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# United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Background Guide 2022

Written by: Johanna Barton and Laila Fouad, Directors  
Clara Praschl and Charlotte Gerdes, Assistant Directors



# NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



# NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This year's staff are: Directors Johanna Barton (Conference A) and Laila Fouad (Conference B), and Assistant Directors Clara Praschl (Conference A) and Charlotte Gerdes (Conference B). Johanna holds a Bachelor of Arts in European Studies from the University of Magdeburg and a Master of Science in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance from the University of Leuven. Laila holds a Bachelors of Arts in Economics from the American University in Cairo, and a Masters in Economic Policy from Columbia University. Clara recently received a Bachelors of Arts in History with a minor in Communication Science and is currently completing her second Bachelors of Arts in Political Science at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. Charlotte is currently pursuing a Bachelors of Arts degree in History and Cultures of the Middle East with a concentration on Arabic Studies at Freie Universität Berlin.

The topics under discussion for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are:

1. Information and Communication Technologies to Empower Vulnerable Societies
2. Addressing Gender Disparities and Promoting Gender Equality in Education

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO is responsible for fostering the cooperation of the international community in the fields of education, science, culture and communication to further the universal respect for justice, rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. At NMUN•NY 2022, we are simulating the Executive Board of UNESCO in terms of composition and size; however, delegates are not limited to the strict mandate of the Executive Board as a budgetary and administrative body. Therefore, for the purposes of NMUN•NY 2022, and corresponding with the educational mission of the conference, the committee can make programmatic and policy decisions on issues within the mandate of UNESCO, in line with the overall function of the organization.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 March 2022 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers](#) website.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretaries-General for Development Department, Vincent Carrier (Conference A) and Martin Schunk (Conference B), at [usg.dev@nmun.org](mailto:usg.dev@nmun.org).

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

## Conference A

Johanna Barton, Director  
Clara Praschl, Assistant Director

## Conference B

Laila Fouad, Director  
Charlotte Gerdes, Assistant Director



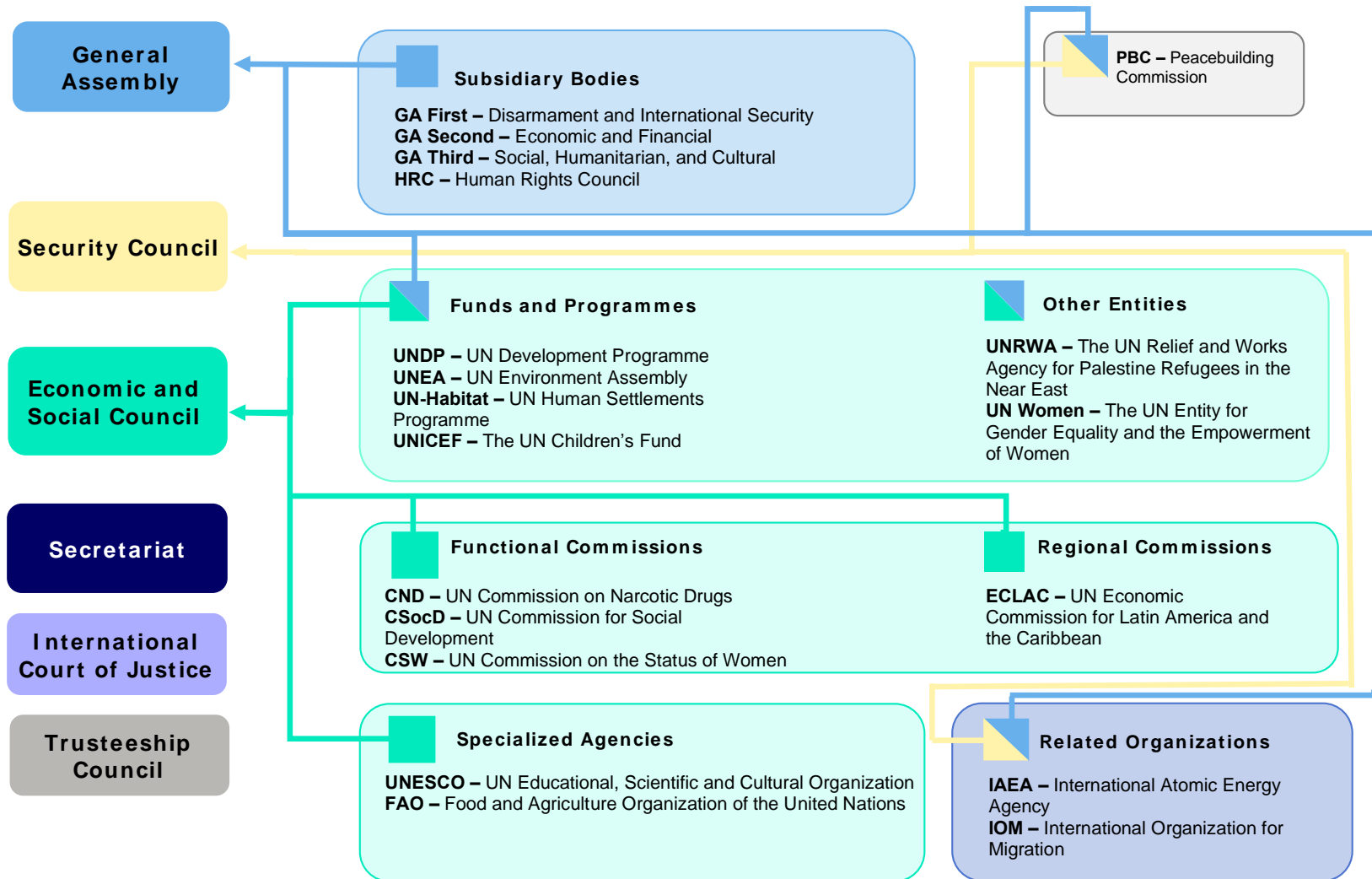
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## United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.



## Committee Overview

### Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) that coordinates with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council.<sup>1</sup> Although it is financially and structurally independent from the primary organs of the UN, UNESCO works with the UN to pursue common interests, including peace and security and social and economic development.<sup>2</sup> UNESCO originated in the 1942 Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), a group of governmental representatives seeking to restore education systems in the wake of WWII.<sup>3</sup> CAME was preceded by the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation and the International Bureau of Education.<sup>4</sup> In November 1945, CAME organized a conference in London to establish an educational and cultural organization.<sup>5</sup> Representatives from 37 countries agreed to found UNESCO; a formal constitution was signed on 16 November 1945, which came into force on 4 November 1946.<sup>6</sup>

In accordance with its mandate, UNESCO has coordinated and produced several international standards for the promotion of peace through collaboration in the fields of education, intercultural dialogue, and communication and information.<sup>7</sup> Among these are the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960), the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* (1978), the *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* (2015), the *Memory of the World Programme* (1992), and the *ICT Competency Framework for Teachers* (2018).<sup>8</sup> Since 2015, UNESCO has significantly contributed to UN reform initiatives and to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with key inputs to several SDGs, such as SDG 4 (“quality education”), SDG 5 (“achieving gender equality”), SDG 10 (“reducing inequalities”), and SDGs relating to information and communication technologies.<sup>9</sup> Some recent topics addressed by UNESCO in accordance with the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) include the development of education systems that foster quality inclusive education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, supporting girls’ and women’s education, and reducing inequalities by closing the digital divide.

At NMUN•NY 2022, we are simulating the Executive Board of UNESCO in terms of composition and size; however, delegates are not limited to the strict mandate of the Executive Board, as a budgetary and administrative body. Therefore, for the purposes of NMUN•NY 2022, and corresponding with the educational mission of the conference, the committee can make programmatic and policy decisions on issues within the mandate of UNESCO in line with the overall function of the organization.

### Governance, Structure, and Membership

UNESCO is a specialized agency, an international organization that coordinates its work with the UN through negotiated agreements, under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).<sup>10</sup> UNESCO is a legally independent agency with its own rules, membership, organs, and financial resources that was brought into a relationship with the UN in 1945.<sup>11</sup> The headquarters of UNESCO is located in Paris,

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-22*, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 63.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO in brief - Mission and Mandate*, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO in brief - Mission and Mandate*, 2021; CAME, *Conference for the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO in brief - Mission and Mandate*, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts: 2016 Edition*, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO at a Glance (ERI/2010/WS/2)*, 2010, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> UN DGC, *What are UN Specialized Agencies, and how Many are There?*, 2021; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-22*, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> UN General Assembly, *Agreements with Specialized Agencies (A/RES/50(I))*, 1945.

France.<sup>12</sup> UNESCO currently has 193 Member States and 11 associate members.<sup>13</sup> Two major bodies, the General Conference and Executive Board, govern the work of UNESCO.<sup>14</sup>

The General Conference, which consists of all UNESCO Member States, meets every two years.<sup>15</sup> The 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference will take place from 9 to 24 November 2021.<sup>16</sup> The General Conference may hold additional meetings as summoned by the Executive Board, or upon request by at least one third of its Member States.<sup>17</sup> The General Conference is primarily responsible for electing members of the Executive Board, deliberating upon and approving recommendations from the Executive Board, summoning international conferences, considering reports from Member States, and advising UN organizations on matters of education, science, and culture.<sup>18</sup> The General Conference may also establish special and technical committees, create subsidiary organs, and invite observers on the recommendation of the Executive Board.<sup>19</sup> UNESCO currently directs the work of several intergovernmental bodies, including the Intergovernmental Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.<sup>20</sup> These sub-organs provide expert research and policy recommendations to the General Conference.<sup>21</sup>

The Executive Board consists of 58 UNESCO Member States serving four-year terms.<sup>22</sup> As the term of 27 Member States will expire in 2021, 27 new Member States will be elected at the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the General Conference.<sup>23</sup> As of October 2021, the chairperson of the Executive Board is Mr. Agapito Mba Mokuy.<sup>24</sup> The UNESCO Constitution affords membership in UNESCO to all UN Member States, and non-Member States may be admitted to UNESCO upon the recommendation of the Executive Board, with a two-thirds majority vote of the General Conference.<sup>25</sup> Associate Members, such as political or territorial entities that do not constitute independent Member States, can be admitted upon recommendation of the General Conference, and are recognized with some rights and obligations.<sup>26</sup> Every two years, the Executive Board prepares the biennial agenda for the General Conference, submits policy recommendations to the General Conference, implements decisions adopted by the General Conference, recommends the admission of new Members, nominates the Director-General, and reviews the budget.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the Executive Board may advise the primary organs of the UN on issues relevant to its mandate, consult with representatives of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and independent experts, and request advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).<sup>28</sup>

The Executive Board and the General Conference are also responsible for selecting the UNESCO's Director-General.<sup>29</sup> Every four years, the General Conference appoints a Director-General who is

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<sup>12</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-22*, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, *Member States*, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-22*, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, *41<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference - 9-24 November 2021*, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, arts. III-VI.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, arts. III-VI; UNESCO, *List of Members of the Executive Board*, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, arts. III-VI.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, *Intergovernmental Committees*, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, art. IV, paras. 11-14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, art. V.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Provisional Agenda of the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference (41 C/1 PROV.)*, 2021, p. 12; UNESCO, *List of Members of the Executive Board*, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO, *Chairperson*, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *Member States*, 2021; UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, art. II.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, *Member States*, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Executive Board in Brief*, 2021; UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, art. V.

