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UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Background Guide 2026

Written by Anabel Kummer, Judith Beck, Nour Abd Eldayem, and Holiday O'Bryan



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2026 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). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staffers. This year's committee staff are: Director Nour Abd Eldayem and Assistant Director Anabel Kummer (Conference A), and Director Holiday O'Bryan and Assistant Director Judith Beck (Conference B). Nour works as a Cybersecurity Consultant. She holds an M.Sc. in Advanced Cybersecurity from King's College London and a B.Sc. in Computer Science from the American University in Cairo. Anabel holds a master's degree in physics from the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg and currently researches for her doctoral studies on the history of science and science diplomacy. Holiday is a first-year PhD student at the UT Austin Jackson School of Geosciences and holds a BA in Geology and Political Science from Macalester College. Judith holds a Bachelor's in Economics and Business from the University of Tübingen and pursues a Master's in General Management. She currently completes her exchange semester at Université Laval, Québec. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretaries-General Alliyah Edwards (Conference A) and Mariana G. Marañón Laguna (Conference B).

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Safeguarding Education in Conflict and Post-Disaster Contexts
2. Promoting Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

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 bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit a Position Paper by 11:59 PM ET on 1 March 2026 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:

- The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which 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.
- The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes 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 this committee, please contact the Deputy Secretaries-General at dsg.ny@nmun.org.

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

Nour Abd Eldayem, Director
Anabel Kummer, Assistant Director
Conference A

Holiday O'Bryan, Director
Judith Beck, Assistant Director
Conference B



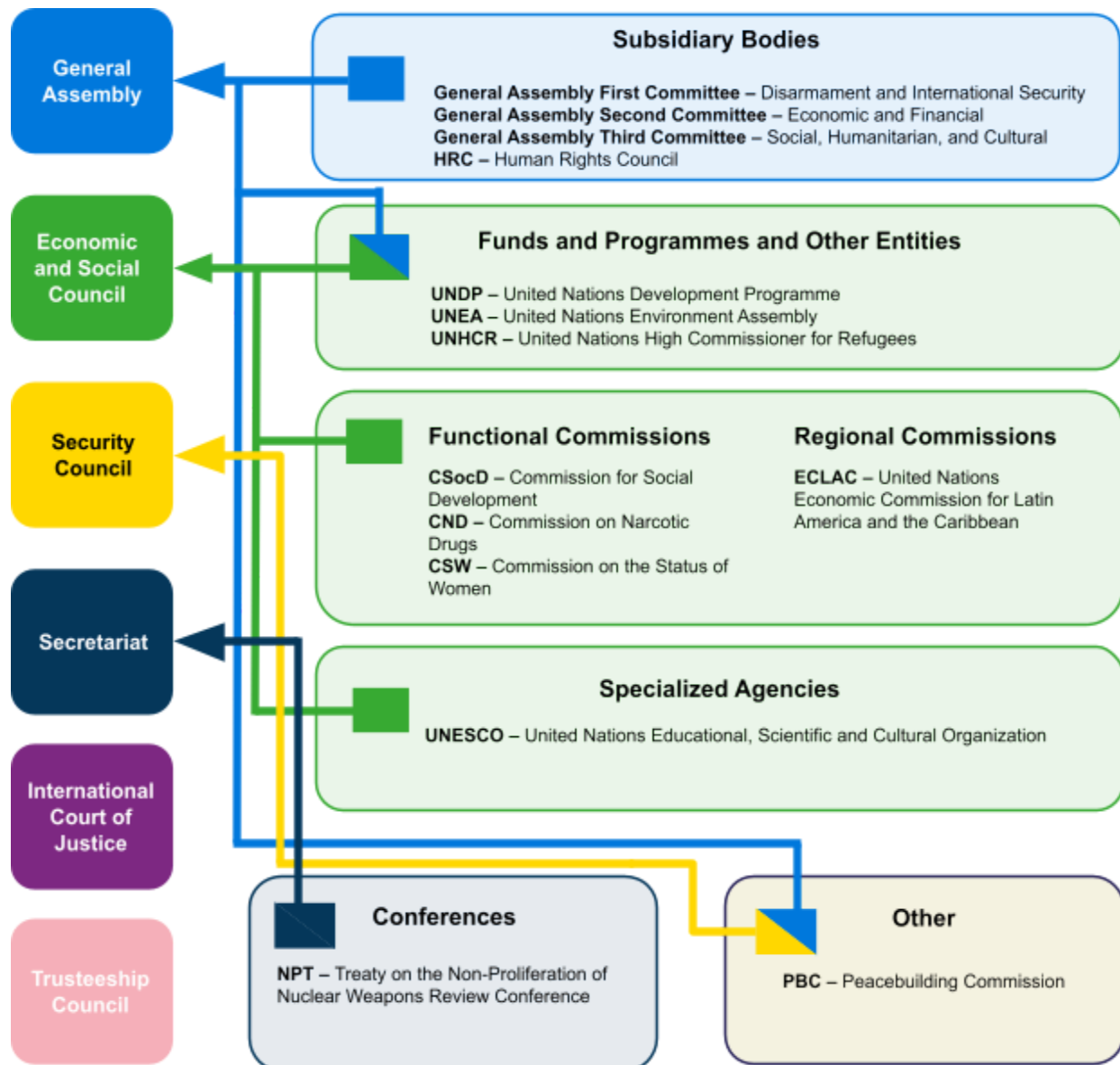
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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the United Nations system simulated at NMUN•NY. It shows where each committee “sits” within the system to demonstrate 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 United Nations system.





Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency that coordinates with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ Although it is financially and structurally independent from the United Nations, UNESCO works closely with several United Nations entities to promote common goals, including peace and security, and social and economic development.² Per 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.³ Among these are the *Convention Against Discrimination in Education* (1960), the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* (1978), the *ICT Competency Framework for Teachers* (2018), the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (2019), and the *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (2022).⁴

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

UNESCO's mandate is derived from Article 1, paragraph 3 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), and is fully defined by the *UNESCO Constitution* (1945).⁵ UNESCO is tasked to promote collaboration among Member States in the fields of education, science, and culture to develop and maintain peace, the rule of law, and mutual respect.⁶ 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."⁷ UNESCO plays a significant role in coordinating international conventions and setting standards in the areas of education, culture, and science.⁸

Whilst the following list is not exhaustive, the mandate of UNESCO can be summarized as:

- UNESCO **will generally**: make policy recommendations to other bodies and Member States in the fields within its mandate; hold international conferences to deliberate issues and set standards; provide expert research and consultation to the primary organs of the United Nations system and synergize its work with other United Nations bodies through ECOSOC; work with other entities and organizations to implement programs in matters related to education, science, culture, communication, and

¹ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2025-26*. 2025. p. 333.

² United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. art. 63.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Basic Texts: 2016 edition*. 2016.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO (ERI/2010/WS/2)*. 2010. p. 37; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Convention of Higher Education*. N.d.

⁵ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 1; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. p. 5.

⁶ Ibid. Art. V, Art. I, para. 1.

⁷ Conference of Allied Ministers of Education. *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO (ECO/CONF./29)*. 1945. p. 1.

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Implementation of standard-setting instruments*. 2015.



information; maintain international standards and records of cultural, natural, and intangible heritage; provide support to Member States in protecting items of cultural significance, improving their education systems, and collaborating in scientific fields.⁹

- UNESCO **will not generally**: set norms and standards in fields other than education, science, and culture; demand action from Member States and other entities on policy development and implementation, typically encouraging and helping facilitate partnerships with organizations instead; request specific action from Member States and other entities on the promotion of access to education, cultural heritage, and scientific programs but instead provide frameworks and policy recommendations.¹⁰

Outlined in its *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029*, UNESCO further serves as: an international forum for ideas, innovation, and policy advice in education, science, culture, and communication and information; a global center for policy analysis, monitoring, benchmarking, and the development and analysis of data and statistics; a standard-setter that supports their implementation; a facilitator and catalyst for international and regional cooperation.¹¹ UNESCO also plays a significant strategic oversight role with respect to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Agenda 2030) (2015).¹²

Governance, Funding, and Structure

UNESCO is a legally independent organization that entered a relationship with the United Nations in 1945.¹³ UNESCO is governed by its own set of rules, including its organization structure, budget, and membership, being independent from the United Nations.¹⁴ UNESCO currently has 194 Member States and 12 Associate Members.¹⁵ Two major bodies, the General Conference and Executive Board, govern the work of UNESCO.¹⁶

The General Conference, consisting of all UNESCO Member States, meets every two years.¹⁷ The General Conference is primarily responsible for: electing the 58 members of the Executive Board, who serve four-year terms; deliberating on and approving recommendations from the Executive Board; summoning international conferences; considering reports from Member States; and advising United Nations organizations on matters of education, science, and culture.¹⁸ The General Conference may also establish special and technical committees, create subsidiary organs, and invite observers on the recommendation of the Executive Board.¹⁹ Every two years, the Executive Board: prepares the biennial

⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO (ERI/2010/WS/2)*. 2010. p. 32.

