

UNESCO: What it is and What it does?

Founded in 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is today composed of 191 Member States. The Governing bodies (General Conference and Executive Board) meet periodically to assure proper functioning, establish priorities and set goals for the Secretariat, headed by the Director-General.

UNESCO is a NRA in 6 Member States where a Non Resident Agency analyst has been deployed in 2007.

[Albania](#)

[Benin](#)

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[About UNESCO](#)

Major fields of action and priorities

UNESCO deploys its action in the fields of Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Culture, Communication and Information.

[Education](#)

Since its creation in 1945, UNESCO has worked to improve education worldwide through technical advice, standard setting, innovative projects, capacity-building and networking. Education for All (EFA) by 2015 guides UNESCO's action in the field of education and indeed, in an intersectoral manner, throughout all its fields of competence.

UNESCO's educational priorities:

- Basic education for all, with special attention being given to literacy, HIV/AIDS prevention education and teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa;
- Secondary education, including technical and vocational education and training as well as science and technology education;
- Promoting quality education, with special reference to values education and teacher training;
- Higher education.

[Natural Sciences](#)

Since its inception, UNESCO has developed several international programmes to better assess and manage the Earth's resources. The Organization also helps reinforce the capacities of developing countries in the sciences, engineering and technology.

UNESCO's priorities in the field of Natural Sciences:

- Water and associated eco-systems;
- Oceans;
- Capacity-building in the basic and engineering sciences, the formulation of science policies and the promotion of a culture of maintenance;
- Promoting the application of science, engineering and appropriate technologies for sustainable development, natural resource use and management, disaster preparedness and alleviation and renewable sources of energy.

Social and Human Sciences

The social and human sciences have a vital role to play in helping to understand and interpret the social, cultural and economic environment. They provide research, identify and analyse trends, propose paths of action.

UNESCO's priorities in the field of Social and Human Sciences:

- Ethics of science and technology, with emphasis on bioethics;
- Promotion of human rights and the fight against all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance through activities in UNESCO's field of competence;
- Foresight, philosophy, human sciences, democracy and the enhancement of human security;
- Management of social transformation.

Culture

Preserving and respecting the specificity of each culture, while ensuring that it preserves and respects the specificities of another culture, and involving it in an approach that bring them together and extends beyond them in a more interactive and interdependent world, is the challenge which must be met by the international community and, on its behalf, by UNESCO and its partners.

UNESCO's cultural priorities:

- Promoting cultural diversity, with special emphasis on the tangible and intangible heritage;
- Cultural policies as well as intercultural and interfaith dialogue and understanding;
- Cultural industries and artistic expressions.

Communication and Information

Communication and Information programmes are rooted in UNESCO's Constitution, which requires the Organization to promote the "free flow of ideas by word and image". The main objective for UNESCO is to build a knowledge society based on the sharing of knowledge and incorporating all the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of sustainable development.

UNESCO's priorities in the field of Communication and Information:

- Empowering people through access to information and knowledge with special emphasis on freedom of expression;
- Promoting communication development;
- Advancing the use of ICTs for education, science and culture.

UNESCO and UN Reform

"The One UN initiative is an essential step towards achieving greater in-country UN System coherence and, in that context, the importance of efforts to reach a common understanding of the One Programme, One Budgetary Framework, One Leader and One Office must be underlined – responding to the UN General Assembly resolution on the 2004 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities (TCPR) and in the spirit of the recommendations contained in the High-level Panel Report on UN System-wide Coherence. The Specialized Agencies are committed to contributing fully to the eight One UN pilots launched in January 2007"...[Download \(pdf\)](#)



Websites

[Africa](#)

The Priority Africa Department was set up in April 1996. As a coordinating unit, its main purpose is to give impetus to UNESCO's action in Africa so as to reflect in all its programmes the priority that is specially accorded to the Africa region and ensure that these programmes are adapted to the needs and aspirations of African Member States. The Department also promotes the continent's participation in the globalization process and strengthens regional and sub regional cooperation. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[AIDS](#)