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, art. V.

<sup>29</sup> UNESCO, *Member States*, 2021.

responsible for coordinating the work of the Secretariat.<sup>30</sup> The Executive Board nominates the Director-General, who is then appointed by the General Conference.<sup>31</sup> In December 2020, current Director-General Audrey Azoulay was nominated as the only candidate for the coming term.<sup>32</sup> She was interviewed during the 211th session of the Executive Board's online public plenary meeting on 14 April 2021.<sup>33</sup>

### **Mandate, Functions, and Powers**

UNESCO's mandate is formally defined in Article 1, paragraph 3 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), and article 1 of the *UNESCO Constitution* (1945).<sup>34</sup> UNESCO is charged with promoting collaboration among Member States in the fields of education, science, and culture in order to develop and maintain peace, the rule of law, and mutual respect.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, UNESCO is responsible for coordinating and supporting the development of knowledge and culture for "economic stability, political security, and general well-being of the peoples of the world."<sup>36</sup> Finally, UNESCO plays a major role in coordinating international conventions and setting standards on topics of education, culture, and science such as its recent role in drafting the landmark *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (2019), the first legally-binding UN treaty on higher education.<sup>37</sup>

To fulfill its mandate, UNESCO holds international conferences to deliberate issues and set standards, provide expert research and consultation to the primary organs of the UN system through ECOSOC, and coordinate with other entities to implement programs in the field.<sup>38</sup> Every six years, UNESCO adopts a medium-term strategy that lays out the organization's strategic vision and programmatic structure, as well as the overarching and strategic program objectives and expected outcomes.<sup>39</sup> The Director-General was also tasked by the General Conference to prepare the *Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029* (2020).<sup>40</sup> This preparation process included an online consultation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and similar institutions in official partnership with UNESCO, UN agencies, and stakeholder intergovernmental organizations.<sup>41</sup> The consultation process ended in May 2020.<sup>42</sup> The new programme of work for the organization and corresponding budget estimates were examined by the Executive Board at its 210th meeting in November 2020.<sup>43</sup> This Medium-Term Strategy provides not only an outline for the next seven years, but also determines UNESCO's strategy in the final decade towards achieving the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015).<sup>44</sup> The Medium-Term strategy is expected to be adopted in November 2021 at the 41st session of the General Conference in Paris.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> UNESCO, *Member States*, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO, *Procedure for the Nomination of the Director-General of UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 1; UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, art. V, art I, para 1.

<sup>36</sup> Conference of Allied Ministers of Education, *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO (ECO/CONF./29)*, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO, *General Introduction to the Standard-setting Instruments of UNESCO*; UNESCO, *Drafting of the Future Global Convention of Higher Education concludes*, 2017; UNESCO, *What is the Global Convention on Higher Education?*, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO at a Glance (ERI/2010/WS/2)*, 2010, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO, *Strategy*, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> UNESCO, *Preparation of the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4) and the Draft Programme and Budget 2022-2025 (41 C/5)*, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO, *210<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board*, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *UNESCO Towards 2030 and Beyond: Major Challenges and Opportunities (40 C/INF.18)*, 2019; UNESCO, *UNESCO moving forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Provisional Agenda of the General Conference at its 41<sup>st</sup> Session (41 C/1 PROV.)*, 2021.

UNESCO's relationship with the UN is governed by an overall agreement ratified by the General Assembly on 14 December 1946.<sup>46</sup> UN representatives are invited to attend meetings of UNESCO's General Conference and Executive Board, as well as special meetings convened by UNESCO.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, UNESCO is entitled to send representatives to the meetings of ECOSOC and the General Assembly when agenda matters pertain to UNESCO's mandate of educational, scientific, or cultural matters.<sup>48</sup> ECOSOC is the primary mechanism for coordinating operations and programs of specialized agencies; it serves as UNESCO's first point of contact with the UN system.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, UNESCO is a member of the UN Sustainable Development Group, and relies on the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination for guidance and strategic direction through its High-Level Committee for Programmes and High-Level Committee for Management.<sup>50</sup> UNESCO also maintains memorandums of understanding with 16 UN system partners that define roles of cooperation to prevent the duplication of work.<sup>51</sup> UNESCO is empowered, in turn, to initiate studies and reports for consideration by ECOSOC.<sup>52</sup> UNESCO may also work with ECOSOC to provide assistance to the Security Council as requested "for the maintenance or restoration of international peace and security."<sup>53</sup>

UNESCO coordinates with civil society through its 199 National Commissions, which are agencies established by the governments of UNESCO Member States and Associated Members.<sup>54</sup> Such partnerships not only allow UNESCO to fulfill its mandate and achieve its objectives but also help to increase cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture, communication, and information.<sup>55</sup> The organization maintains direct partnerships with 370 international NGOs and 20 civil society organizations (CSOs), and formal agreements with 87 IGOs and several institutions in the private sector.<sup>56</sup> UNESCO must provide ECOSOC information about any formal agreements with UN specialized agencies, IGOs, or NGOs before the agreements are enacted.<sup>57</sup> The organization maintains separate strategic objectives for various categories of partnerships, outlined in its *Comprehensive Partnership Strategy (192 EX/5.INF)* of 6 September 2013.<sup>58</sup> This policy framework establishes the form that these partnerships may take on the basis of several criteria, including the purpose of each partnership, strategy for engagement, strategic objectives, future direction of specific types of partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation of a partnership.<sup>59</sup> These partnerships provide critical information and implementation support for UNESCO's various programs and initiatives.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, these partners help UNESCO form policies, make decisions, and produce research materials by providing resources, operational support, and technical

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<sup>46</sup> UNESCO, *Agreement between the United Nations and UNESCO*, 1946.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 63; UNESCO, *Agreement Between the United Nations and UNESCO*, 1946.

<sup>50</sup> UNSDG, *United Nations Sustainable Development Group*, 2021; UN CEB, *FAQ*, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> UNESCO, *Partnering with UN Agencies*, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> UNESCO, *Agreement Between the United Nations and UNESCO*, 1946.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> UNESCO, *National Commissions*, 2021; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945, arts. X-XI.

<sup>56</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy (192 EX/5.INF)*, 2013; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 63; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy (192 EX/5.INF)*, 2013; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy*, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy (192 EX/5.INF)*, 2013, p. 3; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.



expertise.<sup>61</sup> Partners in the field, including bilateral government partners, NGOs, and private sector institutions, help mobilize financial and in-kind contributions for program implementation and meetings.<sup>62</sup>

### **Recent Sessions and Current Priorities**

UNESCO is actively engaged with events and activities supporting its programmatic work around the world.<sup>63</sup> Africa is a priority agenda item, where UNESCO works on developing strategies for a better future, supported by the new *African Union Agenda 2063* (2013) and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.<sup>64</sup> Gender equality is another global focus in which UNESCO works to equip men and women, boys and girls, with knowledge, skills, and values to combat gender inequality.<sup>65</sup> A special focus has also been put on promoting gender equality in the field of education.<sup>66</sup> Gender equality is promoted by UNESCO throughout the educational system, which means that UNESCO aims to ensure access to education for both boys and girls, and mainstreams gender equality within education and through education.<sup>67</sup> UNESCO's "Her education, our future" initiative, which aims to expedite action and leadership in this area, has a special emphasis on girls' and women's education.<sup>68</sup> The *UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and Through Education (2019-2025)* (2019) also guides UNESCO's efforts on education and gender equality.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to promoting gender equality, UNESCO defends and promotes freedom of expression, media independence and pluralism, and the creation of inclusive knowledge societies based on universal access to information and innovative use of digital technologies in the sphere of communication and information.<sup>70</sup> UNESCO's 2021 Communication and Information Programme aims to empower key actors in the fields of freedom of expression, access to information, and digital transformation through capacity-building, policy advice, international cooperation, monitoring, and foresight in order to ensure that fundamental freedoms are guaranteed online and offline, in accordance with international standards.<sup>71</sup>

The most recent session of the General Conference was held from 12 to 27 November 2019.<sup>72</sup> During their 40<sup>th</sup> Session, the General Conference elected new members to the Executive Board, adopted the Draft Programme and Budget for 2020-2021, and discussed topics such as providing assistance to educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories, and safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>73</sup> The preparation of the new *Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget for 2022-2025* was also discussed.<sup>74</sup> Other topics included the *UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020-2025)* (2019), and UNESCO's role in the implementation of

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<sup>61</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy (192 EX/5.INF)*, 2013, pp. 3-4; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>62</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Follow up to Decisions and Resolutions adopted by the executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions: part III, management issues: comprehensive partnership strategy (192 EX/5.INF)*, 2013, pp. 3-4; UNESCO, *Partnerships*, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO, *Priority Africa*, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> UNESCO, *Priority Gender Equality*, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> UNESCO, *What UNESCO does on education and gender equality*, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO fast-tracking girls' and women's education*, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO, *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025*, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Agenda of the 40th session of the General Conference (40 C/1)*, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Agenda of the 40th session of the General Conference (40 C/1)*, 2019; UNESCO, *Approved Programme and Budget 2020-2021: Second Biennium of the 2018-2021 Quadrennium (39 C/5)*, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> UNESCO, *Preparation of the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 and the Draft Programme and Budget*, 2020.

