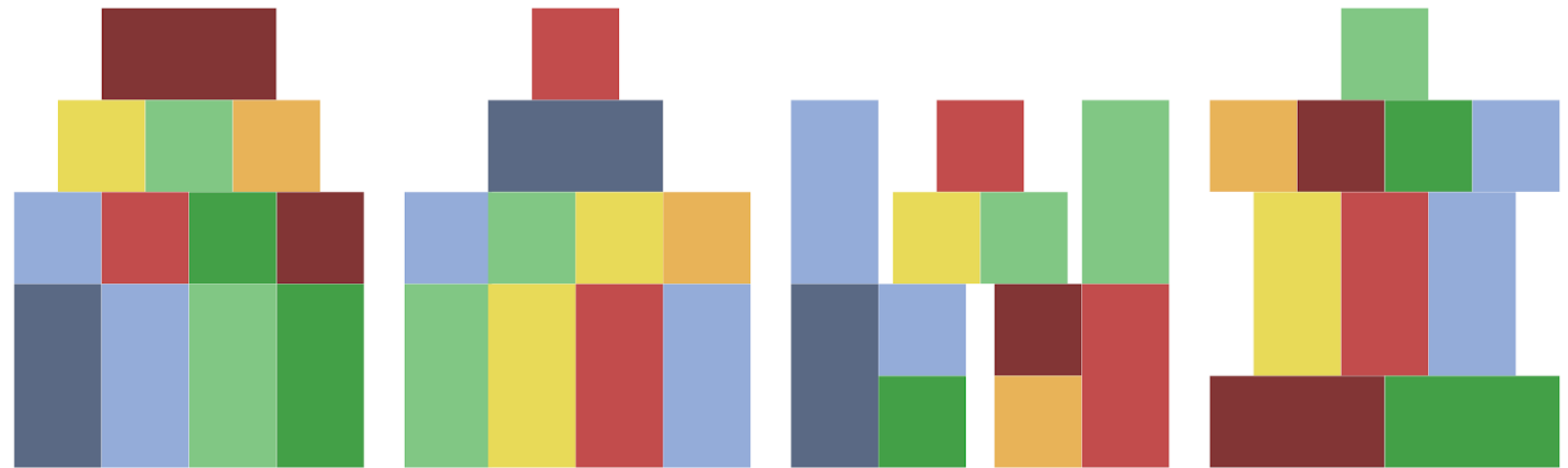


WIA guidance tool: Driving change towards sustainability through a whole-institution approach

Components (14 in total)

- Leadership
- Teaching & Learning:
 - Assessment
 - Curricula
 - Pedagogy
- Research
- Community Engagement
- Culture of Institution
- Partnerships, networks
- People
- Governance
- Campus/School operations
- Student Services
- Finances
- Internal and external communication

Examples of the Whole-Institution Approach



The whole-institution approach will look differently according to the **local context, capacity, and timeline**. Adopting the approach does not necessitate following a certain model, structure, or all components simultaneously. As institutions evolve, **components can be added as they best fit**, like a building block.

How did we get here?

Combining a theoretical approach and Action Research



Kohl, K., Hopkins, C., Toman, I., & van't Land, H. (2026).
**Identifying the 'Building Blocks' of a Transformative
Whole-institution Approach to Education for Sustainable
Development.** *Journal of Education for Sustainable
Development*, 20(1), 24-41.

Literature Review and drafting phase 2024/5

- Conceptualisation early 2024
- Semi-structured Literature Review (128 publications, languages, keywords)
- Additional online short survey
- Focus group/expert group HEIs
- Advisory Group put together by UNESCO
- First draft in late 2024

Action Research – piloting and receiving feedback

- **Meeting March 2025 in Paris (all countries), introduction, change to engage with country representatives and teachers**
- Action Research until late 2025 in the participating countries and schools
- Feedback received: through online form, and individually
- Feedback analysis: what are the priorities to address?
- Revision
- Focus groups with HEIs June & July 2025

What were the challenges?

A critical look back on the process

Literature Review and drafting phase

- inclusive literature review – *where are our blindspots?*
- language barriers limited literature review
- conceptual challenges (ESD could be ‘labelled’ differently, e.g. Green Education, l’écopédagogie, educación ambiental, community engagement)
- Concept of the publication: accessible vs academic, broad audience
- Responding to advisory group feedback

Participating countries/institutions

- Selection of countries (3 LAC, 3 Europe, 2 Africa, 2 Asia)
- Feedback often very general
- Advisory group: varied levels of engagement, not representative
- Not all countries/institutions worked with the guidance tool the same way (e.g. some selected components due to time constraints, others linked to existing projects)
- Lack of resources and time for conducting the AR in some cases

Was this process inclusive and critical?