UNESCO, as one of the key partners of UNAIDS, has been actively involved in preventive education actions around the world. UNESCO's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic seeks to combat complacency, challenge stigmatization, overcome the tyranny of silence, and promote more caring attitudes. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Bioethics](#)

Bioethics, as an awareness of the implications of the advances made in the life and health sciences, in particular genetics and molecular biology, is the basis of an ever-growing debate which transcends borders, since the concerns it expresses inevitably take on an international dimension. It is part of UNESCO's universal and transcultural role to involve all countries in this debate. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Biosphere](#)

UNESCO's Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB) develops the basis, within the natural and the social sciences, for the sustainable use and conservation of biological diversity, and for the improvement of the relationship between people and their environment globally. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Biotechnology/Life Science](#)

The global and ever increasing problems of water and food security threaten global peace initiatives and hamper national development in the developing and least developed countries with an agrarian based economy. The toll of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on these economies as well as the advent of new emerging and re-emerging diseases are issues which preoccupy scientists and governments today. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Chairs UNITWIN/UNESCO](#)

Launched in 1992, this Programme is UNESCO's most important intersectoral downstream activity in the field of higher education with almost 500 UNESCO Chairs and networks established in 113 Member States. A privileged mechanism for knowledge transfer and capacity-building in the spirit of solidarity with and between developing countries, its main participants are hundreds of universities and many important higher-education NGOs, and hundreds of other organizations, foundations and companies are partners. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Communication and Information](#)

Information and communication have become major issues for most of the peoples and nations of our planet, not only as they affect development and peace but also as they contribute to the construction of a more just society with stronger ties of solidarity. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Copyright](#)

Since little is known in many countries about the role of copyright, UNESCO encourages governments to adopt measures which promote creativity and increase the production of national literary, scientific, musical and artistic works, with a view to reducing dependence on foreign sources. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Culture](#)

In the coming years, UNESCO will focus in the area of culture on cultural heritage in all its aspects, the protection of cultural diversity and the promotion of pluralism and dialogue between cultures and civilizations. Indeed, the theme "protection of cultural diversity and the encouragement of pluralism and dialogue between cultures" has been designated, by the Director-General and the Executive Board, as principal priority. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Culture of Peace](#)

As defined by the United Nations, the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[E-learning](#)

The Unit for Special Projects (CI/USP) of the Communication and Information Sector of UNESCO has taken the initiative to create a new site which will be developed in cooperation with the Education Sector, as well as other external partners. The ultimate objective of the e-learning portal is to increase and facilitate access to education resources in different regions of the world in different languages while stimulating professional cooperation to improve the quality of education and learning. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Earth Sciences](#)

The International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) is the global instrument of UNESCO in implementing activities in earth sciences. IGCP projects aim at serving geoscientific needs and focus on practical problems such as increasing demand for mineral resources, groundwater and energy. Thus far, some projects have been carried out, ranging from the interpretation of geodynamic processes and palaeo-ecosystems and the search for natural resources to investigations of global warming. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Education](#)

UNESCO's action is focused upon ensuring a vigorous and effective follow-up to the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, April 2000). Priority is accorded to the realization in practice of the universal right to education. UNESCO also promotes the improvement of the quality of education and the renewal of education systems as part of a continuous effort to ensure that education corresponds to real needs at both individual and societal levels. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Education for All](#)

The urgency of action regarding the achievement of basic education for all is based on the view that, as we enter the twenty-first century, the denial of anyone's right to education - be they child, youth or adult, be they male or female, be they rich or poor - is fundamentally unacceptable. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Environment](#)

UNESCO's contribution to the Johannesburg debate emphasizes that human security and poverty alleviation are inconceivable without sustainable development. This requires that environmental, social and cultural as well as economic aspects of sustainable development be taken together, and that the interactions and interfaces between them be better understood. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Ethics](#)

In 2000-2001 UNESCO strengthened the major international role it is playing in the ethics of science and technology, in particular with a view to responding to current concerns about the dangers inherent in the growing pace of scientific progress and discoveries and their technological applications. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Geology](#)