SDG 4 (“quality education”).<sup>75</sup> In its upcoming 41<sup>st</sup> session, the General Conference will, amongst others, consider the UNESCO Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem, adopt International Standard Classification for teacher training programs, and debate a report by the Director General on the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes.<sup>76</sup> Most importantly, it will adopt the new *Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget for 2022-2025*.<sup>77</sup>

The new *Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget for 2022-2025* was also at the center of discussion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Interregional Meeting of the National Commissions for UNESCO.<sup>78</sup> The meeting functioned as a consultation in the development of UNESCO’s next policy publications, as well as the role of National Commissions in the Organization’s strategic transition and took place from 22 to 25 February 2021 in a virtual format.<sup>79</sup> Approximately 450 participants from nearly 150 National Commissions from all five UNESCO regional groups, Permanent Delegations, and the UNESCO Secretariat and Field Offices attended the event.<sup>80</sup> The meeting delivered a number of recommendations to the ongoing elaboration process of the next *Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029* and the *Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (2020)*.<sup>81</sup> These recommendations focused on the role of National Commissions, inter-sectoral collaboration, partnerships, international cooperation, and visibility.<sup>82</sup>

In 2020, UNESCO’s Executive Board held two regular sessions.<sup>83</sup> At its 210<sup>th</sup> regular session in November 2020, the Executive Board welcomed, amongst others, the evaluation of the *Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE) (2020)* and the *Evaluation of UNESCO’s work in the thematic area of Media and Information Literacy (2020)*.<sup>84</sup> At its 211<sup>th</sup> regular session in April 2021, the Executive Board further discussed the future of UNESCO’s education sector, reviewed the *Memory of the World Programme*, and welcomed the *UNESCO Strategy on Technological Innovation in Education (2021-2025) (2020)*.<sup>85</sup> This series of meetings will be continued in October 2021 as part of the Executive Board’s 212<sup>th</sup> regular session.<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, UNESCO has been greatly involved during the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in mandate-related areas such as science and open access thereof, supporting governments in providing digital education and culture.<sup>87</sup> As a part of UNESCO’s outbreak response, their mission includes to “to support governments for distance learning, open science, knowledge and culture sharing, as fundamental means to stand together and tighten the bonds of our shared humanity.”<sup>88</sup> For example, UNESCO helped raise awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the world of science, education

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<sup>75</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Records of the General Conference, 40th Session, Paris, 12 November-27 November 2019, volume 1: Resolutions (40 C/RESOLUTIONS VOL.1 + CORR.)*, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> UNESCO General Conference, *Provisional agenda of the General Conference at its 41<sup>st</sup> Session (41 C/1 PROV.)*, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> UNESCO, *Future priorities and strategic transformation of UNESCO at the heart of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> UNESCO, *Future priorities and strategic transformation of UNESCO at the heart of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Swiss Commission for UNESCO, *7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO – Report*, 2021.

<sup>83</sup> UNESCO, *Executive Board documents*, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Revised Provisional Agenda and Timetable of Work (209 EX/1 PROV. REV.3)*, 2020; UNESCO Executive, *Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at its 210<sup>th</sup> session (210 EX/DECISIONS)*, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, *Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at its 211<sup>th</sup> session (211 EX/DECISIONS + ADD.)*, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> UNESCO, *Executive Board*, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> UNESCO, *The COVID-19 Outbreak & UNESCO’s Mission*, 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

and culture as part of their “Next Normal” campaign, which centers around a short movie.<sup>89</sup> While this movie shows that in a post-pandemic era, the desire to return to “normal” is ever present, yet UNESCO provides factual information to show that perhaps the normal we had before the pandemic is not one we should wish to return to; hoping to inspire change, and create a new normal.<sup>90</sup> To keep working towards this mission amid the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO continues to cooperate with governments to help create digital education and culture, and facilitate and coordinate research and science, including promotion of open access to scientific data and research.<sup>91</sup>

### **Conclusion**

UNESCO plays a key role in the protection of cultures as well as the promotion of education and improved learning practices, through the inclusion of new technologies to better enhance cultural protection and education.<sup>92</sup> Efforts and cooperation are increasing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, to maintain an international commitment to education and research.<sup>93</sup> This is shown through UNESCO’s digital focus on multiple initiatives, through digital education and culture, and the “Next Normal” campaign.<sup>94</sup> Together with other UN entities and partners from the public and private sector, UNESCO continues to work toward achieving the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda, with particular focus on SDG 4 (“quality education”), SDG 5 (“gender equality”), SDG 10 (“reduced inequalities”), and SDG 17 (“partnerships for the goals”).<sup>95</sup>

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<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247785>

*This key document focuses on the role of UNESCO in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Delegates will find this source particularly helpful in understanding the type of work that UNESCO champions in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, this document provides comprehensive information on the ways in which UNESCO helps with efforts towards each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and UNESCO’s targeted work towards the nine SDGs that align with their mandate. Overall, this source will enable delegates to see how UNESCO use its mandate to contribute to the current global agenda.*

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. (2019). *UNESCO Towards 2030 and Beyond: Major Challenges and Opportunities (40 C/INF. 18)*. Retrieved 6 August 2021 from: [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371398\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371398_eng)

*This document not only provides an outlook on different discussions about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and UNESCO’s work towards the Agenda, but it also provides insights into the direction that UNESCO will take in the new Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029. In the road towards 2030 and the new Medium-Term Strategy, it has established its global priorities as Africa and Gender Equality, but also prioritizes areas such as Small Island Developing States and Young People. UNESCO is also focused on the new priorities of effective international response; using a human rights-based approach; and focusing on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Delegates will*

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<sup>89</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO’s “Next Normal” Campaign*, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> UNESCO, *The COVID-19 Outbreak & UNESCO’s Mission*, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>93</sup> UNESCO, *The COVID-19 Outbreak & UNESCO’s Mission*, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> UNESCO, *The COVID-19 Outbreak & UNESCO’s Mission*, 2020; UNESCO, *UNESCO’s “Next Normal” Campaign*, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2021; UNESCO, *UNESCO moving forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2017.

*find this source useful for understanding the key priority items and vision shaping UNESCO's work for the next four years.*

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). *The COVID-19 Outbreak & UNESCO's Mission*. Retrieved 6 August 2021 from: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19>

*Currently, COVID-19 is a topic that tethers to every facet of our community. This page provides an overview of UNESCO's mission amid this pandemic, as well as pointing towards priorities and recent activities. The "Next Normal" campaign can be found through this page, as well as information on discussions and cooperation to create digital education and culture. This page offers a good starting point in the research towards UNESCO and the impact of COVID-19 thereon, which will likely affect any future discussion and action.*

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## 1. Information and Communication Technologies to Empower Vulnerable Societies

*“Digital technology does not exist in a vacuum – it has enormous potential for positive change, but can also reinforce and magnify existing fault lines and worsen economic and other inequalities.”<sup>96</sup>*

### Introduction

As of 2019, 3.7 billion people worldwide do not have access to the internet, many of whom are living in developing countries.<sup>97</sup> This lack of access excludes them from accessing the abundance of information online, including educational resources and opportunities for professional growth.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, access to information is a human right.<sup>99</sup> Achieving universal access to information and knowledge is therefore a key step to fostering peace and development in the modern world, and fulfilling the targets of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015).<sup>100</sup>

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are technologies that focus on communication and transmitting information, such as telephones, computers, the internet, wireless networks, and audio or visual media.<sup>101</sup> This could include live broadcasting media, such as radio and television, or recorded media, like podcasts and videos.<sup>102</sup> Other popular formats are social networks and videotelephony.<sup>103</sup> ICTs are also tools to access information, participate in the digital economy, or create and perform jobs, which in turn helps build knowledgeable societies, peace, sustainable economic growth, and intercultural dialogue, all of which directly contribute to achieving the SDGs.<sup>104</sup> Several of the SDGs specifically recognize the role of ICTs in achieving sustainable development, for instance, target 9c of SDG 9 (“industry, innovation and infrastructure”) aims to “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries (LDCs) by 2020.”<sup>105</sup> However, while 79% of the population in LDCs lived within range of a mobile-broadband signal, only 20% were online as of 2020.<sup>106</sup>

The 2030 Agenda designates most vulnerable groups to be children and youth, older people, people with disabilities, people with HIV/AIDS, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced people and migrants, as well as persons living in areas affected by terrorism or humanitarian crises.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, these already vulnerable groups of society are more likely to also be disproportionately impacted by the digital divide.<sup>108</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) works on building peace “through international cooperation in education, the sciences and culture.”<sup>109</sup> One of UNESCO’s goals is

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<sup>96</sup> UN Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General: Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, 2020, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021, p. 14; ITU, *Digital inclusion of all*, 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Giga, *Background*, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, art.19.

<sup>100</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information*, 2021.

<sup>101</sup> FAO, *Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)*, 2021.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information*, 2021; UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021; ITU, *Digital inclusion of all*, 2021; WSIS, *Declaration of Principles (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E)*, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> UN DESA, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, 2020, p.43; UN DESA, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, 2021, p.45.

<sup>107</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> North-West University South Africa, *Vulnerable Societies*, 2021; Chang et al, *Bridging the Digital Divide: Reaching Vulnerable Population*, 2004.