Lessons learned:



Participants at Action Research Symposium, Bucharest, January 2026

- Theory $\neq$ Practice
- No '*one size fits all*' solution – local adaptation
- Different entry points
- Personal connection, feedback are crucial
- Practitioners driving transformation
- Communication and respect essential for partnerships – mutual learning

Thank you! **Merci!**

Sign up to our newsletter

Any questions?

<https://iau.global/newsletter>



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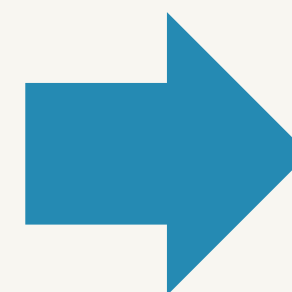




Cluster Activity report 2025-26

IAU Global HESD Cluster

- Launched in 2018 by an initiative of rectors, presidents and the IAU Board.
- 16 Universities from all world regions lead SDG 1- 16.
- Leads/Coordinating institutions work with Satellite universities and observers in subclusters (~70 HEIs and 100+ contacts).
- IAU leads SDG 17: Partnerships.
- IAU Member Organisations can join SDG 17.



1 common Goal: to enhance HE engagement with Sustainable Development in T&L, Research and campus and community engagement ***through a whole-institution approach (WIA)***

List of Cluster Members and Satellites – www.iau-hesd.net/IAU-Global-HESD-Cluster



Workshop on HE, SDGs, and more – April 2026

- Co-organized by the University of Manouba, University of Carthage, University of Sousse and the IAU
- 50 experts from 15 HEIs, different disciplines/roles, high-level opening
- Meeting Report and news article [here](#)