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)*. 2022.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Agreements with Specialized Agencies (A/RES/50(I))*. 1945.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Member States*. N.d.

¹⁶ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2025-26*. 2025. p. 333.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. Arts. III-VI.

¹⁹ Ibid. Arts. III-VI.



agenda for, submits policy recommendations to, and implements decisions adopted by the General Conference; recommends the admission of new Members; nominates the Director-General; and reviews the budget.²⁰ Additionally, the Executive Board may advise the primary organs of the United Nations 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.²¹

²⁰ Ibid. 1945. Art. V; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Executive Board in Brief*. N.d.

²¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. Art. V.



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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)*. 2022. Retrieved 25 October 2025 from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083>



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United Nations, General Assembly. *Agreements with Specialized Agencies (A/RES/50(I))*. 1945. Retrieved 25 October 2025 from: [https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/50\(I\)](https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/50(I))



1. Safeguarding Education in Conflict and Post-Disaster Contexts

Introduction

Conflict and disasters disrupt education systems and the communities they serve.²² While disasters are defined as severe disruptions to communities or societies as a result of hazardous events, Conflict in this context can refer to declared war, protracted armed confrontations, and civil unrest.²³ Both disasters and conflicts often lead to human, material, economic, and environmental losses and impacts.²⁴ While the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) does not formally recognize natural disasters, it defines hurricanes, earthquakes, or floods as natural hazards, which only become disasters when they impact vulnerable communities (those in high-risk areas or lacking preparedness measures).²⁵ Disaster and conflict cause similar outcomes and may damage school infrastructure, reduce teacher availability, harm mental and physical well-being, and exacerbate existing inequalities.²⁶ Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies aim to prevent new disaster risks and to reduce existing risks, thereby contributing to resilience building and sustainable development.²⁷ Further, DRR in education seeks to strengthen response and recovery efforts directed towards education systems.²⁸ Crisis-sensitive education planning and DRR strategies can help to strengthen learner, teacher, and community resilience and ensure continuity of education.²⁹

Education is a core part of a robust humanitarian response to conflict and disaster.³⁰ Education systems provide safety, psychosocial support, and access to food and healthcare in addition to learning spaces for children and adults.³¹ These create structure and stability during and after a crisis, mitigating the physical and social effects of conflict.³² Abilities developed in school, such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills, help both children and adults during times of crisis.³³ Specialized education on HIV/AIDS prevention, fire, water, and landmine safety, and peacebuilding offers life-saving information and a chance

²² Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. *EiE and Crisis-Sensitive Planning*. 2024.

²³ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction*; International Armed Conflict. 2016; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction; Non-International Armed Conflict*. 2008; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction; Civil Unrest*. 2000; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction; Disaster*. 2017.

²⁴ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction; Disaster*. 2017.

²⁵ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *No Natural Disasters*. N.d; World Health Organization. *Vulnerability and Vulnerable Populations; Community Disaster Risk Management*. N.d.

²⁶ Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. *EiE and Crisis-Sensitive Planning*. 2024.

²⁷ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction; Disaster Risk Reduction*. 2017.

²⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific. *Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in education: an imperative for education policymakers*. 2011.

²⁹ Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. *EiE and Crisis-Sensitive Planning*. 2024.

³⁰ Smith. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Education and Conflict*. 2011. p. 1.

³¹ Ibid. p. 1.

³² Ibid. p. 1.

³³ Ibid. p. 2.



to build disaster resilience.³⁴ Education can also promote political and social participation, active citizenship, and global awareness.³⁵ Per the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 72 million children in crisis-affected Member States do not attend school, and an additional 127 million may attend school but never reach basic proficiency in reading and writing.³⁶ Further, according to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), without access to education, children and adults are more vulnerable to future instability, poverty, and violence, and may lack the skills needed to contribute to resilience-building and redevelopment.³⁷ Investment in education systems is not only a humanitarian necessity, but a foundation for long-term peace and recovery.³⁸ Education empowers individuals to rebuild their lives and communities with agency and dignity.³⁹ Ensuring consistent and stable access to learning during times of crisis helps lay the groundwork for a more stable future.⁴⁰

International and Regional Framework

Education is recognized as a fundamental human right.⁴¹ Education as a universal human right was codified in Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and in Article 13 (I) of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966).⁴² Both emphasize education's role in the development of the human personality, fostering respect for human rights, tolerance, and supporting the work of the United Nations in maintaining peace.⁴³ Education is a tool for breaking the cycle of poverty, reducing inequality, and achieving sustainable development.⁴⁴

General Assembly resolution 64/290 (2010) on "The right to education in emergency situations" establishes an international framework for a safe and protective educational environment during conflict and in post-emergency situations.⁴⁵ This resolution guides Member States in aligning their policies with human rights obligations and calls on all Member States to criminalize attacks on schools by recognizing them as potential war crimes under international law.⁴⁶ It further highlights the need to ensure that education in emergency contexts addresses the gender-specific needs of girls, noting their heightened

³⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

³⁵ Pillsbury. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *Minimum educational standards for education in emergencies*. 2004. p. 1.