<sup>109</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO in brief - Mission and Mandate*, 2021.



to create inclusive knowledge societies to empower communities by increasing access to information and knowledge.<sup>110</sup> According to UNESCO, knowledge societies are societies in which people have access to information, are able to transform it into knowledge, and can then use it to “enhance their livelihoods and contribute to the social and economic development of their societies.”<sup>111</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how a lack of access to ICTs can leave people behind as the world turned to remote learning, working, socializing, and commerce.<sup>112</sup> Lack of connectivity is also more common in already marginalized communities, exacerbates inequalities between rich and poor, and furthers the digital divide.<sup>113</sup> As education, work, and public services increasingly rely on digital access, lack of connectivity is a growing impediment to human development.<sup>114</sup> Especially during health crises, access to information and the skills to discern disinformation can save lives, empower people, and prevent already vulnerable groups from becoming the casualties of the crisis.<sup>115</sup> ICTs can also empower marginalized communities such as indigenous peoples by giving them tools to preserve and teach their languages, demonstrating the value ICTs hold to different vulnerable communities.<sup>116</sup>

### ***International and Regional Framework***

The values of empowering vulnerable societies through ICTs are rooted in the International Bill of Human Rights, which includes the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UDHR) (1947), *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (1966), and *the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1966).<sup>117</sup> Article 19 of the UDHR and article 19 of the ICCPR affirm the right to hold opinions and to freedom of expression, alongside seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas through any media.<sup>118</sup> The right for everyone to “share in scientific advancement and its benefits” is established in article 27.1 of the UDHR.<sup>119</sup> This was reiterated in article 15 of the ICESCR, alongside the call to develop and diffuse science and culture.<sup>120</sup>

In 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the *Declaration of Guiding Principles on the Use of Satellite Broadcasting for the Free Flow of Information, the Spread of Education and Greater Cultural Exchange*.<sup>121</sup> In 1978, the General Conference also adopted the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, apartheid and incitement to war*.<sup>122</sup> In both documents, the General Conference recognized the importance of equality in satellite broadcasting and free and diverse dissemination of information for peace, and noted the potential of using

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<sup>110</sup> UNESCO, *Building Knowledge Societies*, 2021.

<sup>111</sup> UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021.

<sup>112</sup> ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p. xii.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>114</sup> Opp, The evolving digital divide, *UNDP Blog*, 2021.

<sup>115</sup> ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p. 65.

<sup>116</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO’s action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021, p. 20.

<sup>117</sup> OHCHR, *The International Bill of Human Rights*, 1996.

<sup>118</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

<sup>119</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

<sup>120</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> UNESCO, *Declaration of Guiding Principles on the Use of Satellite Broadcasting for the Free Flow of Information, the Spread of Education and Greater Cultural Exchange*, 1972.

<sup>122</sup> UNESCO, *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, apartheid and incitement to war*, 1978.

broadcasting for education and spreading information.<sup>123</sup> These framework documents recognized that information enabled by mass media can promote human rights and empower people economically.<sup>124</sup>

Between 2003 and 2005, World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) took place across two phases.<sup>125</sup> The WSIS was a multi-stakeholder UN summit on the opportunities and challenges of the progress in information and communication technologies.<sup>126</sup> During the Geneva phase in 2003, the Summit adopted the *Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action* to create political will and establish steps towards an inclusive knowledge society.<sup>127</sup> To bridge the digital divide, the *Geneva Plan of Action* laid out 11 action targets, which include among others "[i]nformation and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society" and "[a]ccess to information and knowledge."<sup>128</sup> The Geneva Plan of Action notably calls for inclusive ICT infrastructure that considers vulnerable groups and also promotes accessibility of ICTs for all, particularly for vulnerable groups.<sup>129</sup>

The Tunis phase of the WSIS in 2005 built upon the outcomes of the Geneva phase.<sup>130</sup> At the second phase, the Summit adopted the *Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society* to agree on steps towards internet governance and financial mechanisms to help implement the Geneva and Tunis outcomes.<sup>131</sup> In the Tunis Agenda, Member States committed to promote "the use of traditional and new media in order to foster universal access to information, culture and knowledge for all people, especially vulnerable populations."<sup>132</sup>

Using ICTs to increase access to knowledge and information contributes to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.<sup>133</sup> The role of ICTs in sustainable development is explicitly recognized in SDGs 4 ("quality education"), 5 ("gender equality"), 9 ("industry, innovation and infrastructure"), and 17 ("partnership for the goals").<sup>134</sup> Specifically, target 5b of SDG 5 ("gender equality") calls for enhancing "the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women."<sup>135</sup> The impact of ICTs is also noted in targets 16.7 and 16.10 of SDG 16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions"), as using ICTs and digitalization can increase transparency and accountability of governments and other institutions.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> UNESCO, *Declaration of Guiding Principles on the Use of Satellite Broadcasting for the Free Flow of Information, the Spread of Education and Greater Cultural Exchange*, 1972; UNESCO, *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, apartheid and incitement to war*, 1978.

<sup>124</sup> UNESCO, *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, apartheid and incitement to war*, 1978, Art. VII.

<sup>125</sup> UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> WSIS, *Plan of Action (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E)*, 2003.

<sup>128</sup> UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021; WSIS, *Plan of Action (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E)*, 2003.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> WSIS, *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev. 1)-E)*, 2005.

<sup>133</sup> ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p. 19.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> UNESCO, *Information for All Programme: consolidating information and knowledge societies; empowering peoples and nations*, 2017, p. 9; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, pp. 25-26.

## **Role of the International System**

UNESCO's mandate, as established in the *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (1945), is to “contribute to peace and security [...] through education, science and culture.”<sup>137</sup> To achieve this, UNESCO's goal is to strengthen mass communication, improve and develop education on mass education, and champion equitable access to mass communication.<sup>138</sup> UNESCO has been addressing the empowerment of vulnerable groups of society through ICTs since the 1980s.<sup>139</sup> The organization is responsible for the original implementation of six WSIS action lines, which in turn support the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>140</sup> In particular, UNESCO focuses on areas such as information literacy, freedom and safety of press and freedom of expression, universal access to information, and cultural diversity in cyberspace, as well as gender equality and diversity in media.<sup>141</sup>

The International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC) was established in 1980 by the UNESCO General Conference to strengthen democracy by increasing universal access to information and knowledge, especially in developing countries transitioning to new media and ICTs.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the IPDC targets the Internet for its potential to strengthen human rights, contribute to both environmentally and economically sustainable development, and empower groups and individuals.<sup>143</sup> The Programme notes that free and pluralistic media in developing countries will provide more equitable access to information and will empower people to express themselves.<sup>144</sup> The Information for All Programme (IFAP), established by UNESCO in 2001, works with Member States in formulating their information policies, reflecting on the ethical, societal, and legal challenges of ICTs, including information literacy, ethics and accessibility.<sup>145</sup>

In addition to UNESCO, many other UN entities work to empower vulnerable groups of society through ICTs.<sup>146</sup> The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as the United Nations (UN) specialized agency for ICTs, addresses each SDG with its *Connect 2030 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development* (2020) plan, which aims to achieve growth, inclusiveness, sustainability, innovation, and partnerships.<sup>147</sup> Under similar aims, ITU and UNESCO established the Broadband Commission for Digital Development in 2010, which advocates for universal broadband connectivity for development.<sup>148</sup> The Broadband Commission also advises governments to promote access to information, support learning institutions in teaching remotely and to foster media and information literacy.<sup>149</sup> The Commission members are associated with UN Agencies, NGOs, Governments, and private companies in the technology sector.<sup>150</sup>

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) works to close the gender digital divide through supporting projects such as Bangladesh's “Access to Information (a2i)” initiative which digitizes services

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<sup>137</sup> UNESCO, *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1945.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> UNESCO, *International Programme for the Development of Communication*, 2021.

<sup>140</sup> ITU, *Advancing Sustainable Development Through Information and Communication Technologies: WSIS Action Lines Enabling SDGs*, 2014; UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021.

<sup>142</sup> UNESCO, *International Programme for the Development of Communication*, 2021; UNESCO, *Evaluation of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)*, 2018, p. 8/19.

<sup>143</sup> UNESCO, *International Programme for the Development of Communication*, 2021.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> UNESCO, *Information for All Programme: consolidating information and knowledge societies; empowering peoples and nations*, 2017.

<sup>146</sup> ITU, *Connect 2030 – An agenda to connect all to a better world*, 2020.

<sup>147</sup> ITU, *About International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*, 2021; ITU, *Connect 2030 – An agenda to connect all to a better world*, 2020.

<sup>148</sup> ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p. xii.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

for rural citizens, and Vietnam’s ongoing e-government initiative.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) aims to close the gender gap with its e-learning portal, the Virtual Skills School, and its Buy from Women Enterprise Platform, which empowers smallholder women farmers in Rwanda.<sup>152</sup> To help implement and follow-up on the outcomes of the WSIS process, UNESCO, ITU, UNDP, and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) organize the annual WSIS Forum as a multi-stakeholder discussion platform for the “‘ICT for development’ community.”<sup>153</sup> Its goal is to advance the implementation of the WSIS action lines and to use ICTs for achieving the SDGs.<sup>154</sup>

As a result of the discussions at the WSIS in 2003 and 2005, the UN Secretary-General convened the annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF).<sup>155</sup> IGF is a platform for discussions on internet governance related public policy issues, uniting stakeholders from governments, the private sector, the technical community and civil society.<sup>156</sup> IGF’s annual meetings and intersessional activities aim “to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world” and to “contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.”<sup>157</sup> IGF does not have a decision-making mandate and cannot adopt resolutions or create any binding treaties, but is an open forum to exchange information, share good practices, and facilitate the discourse between the different stakeholder groups.<sup>158</sup>

The outcomes of the WSIS were also reviewed in the UN General Assembly WSIS+10 High Level Meeting in 2015 and will again be reviewed in 2025 (WSIS+20).<sup>159</sup> In 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/125 on the “Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.”<sup>160</sup> In this resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed that “the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online,” and committing to harnessing ICTs and the WSIS action lines to achieve the 2030 Agenda.<sup>161</sup>

Additionally, the private sector works both to promote access to the internet in rural regions and developing countries as well as to provide open educational resources and digital skills trainings on the Internet or in person, as part of corporate social responsibility programs.<sup>162</sup> For example, the software corporation SAP, in cooperation with other UN, private, and government partners, offers annual or permanent educational programs tailored to the needs of each region to promote IT skills.<sup>163</sup> These help increase employment opportunities for individuals and “help build a skilled, employable work force, which in turn can contribute to economic growth.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), like the

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<sup>151</sup> UNDP, *Development Future Series - Harnessing Information and Communications Technologies for gender equality in Europe and Central Asia*, 2021; UNDP, *A New Digital System Drives Bhutan's COVID-19 Vaccination Success*, 2021; Xu, *How Information and communication technologies help to eradicate poverty, UNDP Asia and the Pacific*, 2017.