The International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) is a joint endeavour of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences). It was launched in 1972 to facilitate cooperation among geoscientists across frontiers and boundaries. Its objective is to bring scientists from all over the world together and enhance interaction, particularly between North and South, through joint research work, meetings and workshops. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Human Genome](#)

Priority is given to strengthening the impact of the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights by making it more widely known and especially by fostering incorporation of its principles in national legislation, regulations and practices. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Human Rights](#)

UNESCO has been involved actively in the development and protection of human rights through normative action, research and education. Between 1997 and 2001 a series of regional conferences on human rights education was organized, which encouraged the adoption and implementation of national plans of action. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Hydrology](#)

The International Hydrological Programme (IHP), UNESCO's intergovernmental scientific co-operative programme in water resources, is a vehicle through which Member States can upgrade their knowledge of the water cycle and thereby increase their capacity to better manage and develop their water resources. It also aims at the improvement of the scientific and technological basis for the development of methods for the rational management of water resources, including the protection of the environment. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Management of Social Transformations](#)

The "Management of Social Transformations" (MOST) Programme, launched in 1994, aims at developing worldwide a knowledge base for the study of social transformations and helping in the formulation of policies in this field through activities ranging from projects to take action or provide expertise to extensive regional and international research and policy networks, and including capacity-building. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Natural Sciences](#)

Addressing the challenge of sustainable development is perhaps one of the most daunting tasks of the twenty-first century. It will require deep-seated changes in our ways of thinking and acting. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Philosophy](#)

In recent years, cooperation between philosophers, human and social scientists and decision-makers responsible for social and cultural policies was reinforced in the framework of the activities on "Pathways into the Third Millennium" and of the UNESCO Chairs in philosophy and bioethics and the network of philosophy and democracy. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Poverty alleviation](#)

The complex and dynamic relationship between education and efforts to eradicate poverty is one which involves all types and levels of education; moreover, it should be well integrated within broader frameworks of economic and social policy, development strategy and anti-poverty initiatives. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Social and Human Sciences](#)

The social and human sciences, philosophy and future-oriented activities have a key role in UNESCO's function as a laboratory of ideas, in innovatory policy-making and as an intellectual and ethical watch, since the concepts, methodologies and analytical tools of these disciplines can help forge the link between thought and action, know ledges and policies. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Street and Working Children](#)

At the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), the International Community declared that "basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults...the poor, street and working children should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities". [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Sustainable Development](#)

UNESCO's contribution to the Johannesburg debate emphasizes that human security and poverty alleviation are inconceivable without sustainable development. This requires that environmental, social and cultural as well as economic aspects of sustainable development be taken together, and that the interactions and interfaces between them be better understood. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Tolerance](#)

Since the end of the cold war, there has been a steady increase in social, religious and cultural conflicts. Too many have quickly turned into full-scale armed conflicts; too many fundamental human rights have come under direct assault, too many lives have been lost. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Water](#)

Water resources and their associated ecosystems are under great threat. To provide appropriate knowledge bases for water security in the twenty-first century is a major challenge that also requires interdisciplinary cooperation among all programmes dealing with environment and development issues. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Women](#)

The empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality are indispensable for sustainable development and the full respect for and enjoyment of human rights, as expressed at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) and subsequent decisions of UNESCO's governing bodies. UNESCO's fields of competence play an important role in this process and, inversely, it is of key importance to promote gender equality. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[World Heritage](#)

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is the Secretariat to the World Heritage Committee and was established in 1992 to develop an integrated multidisciplinary approach to the conservation of both cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. The Centre works to encourage adherence to, and more effective implementation of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, to which 162 Member States are parties. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)

[Youth](#)

UNESCO's involvement in the field of youth stems from the beginning of the organization in 1946. After the second World War, UNESCO (at the time only with 20 Member States) helped organize international volunteer youth work camps to aid in the reconstruction of Europe. Almost fifty years later in November 1996, 186 Member States at the 29th Session of the UNESCO General Conference reaffirmed and stressed their unanimous commitment to youth as a priority for the whole Organization. [More](#) | [Go to website](#)