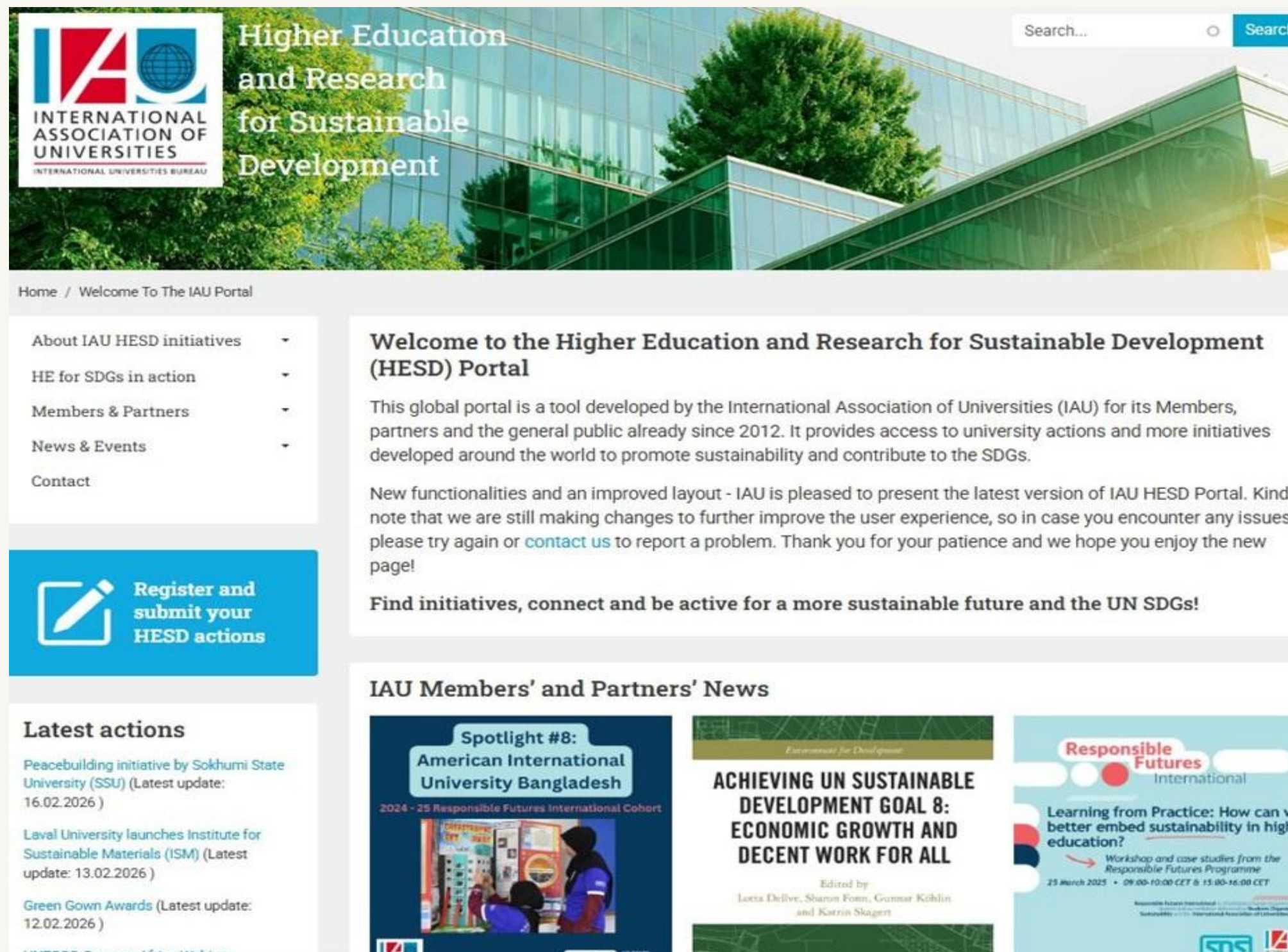
The IAU HESD Portal

 www.iau-hesd.net

Search by:

- Keyword
- Country
- University
- Category
- SDG

Submit your actions for your university/organisation [here](#).



The screenshot shows the IAU HESD Portal homepage. At the top, there is a banner with the IAU logo and the text "Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development". Below the banner, there is a search bar and a navigation menu. The main content area features a welcome message, a list of latest actions, and a section for IAU Members' and Partners' News. The footer includes logos for IAU, IAU HESD, and IAU HESD Africa.

Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development

Search... Search

Home / Welcome To The IAU Portal

About IAU HESD initiatives
HE for SDGs in action
Members & Partners
News & Events
Contact

Register and submit your HESD actions

Welcome to the Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) Portal

This global portal is a tool developed by the International Association of Universities (IAU) for its Members, partners and the general public already since 2012. It provides access to university actions and more initiatives developed around the world to promote sustainability and contribute to the SDGs.

New functionalities and an improved layout - IAU is pleased to present the latest version of IAU HESD Portal. Kindly note that we are still making changes to further improve the user experience, so in case you encounter any issues, please try again or [contact us](#) to report a problem. Thank you for your patience and we hope you enjoy the new page!

Find initiatives, connect and be active for a more sustainable future and the UN SDGs!

Latest actions

Peacebuilding initiative by Sokkhumi State University (SSU) (Latest update: 16.02.2026)

Laval University launches Institute for Sustainable Materials (ISM) (Latest update: 13.02.2026)

Green Gown Awards (Latest update: 12.02.2026)

IAU Members' and Partners' News

Spotlight #8: American International University Bangladesh

2024 - 25 Responsible Futures International Cohort

ACHIEVING UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 8: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Edited by: Lotta Delve, Sharon Fonn, Gunnar Köhlin and Katrin Skagert

Responsible Futures International

Learning from Practice: How can we better embed sustainability in higher education?

Workshop and case studies from the Responsible Futures Programme

25 March 2025 • 09:00-10:00 CET & 15:00-16:00 CET

IAU HESD Africa



Resources & Further Information

- Sign up for updates on the 4th IAU HESD Global Survey [here](#)
- Responsible Futures International:
<https://www.responsiblefutures.org.uk/international-programme>
- Responsible Futures International [Pilot Report](#)
- Accelerating Action for the SDGs – [Report of the 3rd IAU Global Survey on HESD](#)
- Specialized Portal for SD-related Actions, News, Events and documents:
- IAU HESD Portal www.iau-hesd.net
→ Examples of best practice – search the portal!
- IAU Publications: <https://iau.global/publications>
- [IAU Horizons 30.1 Transforming Our World: Shaping the Path Forward](#)
- [IAU Global Cluster on HESD Activity Report 2024-2025](#)
- Partners: [Students Organising for Sustainability](#) and [the Global Student Forum](#)
- Sign up for the IAU Newsletter: <https://iau.global/newsletter>
- [Previous and upcoming webinars](#)
- Recent event <https://iau.global/all-events/how-can-partnerships-with-academia-accelerate-local-innovation-and-build-sustainable-communities>