<sup>152</sup> UN Women, *Making Innovation And Technology Work For Women*, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>153</sup> ITU, *World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2021*, 2021.

<sup>154</sup> ITU, *WSIS At A Glance*, 2019.

<sup>155</sup> IGF, *About the Internet Governance Forum*, 2021, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> IGF, *About the IGF*.

<sup>157</sup> IGF, *About the Internet Governance Forum*, 2021, pp. 2-3.

<sup>158</sup> IGF, *About the IGF*.

<sup>159</sup> UNESCO, *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, 2021.

<sup>160</sup> UN General Assembly, *Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (A/RES/70/125)*, 2015.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 2015.

<sup>162</sup> Microsoft Corporation, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, 2021; Microsoft Corporation, *Airband*, 2021; Facebook, Inc., *Digital Literacy Library*, 2021.

<sup>163</sup> Galer, *The Amazing Inclusion Story Behind India’s Digital Transformation*, *SAP Corporate*, 2021; Africa Code Week, *Read, Write, Count, Code: African Youth Empowered with Digital Skills for Life!*, 2021.

<sup>164</sup> Bryant, *Attending a Code Week Can Change Your Life*, *SAP Corporate*, 2018.



nonprofit children’s organization SOS Children’s Villages provide access to computers and the internet to children and teenagers, enhance their digital literacy and offer virtual training and e-learning.<sup>165</sup> Together with the NGO Plan International, which works to advance children’s rights and equality for girls, SOS Children’s Villages runs the Open Space Literacy Project in which digital tools are integrated into classroom teaching, improving efficacy in learning and bridging deficits in disadvantaged schools’ resources.<sup>166</sup>

### ***Bridging Digital Divides and Ensuring Access to Information***

The benefits of ICTs are unevenly distributed between developing and developed countries, and there are also inequalities within countries.<sup>167</sup> The term “Digital Divide” is describes inequalities in access to the internet or ICTs in general.<sup>168</sup> The term “Digital Divide” also describes how those without access to the digital world face a disadvantage in the twenty-first century.<sup>169</sup> When essential services are moved online, 56% of people living in developing countries who do not currently have access to the internet may be left behind.<sup>170</sup> Within a country, accessibility can vary due to a number of factors, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, age group, and (dis)ability.<sup>171</sup> This lack of access can be of physical or material nature, such as lack of telecommunication networks or affordable devices.<sup>172</sup> In 2019, 93% of the world’s population lived within reach of a mobile-broadband signal; however, only 54% used the internet, noting high costs for internet access.<sup>173</sup> To be considered affordable, 1.5 GB of entry-level broadband services should cost less than 2% of the monthly Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.<sup>174</sup>

To participate in today’s digital age, a broadband connection to the internet is very important.<sup>175</sup> Given that only 20% of people in LDCs were online as of 2020, the Broadband Commission for Digital Development sets the goal for internet adoption to reach 35% of the population in Least Developed Countries and 65% in developing countries by 2025.<sup>176</sup> To achieve this, the Broadband Commission has working groups researching equal access to ICTs for everyone, as well as factors such as affordability, safety, and digital literacy.<sup>177</sup> However, not only is accessibility to ICTs a problem globally, but also the lack of skills to use them can hamper users aiming to take advantage of technology, with issues such as lack of literacy, numeracy, or digital skills hindering full access.<sup>178</sup> In 2017, 65% of the world’s population did not have “basic” skills for computer-based activities and less than 30% were proficient in “standard” ICT skills.<sup>179</sup> The Broadband Commission aims for 60% of youth and adults to achieve at least a minimum level of proficiency in sustainable digital skills by 2025.<sup>180</sup> This is particularly important since most jobs in the modern economy require at least some generic computer and information skills, and an estimated 90% of

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<sup>165</sup> SOS Children’s Villages, *ICT4D – Technology for children, young people and families*, 2017.

<sup>166</sup> SOS Children’s Villages, *Open Space Literacy*, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> Schweitzer, Digital Divide, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015.

<sup>168</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/RES/75/202)*, 2020.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> ITU, *Digital inclusion of all*, 2021.

<sup>171</sup> Schweitzer, Digital Divide, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> UN DESA, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, 2020, p. 43.

<sup>174</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring digital development: Facts and Figures 2020*, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>175</sup> UN Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General: Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, 2020, p. 5.

<sup>176</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021, p. 20.

<sup>177</sup> Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, *Working Groups*, 2021.

<sup>178</sup> Schweitzer, Digital Divide, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015.

<sup>179</sup> ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p. 25.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

future jobs will require digital skills.<sup>181</sup> As well, while in many sectors people lost their jobs due to COVID-19, the ICT sector saw employment rise in 2020.<sup>182</sup>

The gender digital divide is an extension of gender inequality that manifests in different forms, such as in digital skills, access to trainings, and use of internet, which stems from gender norms and societal expectations.<sup>183</sup> The gender digital divide is an issue prevalent in every discussion on access to Information and reaching the SDGs with the help of ICTs.<sup>184</sup> Connecting communities to the digital world and digital economy also increases women's opportunities for entrepreneurship, especially women whose non-digital labor would be impacted by social norms and time poverty, and supports their economic growth.<sup>185</sup> Time poverty is the lack of time experienced by women who have disproportionate domestic work and family responsibilities compared to their male peers, and are unable to go to training centers or evening schools, but would rather benefit from flexible e-learning options.<sup>186</sup> Digital skills and devices can also open up doors for them by allowing them to work from home or start their own e-commerce.<sup>187</sup>

The IDPC works on safety and education for journalists and the development of community media, including technical capacities, strengthening democracy and ensuring public access to information.<sup>188</sup> Many private companies address inequalities in ICT skills, such as the "Google Next Billion Users" initiative that focuses on making products accessible and understandable for first time users and to show them the possibilities of using ICTs.<sup>189</sup> It also considers people with different levels of literacy, stability in internet connection and other factors impacting their experience.<sup>190</sup>

### **Empowering Indigenous Peoples through ICTs**

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people from 5,000 groups in the world, making up about 5% of the world's population.<sup>191</sup> Delivering on the 2030 Agenda can help economically and socially empower these communities, as indigenous people currently constitute approximately 15% of the world's extreme poor, and are one of the most discriminated against and excluded groups worldwide.<sup>192</sup> In 2007, the General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which sets a minimum of rights to ensure the "survival, dignity and well-being" of indigenous peoples.<sup>193</sup> However, if indigenous peoples are not included in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and their rights as set in UNDRIP are not respected, they are at risk of further marginalization.<sup>194</sup>

Currently, 40% of the world's 4,000 Indigenous Languages are endangered.<sup>195</sup> Language loss is not only a linguistic issue, but a political one as well, since languages express the traditional knowledge of a people, and for indigenous peoples, their language is often connected to their holistic notion of well-

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<sup>181</sup> UNDP, *Development Future Series - Harnessing Information and Communications Technologies for gender equality in Europe and Central Asia*, 2021, p. 1; ITU & UNESCO, *State of Broadband Report 2020*, 2020, p.27; Chetty et al., *Bridging the digital divide in the G20: skills for the new age*, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> UNDP, *Development Future Series - Harnessing Information and Communications Technologies for gender equality in Europe and Central Asia*, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> UNESCO & EQUALS, *I'd blush if I could: closing gender divides in digital skills through education*, 2019.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Chetty et al., *Bridging the digital divide in the G20: skills for the new age*, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>188</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)*, 2018, p. 19.

<sup>189</sup> Google LLC, *Next Billion Users*, 2021.

<sup>190</sup> Google LLC, *Next Billion Users: Tools for building helpful, inclusive products*, 2021.

<sup>191</sup> UN DESA, *Environment*.

<sup>192</sup> Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development, *Indigenous Views*, 2021.

<sup>193</sup> UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*, 2007.

<sup>194</sup> DeLuca, *What Do the Sustainable Development Goals Mean for Indigenous Peoples?*, 2017.

<sup>195</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO's action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021, p. 1.

being.<sup>196</sup> As a result of this pattern, UNESCO has supported countries in formulating national education policies that are inclusive, and linguistically- and culturally-relevant to indigenous peoples.<sup>197</sup> To preserve, revitalize, and promote indigenous languages, the UN General Assembly declared the Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022 to 2032 in its resolution 74/135 on the “Rights of indigenous peoples” with UNESCO as the lead agency, building off the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019.<sup>198</sup> In this context, ICTs can be used to preserve and teach indigenous languages, thereby empowering indigenous peoples.<sup>199</sup> Communities can also build online dictionaries or language apps depending on their needs.<sup>200</sup> Digital activists promote their languages and cultures on social media.<sup>201</sup> However, sometimes technologies cannot display indigenous languages in writing and appropriate software capacities also need to be developed in conjunction with social programs.<sup>202</sup>

Indigenous peoples, whose community’s first official language is not English, have even less access to information, as currently 61.9% of all webpages are in English.<sup>203</sup> Only 5% of the world’s languages are represented on the internet while the top ten languages making up about 90% of websites.<sup>204</sup> In 2003, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace* and stipulated that all cultures “have access to cyberspace in all languages, including indigenous ones.”<sup>205</sup> The Recommendation acknowledges that that linguistic diversity in cyberspace “can be a determining factor in the development of a knowledge-based society.”<sup>206</sup> Similarly, global equitable connectivity to ICTs and the internet would allow communities to create content in local languages and thus promote linguistic diversity and preservation of endangered languages.<sup>207</sup>

UNESCO’s IFAP program also works to promote multilingualism in cyberspace.<sup>208</sup> Providing information and knowledge in diverse languages is important to ensuring access and stopping marginalization to create more equitable, pluralistic knowledge societies.<sup>209</sup> With IFAP, UNESCO encourages its Member States to include the aspect of language in their digital innovation policies and to themselves encourage linguistic diversity and language preservation in cyberspace as well as the creation of local content in local, minority, and indigenous languages.<sup>210</sup> However, to empower indigenous peoples, the information distributed through ICTs needs to be accessible and understandable.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO’s action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021, p. 9, p. 16.

<sup>197</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO’s engagement with indigenous peoples*, 2018, p. 2.

<sup>198</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO’s action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Rights of indigenous peoples (A/RES/74/135)*, 2019, p. 8.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> First Peoples’ Cultural Council, *Check Before You Tech*, 2020, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO’s action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021, p. 20.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>203</sup> W3Techs, *Usage statistics of content languages for websites*, 2021; UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO’s action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages: within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages*, 2021, pp. 26-27.

<sup>204</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021, p. 11, W3Techs, *Usage statistics of content languages for websites*, 2021.

<sup>205</sup> UNESCO, *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*, 2003.

<sup>206</sup> UNESCO, *Information for All Programme (IFAP)*, 2021.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> UNESCO, *Information for All Programme: consolidating information and knowledge societies; empowering peoples and nations*, 2017.

<sup>209</sup> UNESCO, *Information for All Programme (IFAP)*, 2021.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> UNESCO, *The Right to Information in Times of Crisis*, 2020, p. 4.

## Conclusion

ICTs can accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs and UNESCO's strategic priorities.<sup>212</sup> ICTs can also empower vulnerable and marginalized groups if all stakeholders collaborate to solve issues of inequality in accessibility, digital skills, and content.<sup>213</sup> Otherwise, ICTs will amplify the already existing social divides.<sup>214</sup> Bridging the digital divide in its many facets is a main challenge to realizing the 2030 Agenda.<sup>215</sup> UNESCO operates different programs and initiatives to develop capacities, provide trainings, and encourage and advise Member States in formulating impactful digital policies.<sup>216</sup>

## Further Research

In beginning their research, delegates should ask: How can ICTs support and empower vulnerable societies? How can this same technology harm or hinder progress in these societies, and how can this be mitigated? How do societal norms impact women's access to ICTs and to the education to gain digital skills? How can the digital divide for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and people on the move, such as refugees and migrants, be addressed? What is your Member State's stance on the preservation of indigenous languages, and how can technology be harnessed to achieve this goal? How can UNESCO better channel its partnerships with NGOs, IGOs, and within the UN system to empower other vulnerable groups of societies through ICTs?

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*This report by ITU and UNESCO presents the current state of access to Information and Communication Technologies in differently developed countries. The report examines uneven access between and within countries, current challenges to accessibility, and connectivity status during the COVID-19 crisis. Delegates will find this report useful as it provides many current statistics and connects these with the UNESCO Advocacy Targets. It also presents the Broadband Commission for Development's Agenda for Action with concrete immediate actions recommended to the private sector, governments, the UN, NGOs, and other stakeholders.*

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<sup>212</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 21.

<sup>213</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/RES/75/202)*, 2020.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> ITU, *Digital inclusion of all*, 2021.

<sup>216</sup> UNESCO, *Communication and Information Programme*, 2021; UNESCO, *Information for All Programme: consolidating information and knowledge societies; empowering peoples and nations*, 2017.



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*This report of the United Nations Secretary-General talks about the issues connected with ICTs. The Secretary-General has convened a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation as of 2018, which offers recommendations regarding global connectivity, digital inclusion, and issues regarding human rights and digital security. Delegates will find this source useful to learning about the potential and risks that technology presents, as well as the recommendations the Panel proposes to advance international digital cooperation.*

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## 2. Addressing Gender Disparities and Promoting Gender Equality in Education

*“Sometimes people like to ask me why should girls go to school, why is it important for them. But I think the more important question is why shouldn’t they, why shouldn’t they have this right to go to school.”<sup>217</sup>*

### Introduction

Projections estimate that 11 million girls might permanently drop out of school due to the educational crisis caused by COVID-19.<sup>218</sup> The pandemic presents a significant risk to the gender equality gains made in education in recent decades.<sup>219</sup> However, even before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges of achieving gender equality had been immense, as getting every girl to go to primary school until 2030, a key target of United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (“quality education”), would not be achieved if the pace of progress had remained at the same rate as it had been for the past 25 years.<sup>220</sup> And unfortunately these challenges are not limited to access to education alone.<sup>221</sup> Beyond unequal access to education, issues such as stereotypes in subject choices, stereotypes in textbooks, glass ceiling impacts within education, unequal funding distribution, lack of comprehensive sexual education, and the lack of female educators and academic researchers in educational leadership positions all have an impact on the global gender disparity in education.<sup>222</sup>

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), education is not limited to tradition access to classroom-based schooling, but also refers to sustainable empowerment through technical and vocational training, and health and reproductive rights education.<sup>223</sup> UNESCO regards gender equality as the equality in rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys.<sup>224</sup> Gender equality in education is vital, not only for the people affected but also for their community, country, and world.<sup>225</sup> Education improves the economic prospects of girls: education is key to finding decent work.<sup>226</sup> Girls’ education also reduces the risk of exposure to domestic violence, early and forced marriage, and adolescent pregnancy.<sup>227</sup> It also increases the overall economic well-being of a country.<sup>228</sup> Crucially, the advancement of girls’ education is interlinked with development issues in a broader sense, such as poverty reduction or well-being.<sup>229</sup> Consequently, the developments in girls’ education may have long-term effects on achieving the SDGs as a whole.<sup>230</sup> As education is at the very center of UNESCO’s mandate, educational advancement has been on UNESCO’s agenda since its foundation in 1945.<sup>231</sup> The adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform*

<sup>217</sup> Malala Yousafzai, *Nobel Lecture*, 2014.

<sup>218</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> UN DESA, *SDG Goals: Goal 4*, 2021; UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>221</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021; UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 13-21; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979, art. 10; UNESCO, *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan: 2014-2021, 2019 revision*, 2019, pp. 10-11.

<sup>222</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 1-4, 48-49.

<sup>223</sup> UNESCO, *Education transforms lives*, 2021.

<sup>224</sup> UNESCO, *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan: 2014-2021, 2019 revision*, 2019, pp. 10-11.

<sup>225</sup> UNESCO, *Keeping Girls in the Picture*, 2021.

<sup>226</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> UNESCO, *Keeping Girls in the Picture*, 2021.

<sup>229</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Constitution*, 1945, art. 1.

for Action in 1995 marked the starting point of addressing gender equality in education for UNESCO and since 2007, gender equality constitutes one of UNESCO's two global priorities, alongside the development of the African continent.<sup>232</sup> Under this global priority, UNESCO aims to integrate a gender equality perspective in all its policies, programs and processes.<sup>233</sup>

### **International and Regional Framework**

Education and gender equality are enshrined in the human rights agenda of the UN.<sup>234</sup> Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) stresses that “[e]veryone has the right to education,” establishing education as a fundamental human right.<sup>235</sup> In 1979, the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) was adopted, which specifies women’s rights and serves as the fundamental international convention for the advancement of women’s rights.<sup>236</sup> Article 10 of CEDAW highlights the rights of women in the field of education.<sup>237</sup> It calls for equal conditions for access to studies, career and vocational guidance, access to continuing education programs for adults, access to appropriate health and reproductive health education, and the elimination of any gendered stereotypes of professional roles.<sup>238</sup> Another central international framework document is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), which emphasizes the right of all children to have access to education, and calls for international cooperation in the advancement of gender-equal education in article 28.<sup>239</sup>

In 1995, the *Beijing Platform for Action* (BPfA) was launched as the central global agenda for women's empowerment at the Fourth Conference for Women.<sup>240</sup> It is generally considered the most progressive landmark document for advancing women’s rights.<sup>241</sup> The Beijing Platform identified inequalities in access to education and noted it as one of the critical areas of concern.<sup>242</sup> On the 25th anniversary of the BPfA, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) began reviewing the accomplishments and challenges ahead on gender equality.<sup>243</sup> In 2021, the UN Women Generation Equality Forum convened governments, corporations, and change-makers to define and announce investments and policies for the next five years.<sup>244</sup> Their efforts culminated in launching the *Global Acceleration Plan* (2021), a road map for gender equality aiming to fulfill the promises and goals of the BPfA.<sup>245</sup> In this Plan, the importance of education for girls and women is firmly emphasized.<sup>246</sup>

Advancing gender equality in education also represents a crucial element of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), which constitutes a set of universal goals to be accomplished by 2030

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<sup>232</sup> World Education Forum, *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*, 2015; UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. vii; UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020, pp. 7 & 9.

<sup>233</sup> UNESCO, *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan: 2014-2021, 2019 revision*, 2019, p. 6.

<sup>234</sup> UNESCO, *Intersection between Gender Equality and Quality Education in South-East Europe and selected Mediterranean*, 2020; UNESCO, *Right to Education*, 2021; UN OHCHR, *Women’s Human Rights and Gender Equality*, 2021.

<sup>235</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

<sup>236</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

<sup>240</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

<sup>241</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995; UN Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome*, 2015.

<sup>242</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

<sup>243</sup> UN Women, *Celebrating 25 years of championing women’s rights*, 2019.

<sup>244</sup> UN Women, *Generation Equality Forum*, 2021.

<sup>245</sup> Generation Equality Forum, *Global Acceleration Plan*, 2021; UN Women, *Generation Equality Forum*, 2021.

<sup>246</sup> Generation Equality Forum, *Global Acceleration Plan*, 2021, pp. 57, 113.

and serves as the framework document for the UN's current work.<sup>247</sup> In particular, SDG 4 ("quality education") and SDG 5 ("gender equality") are relevant to addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality in education.<sup>248</sup> More specifically, target 4.5 of SDG 4 aims to eliminate gender disparities in education.<sup>249</sup> Additionally, gender equality in education indirectly supports the other SDGs, such as SDG 1 ("no poverty") or SDG 3 ("good health and well-being").<sup>250</sup>

In connection with the establishment of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), the *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* (2015) was launched during the World Education Forum.<sup>251</sup> The *Incheon Declaration* stresses the importance of gender equality in its preamble.<sup>252</sup> The Declaration constitutes a roadmap for the advancement of SDG 4 until 2030, while also identifying strategies to advance equality in education.<sup>253</sup> The *Incheon Declaration* also highlights the mandated leadership role of UNESCO in leading and coordinating *Education 2030*.<sup>254</sup> The goal of advancing gender equality is also reflected in regional frameworks, such as in articles 14 and 23 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* (CFR) of the European Union (EU) (2000) and article 12 of the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003).<sup>255</sup>

### **Role of the International System**

In 2019, UNESCO launched its strategy *From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2019-2025*.<sup>256</sup> In this document, UNESCO identifies three thematic priorities: (1) improving access to reliable data on gender equality, (2) advancing legal and policy planning frameworks to promote girls' right to quality education, and (3) advancing teaching and learning practices to empower girls.<sup>257</sup> The strategy provides guidance for all of UNESCO's programs and actions and aims at promoting a coherent and collective approach in the field of educational gender equality.<sup>258</sup> In 2014, UNESCO launched its *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan*, an operational framework for implementing UNESCO's priority of gender equality between 2014 and 2021.<sup>259</sup> The 2019 review of the Action Plan calls for pursuing a gender equality based approach in all areas of education, as well as increasing the number of gender-transformative activities and the financial and human resources committed to tackling gender-related issues, in order to meet the Plan's targets by its end date.<sup>260</sup>

One central pillar of UNESCO's work is raising awareness and advocacy.<sup>261</sup> In 2021, UNESCO launched the "#LearningNeverStops" campaign focusing on advancing education in times of COVID-19.<sup>262</sup> Another central field of UNESCO's work is monitoring and reporting through the annual Global Education

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<sup>247</sup> UN DESA, *The 17 Goals*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>248</sup> UN DESA, *SDG Goals: Goal 4*, 2021; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *SDG Goals: Goal 5*, 2021.

<sup>249</sup> UN DESA, *The 17 Goals*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> UN DESA, *SDG Goals: Goal 1*, 2021; UN DESA, *SDG Goals: Goal 3*, 2021.

<sup>251</sup> World Education Forum, *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*, 2015.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 2015.

<sup>255</sup> European Commission, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 2012; African Union, *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, 2003.

<sup>256</sup> UNESCO, *From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2019-2025*, 2019.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>259</sup> UNESCO, *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan: 2014-2021, 2019 revision*, 2019.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>261</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO's Commitment to girls' education and achieving gender equality in and through education*, 2021.

<sup>262</sup> UNESCO, *Keeping girls in the picture*, 2021.



Monitoring (GEM) reports.<sup>263</sup> GEM reports evaluate the developments in achieving SDG 4, thereby constituting a foundation for evidence-based advocacy for promoting quality education.<sup>264</sup> The 2021 GEM report tracked and reviewed the efforts in gender equality in education since 1995.<sup>265</sup> It concludes that gender equality in education has improved, particularly in enabling access to education, but there is still a long road ahead.<sup>266</sup> In 2015 and 2021, UNESCO launched the UNESCO Science Report (USR), pointing out inequalities in science-related fields.<sup>267</sup> The most recent report highlights that the impact of the glass ceiling are still present in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, which continue to be male-dominated.<sup>268</sup> Additionally, it points out the lack of data on gender inequality in research.<sup>269</sup> The report recommends that men and boys act as advocates for gender equality, and that education should continue to deconstruct gender stereotypes, which continue to hinder advancement of women and propagate gender-based violence.<sup>270</sup> In this context, UNESCO's "Men4GenderEquality Initiative" seeks to engage men and boys alongside women and girls in the global gender equality movement.<sup>271</sup>

Even though gender equality in education is at the center of UNESCO's mandate, other UN entities aim to promote gender equality in education as well, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).<sup>272</sup> In its *Gender Action Plan (GAP)* (2017), UNICEF stresses the following targeted themes: gender equality in access, gender equality in teaching, and girls' secondary education, whereby the latter is classified as a priority.<sup>273</sup> In reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF launched the report *Reimagining Girls' Education: Solutions to Keep Girls Learning in Emergencies* in 2021, which provides guidance on best practices to support the learning outcomes of girls during emergencies.<sup>274</sup> Similarly, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the "Learning Data Compact" in 2021, aimed at tackling data gaps that preclude many countries from monitoring gender equality progress in education.<sup>275</sup> Together, they also launched the Mission to Recover Education 2021 initiative as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>276</sup> UN Women also takes a leading role in reviewing the progress made in implementing the BPfA and consequently influences UNESCO's work in gender equality in education.<sup>277</sup> In this context, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), supported by UN Women, is the principal global intergovernmental body dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, and continues to champion the importance of education the multiple facets of its work.<sup>278</sup>

Outside of the UN system, the World Bank and the NGO The Malala Fund finance several projects relevant to gender equality in education.<sup>279</sup> Likewise, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) started its own OECD Gender Initiative that monitors the progress made through data and analysis, and provides best practices for achieving greater equality.<sup>280</sup> Most notably, the OECD

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<sup>263</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020.

<sup>264</sup> UNESCO *The Global Education Monitoring Report, in brief*, 2020.

<sup>265</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>267</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO research show women career scientists still face gender bias*, 2021; UNESCO, *UNESCO Science Report: The race against time for smarter development*, 2021; UNESCO, *UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030*, 2015; UNESCO, *To be smart, the digital revolution will need to be inclusive: excerpt from the UNESCO science report*, 2021.

<sup>268</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO research show women career scientists still face gender bias*, 2021.

<sup>269</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO Science Report: The race against time for smarter development*, 2021, p. 19.

<sup>270</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020, pp. 9, 55-56.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>272</sup> UNICEF, *Gender Equality*.

<sup>273</sup> UNICEF, *Gender Action Plan 2018-2021*, 2017.

<sup>274</sup> UNICEF, *Reimagining Girls' Education*, 2021.

<sup>275</sup> UNICEF, *Learning Data Compact*, 2021.

<sup>276</sup> UNICEF, *Mission: Recovering Education in 2021*, 2021.

<sup>277</sup> UN Women, *Commission on the Status of Women*.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> World Bank Group, *Projects*, 2020; Malala Fund, *Malala Fund*, 2021.

<sup>280</sup> OECD, *Gender Equality: Ongoing Work*, 2021.

regularly publishes the rankings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).<sup>281</sup> The PISA results are an indicator for learning outcomes worldwide and constitute a basis for policymakers.<sup>282</sup> For instance, the PISA results play a central role in the EU's policymaking, insofar as they constitute the basis and reevaluation of the *Strategic framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training* (ET 2020).<sup>283</sup> The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is also a significant civil society organization movement promoting the advancement of gender equality in education by pressuring governments and the international community to act on the issue through advocacy, research, and campaigns.<sup>284</sup>

Regional organizations are also committed to tackling this important topic.<sup>285</sup> The Council of Europe identified combating gender stereotypes in education as one of the priorities of the *Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality 2018-2023*.<sup>286</sup> Under the Strategy, it launched a compilation of good practices to promote a stereotype-free education.<sup>287</sup> The African Union (AU) and its International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (CIEFFA) have also launched a High-Level Dialogue on Gender Equality and the "Education in Africa" platform for Member States, development partners, and civil society organizations to discuss the specific challenges Africa faces, such as providing secure schools for girls in fragile and conflict-affected states.<sup>288</sup>

### **Promoting girls' and women's access to education**

As of 2018, 258 million children did not have access to primary education, with 5.5 million more girls than boys not having access to primary school education.<sup>289</sup> Countries most affected by this disproportionate gender inequality issue are in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>290</sup> Even though the level dropped from 65 million girls out of primary school in 1998 to around 32 million in 2007, no substantial progress has been made since then.<sup>291</sup> As of 2018, around 32 million girls are still out of school, and an even higher gender disparity can be observed in secondary and tertiary education.<sup>292</sup> In 15% of all countries, a significant gender gap exists in secondary schools, and in 21% of all countries, a significant gender gap exist in tertiary schools.<sup>293</sup> Even if the primary school enrolment rates rise, it is still a challenge to keep girls in the education system.<sup>294</sup> According to UNESCO's World Inequality Database in Education (WIDE), the most impoverished girls spend less than two years in school on average in several developing countries.<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, recent projections estimate that 11 million girls might not return to school due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>296</sup> Conflict has also been shown to have adverse impacts on girls' education, for example in Afghanistan.<sup>297</sup> As of September 2021, due to the assumption of power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Afghan girls are at risk of losing access to education.<sup>298</sup> Despite the progress in the enrollment rate of

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<sup>281</sup> OECD, *PISA*, 2021.

<sup>282</sup> OECD, *PISA 2018 results*, 2019.

<sup>283</sup> European Commission, *PISA 2018 and the EU*, 2019.

<sup>284</sup> Global Campaign for Education, *Campaign for Education*, 2020; Global Campaign for Education, *Strategic Plan 2019-2022*, 2019.

<sup>285</sup> Council of Europe, *Gender Equality: Education*, 2021; African Union, *4<sup>th</sup> High-Level Dialogue on Gender Equality and Education in Africa*, 2020.

<sup>286</sup> Council of Europe, *Gender Equality: Education*, 2021.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> African Union, *4<sup>th</sup> High-Level Dialogue on Gender Equality and Education in Africa*, 2020; AU CIEFFA, *No education future for vulnerable girls unless guns are silenced*, 2020.

<sup>289</sup> UN DESA, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, 2020, p. 32.

<sup>290</sup> UNESCO, *World Inequality Database on Education*.

<sup>291</sup> UNICEF, *A new era for girls – taking stock of 25 years of progress*, 2020, p. 11.

<sup>292</sup> UNICEF, *Gender and Education*, 2020.

<sup>293</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO sounds a warning on what is at stake for education in Afghanistan*, 2021.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

girls in schools over the last 20 years, Afghanistan still has one of the largest gender gaps in education the world with only 37% of teenage girls demonstrating sufficient literacy skills.<sup>299</sup>

Globally, educational gender inequality tends to also intersect with other socio-economic and political disadvantages, which exacerbates the risk of exclusion from education.<sup>300</sup> The Malala Fund estimates that half of all refugee girls will not go back to school after COVID-19.<sup>301</sup> Particularly affected are vulnerable girls, such as the most economically marginalized, girls in conflict areas, indigenous girls, or pregnant girls.<sup>302</sup> Furthermore, there are great disparities between rural and urban education attendance levels for girls in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>303</sup> According to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by 22 years of age in the US, which demonstrates that this is an issue that impacts developed and developing countries alike.<sup>304</sup>

Various projects have been launched to support specific communities in advancing gender equality in education.<sup>305</sup> In 2018, in the context of the “Better Life, Better Future” initiative, UNESCO launched a project explicitly targeting indigenous girls in Guatemala.<sup>306</sup> The objective was to strengthen national policies culminating in a *National Policy of Educational Equality for Women* (2019), which was co-created by the Guatemalan government, civil society, and the UN system.<sup>307</sup> On a local level, two UNESCO “Malala Centers for Education” opened in Guatemala, with more than 650,000 indigenous girls expected to benefit from the project.<sup>308</sup> Likewise, in 2021, UNESCO joined the All-Africa Students Union (AASU), one of the largest student movements in Africa, to support pregnant girls in reenrolling in the educational systems in their respective country.<sup>309</sup>

To accelerate action towards gender equality, political will and a system-wide transformation is needed.<sup>310</sup> Even if an increase in laws and policies for gender equality in education can be observed, gender equality still often fails in practice.<sup>311</sup> Despite improvements in educational offers, societal norms that impede access to education still need to be effectively addressed.<sup>312</sup>

### ***Looking at Gender Equality Beyond Access to School***

Gendered stereotypes about subject and career choices in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are widespread.<sup>313</sup> These prejudices are not limited to primary education but also affect post-secondary education.<sup>314</sup> For instance, girls are less likely to pursue jobs in STEM in OECD

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<sup>299</sup> UNESCO, *The right to education: what’s at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review*, 2021.

<sup>300</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>301</sup> UNHCR, *Coming Together for Refugee Education*, 2020, p. 5.

<sup>302</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. vii & 1.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>304</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *About Teen Pregnancy*, 2021.

<sup>305</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>308</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls’ Right to Education*, 2021.

<sup>309</sup> UNESCO, *Youth and students across Africa take together action for girls’ education through UNESCO’s campaign*, 2021.

<sup>310</sup> UNESCO, *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025*, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>311</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 2.

<sup>312</sup> UNESCO, *Gender equality in education: Digging beyond the obvious*, 2021.

<sup>313</sup> UNESCO, *New UNESCO report sheds light on gender inequality in education*, 2017.

<sup>314</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 15-16.

countries.<sup>315</sup> Only 14% of top-performing girls in STEM subjects choose a career path in the STEM field, compared to 26% of top-performing boys.<sup>316</sup> There is also a high gender disparity in research: only around 30% of researchers in science are female.<sup>317</sup> In ICT studies, the number of female students is below 25%.<sup>318</sup> Similarly, women are more likely to pursue so-called "pink collar" jobs, or jobs stereotypically understood as being held primarily by women, such as teaching, childcare, and nursing.<sup>319</sup> These prevailing patterns result in a lack of female role models and decision-makers in STEM fields, which in turn creates a barrier for girls in school to develop essential skills for future careers in STEM subjects.<sup>320</sup> Highschool and career counselors as well as textbooks often inadvertently promote these stereotypes in both developed and developing countries.<sup>321</sup>

In recent years, UNESCO has increasingly focused its activities on the issue of gender stereotypes in education, and initiated projects tackling this issue, including in partnerships with the private sector.<sup>322</sup> In 2021, in cooperation with Microsoft, UNESCO held a virtual Artificial Intelligence (AI) hackathon aiming to widen girls' understanding of AI.<sup>323</sup> It brought together secondary school girls from 11 countries in Africa, the Arab States, and Europe.<sup>324</sup> Since 1998, UNESCO and the L'Oreal Foundation have supported women scientists by raising awareness and sponsoring female researchers in various fields, including quantum physics, chemical engineering, and molecular biology, among others.<sup>325</sup>

Another central dimension of gender equality within education is access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).<sup>326</sup> Access to CSE for all students is essential to promoting understanding of and respect for student's gender identities, and effective CSE is linked to lowered numbers of early pregnancies and gender-based violence.<sup>327</sup> Educational institutions must also be places where girls feel safe.<sup>328</sup> Both the risk of violence on the commute to school and a lack of menstrual hygiene and sanitation facilities constitute significant barriers that often lead to girls missing class.<sup>329</sup> Over 335 million girls that attend primary or secondary education lack facilities that are essential for menstrual hygiene.<sup>330</sup> Together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other relevant stakeholders, UNESCO developed *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* in 2018.<sup>331</sup> This technical guidance document aims to assist relevant state authorities in the development of CSE and the provision of appropriate

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<sup>315</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 2.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>317</sup> UNESCO, *Women in Science*, 2021.

<sup>318</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021.

<sup>319</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021; UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>320</sup> UNICEF, *A new era for girls – taking stock of 25 years of progress*, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>321</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 3 & 35.

<sup>322</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020.

<sup>323</sup> UNESCO, *Girls design artificial intelligence solutions during virtual hackathon held by Microsoft and UNESCO*, 2021.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020, p. 66.

<sup>326</sup> UNESCO, *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in through education 2019-2025*, 2019, p. 11; UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 54-55.

<sup>327</sup> UNESCO, *Comprehensive sexuality education: A foundation for life and love campaign*, 2018.

<sup>328</sup> UNICEF, *Girls' Education*.

<sup>329</sup> UNESCO, *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in through education 2019-2025*, 2019, p. 16.

<sup>330</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 5.

<sup>331</sup> UNESCO et al., *International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach*, 2018.



support to female students.<sup>332</sup> It also presents an advocacy and accountability tool for NGOs.<sup>333</sup> Furthermore, UNESCO supports several countries in implementing national policies that tackle school related gender-based violence.<sup>334</sup> Despite this progress, CSE and menstrual hygiene are topics that are often considered taboo, and therefore lack general awareness and disaggregated data.<sup>335</sup>

## Conclusion

Achieving gender equality in education has many dimensions.<sup>336</sup> The main task of UNESCO is to provide global and regional leadership in advancing gender equality in education.<sup>337</sup> UNESCO can rely on numerous declarations and frameworks as gender equality in education is deeply enshrined in human rights documents, yet practical and programmatic challenges and barriers remain.<sup>338</sup> Despite UNESCO's initiatives, projects, and significant progress over the last twenty-five years, there is still global need for improvement in terms of access to education.<sup>339</sup> Statistical averages alone cannot fully capture the continuing gender disparity in access to education.<sup>340</sup> Major challenges such as ensuring access to education for girls from marginalized groups, and the negative impact of COVID-19 on gender inequality in education, remain.<sup>341</sup> It is crucial that gender equality in education is not limited to access, but extends to various dimensions.<sup>342</sup> Key challenges remaining for UNESCO to tackle include a lack of prioritization from stakeholders in addressing gender disparities, stigma around open discussion of girls' needs in education, and deeply enshrined patriarchal social norms.<sup>343</sup>

## Further Research

Delegates should start their research by considering the following points: How can UNESCO create innovative approaches to overcome the current stagnation in gender-equal access to education? How can UNESCO succeed in providing educational access for disadvantaged and marginalized groups? How can the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic be mitigated? How can UNESCO overcome the existing gendered prejudices in career options for women and girls? How can existing stigma be reduced and CSE normalized? How can UNESCO cooperate with existing and new partners to accelerate action to tackle gender equality in education? How can UNESCO prevent backsliding on this important issue through long-term strategies?

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<sup>332</sup> UNESCO et al., *International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach*, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>334</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*, 2020, p. 57.

<sup>335</sup> Council of Europe, *Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society*, 2021; World Economic Forum, *There are 3 barriers blocking good menstrual hygiene for all women. Here's how we overcome them*, 2019; UNESCO, *Cracking the code: girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)*, 2017, p. 72.

<sup>336</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979, art. 10.

<sup>337</sup> UNESCO, *Education transforms lives*, 2021.

<sup>338</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

<sup>339</sup> UNESCO, *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*, 2021; UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>340</sup> UNESCO, *From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2019-2025*, 2019, p. 6.

<sup>341</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. vii & 1-6; UNESCO, *From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through education 2019-2025*, 2019, p. 6.

<sup>342</sup> UNESCO, *Global education monitoring report 2020: a new generation – 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020, pp. 1-4.

<sup>343</sup> UNESCO, *From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2019-2025*, 2019, pp. 6-7.

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*This document contains UNESCO's strategy on this topic for 2019-2025. In this document, UNESCO notes its recommendations on the need for better data, better legal, policy and planning frameworks and better teaching and learning practices. This Strategy also proposes a specific action plan for future progress, which delegates may find useful to developing their own research and proposals on this issue.*

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020). *UNESCO and the promise of gender equality: key actions of 2018 and 2019*. Retrieved 25 June 2021 from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372716>

*In this report, delegates will find a compilation of UNESCO's significant projects and actions within the last years on the issue of gender equality. This report succinctly summarizes UNESCO's ongoing projects, which will be a useful starting point for delegates to better understand the diverse work of UNESCO on gender equality in education. There is also useful discussion on the work of the Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education, which will provide necessary background on this topic.*

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). *#HerEducationOurFuture: Keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis – the latest facts on gender equality in education*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375707>

*This factsheet presents the latest data on gender equity in education. It also considers the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on this issue. It gives an excellent overview of the various dimensions of gender equality in education and provides introductory statistics and data on the topic. Furthermore, it illustrates why the advancement of gender equality in education is so significant for both the women affected and society as a whole. Thus, this overview is particularly well suited to introduce delegates to this important topic.*

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

*The 2030 Agenda is the central document framing all of the UN's current work and priorities. It establishes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and respective targets. It is worth looking at the SDGs to see the central goals on which UNESCO's work is based, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 5. In addition to this framework document, annual reports are published that review the recent actions and developments for each SDG, which will be useful for delegates to see progress, or lack of, on the issue of gender inequality in education.*

World Education Forum. (2015). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>

*The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015) constitutes an essential document for the advancement of gender equality in education since it serves as a roadmap for the advancement of SDG 4. The Declaration identifies relevant targets and indicators as well as several strategies and implementation modalities to advance education. It calls for gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools, among other recommendations. Delegates should fully understand this strategy to understand UNESCO's priorities and vision for advancing education until 2030.*

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