³⁶ Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. *EiE and Crisis-Sensitive Planning*. 2024.

³⁷ Pillsbury. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *Minimum educational standards for education in emergencies*. 2004. p. 1.

³⁸ Education Cannot Wait. *Delivering Quality Education to Children and Youth Left Furthest Behind In Crisis; A Case for Investment*. 2021. p. 2.

³⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global citizenship and peace education*. N.d.

⁴⁰ Pillsbury, A. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *Minimum educational standards for education in emergencies*. 2004. p. 1.

⁴¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217/A (XXVI))*. 1948.

⁴² United Nations, General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217/A (XXVI))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XIII))*. 1966.

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XIII))*. 1966.

⁴⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The right to education*. N.d.

⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The right to education in emergency situations (A/RES/64/290)*. 2010. pp. 2-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 2.



vulnerability to gender-based violence.⁴⁷ Safe education settings offer structured environments where girls are more likely to be protected.⁴⁸ The resolution further stresses the integration of disaster risk and safety measures into every stage of educational facility development by using the INEE Minimum Standards for Education.⁴⁹ Their purpose is to enhance the quality, accessibility, and accountability of education in crises by providing nineteen standards with practical guidance for preparedness, response, and recovery across diverse emergency contexts.⁵⁰ For example, Standards 5, 8, and 9 emphasize the importance of trained teachers, safe and inclusive learning environments, and the protection and well-being of all learners and staff.⁵¹

The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (Sendai Framework) (2015) promotes the integration of disaster risk reduction into education systems to make schools safer and more resilient in the face of conflict.⁵² The Sendai Framework calls for strengthening educational infrastructure to ensure continued learning during and after disasters and to support the delivery of essential and life-saving services, including safe shelter, food, and non-food relief supplies.⁵³ The Framework further emphasizes the importance of protection systems, including early warning systems, for schools to build resilience and ensure sustainable recovery in post-disaster contexts for those disproportionately affected by disasters.⁵⁴ The Sendai Framework provides a practical framework that incorporates resilience within education systems, thereby linking education to disaster management and sustainable development.⁵⁵

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015) sets an action plan addressing education in conflict and post-disaster contexts.⁵⁶ With 251 million children out of school in 2024, displaying a decrease of 1% compared to 2015, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (quality education) aims to achieve quality education by providing all with equal opportunities to receive quality and continued education.⁵⁷ In alignment with the principle of leaving no one behind, SDG 4 emphasizes the urgency of reaching crisis-affected populations, recognizing education as an immediate measure that offers life-saving knowledge, skills, and psychological support.⁵⁸ SDG 4 further advocates for flexible and adaptable learning pathways due to the disrupted and non-linear nature of education in emergency contexts.⁵⁹ Moreover, SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The right to education in emergency situations (A/RES/64/290)*. 2010. p. 3; Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *INEE Minimum Standards*. 2024.

⁵⁰ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *INEE Minimum Standards, 2024 Edition*. 2024.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/69/283)*. 2015.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 21.

⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 17.

⁵⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 17; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Education Monitoring Report*. 2024. p. 6.

⁵⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What you need to know about education in emergencies*. 2025. p. 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 17.



highlight the importance of education in conflict and post-disaster settings.⁶⁰ SDG 10 aims to provide equal opportunities for all, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, or other status.⁶¹ In 2024, nearly 50,000 people lost their lives due to conflicts, underscoring the need to promote peaceful societies.⁶² Advancing universal access to justice and strengthening effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels is essential to achieving sustainable development, in line with SDG 16.⁶³

Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) on “Children and armed conflict” establishes an international framework for protecting education during armed conflicts and highlights the link between education and conflict.⁶⁴ In this resolution, the Security Council condemns attacks against schools and all civilians who are connected to schools, including students of all ages and teachers.⁶⁵ Further, the Security Council reaffirms the role of education in promoting peace and security in armed conflict and post-disaster contexts and underscores the importance of safeguarding access to education as a life-saving and stabilizing force for individuals, especially girls.⁶⁶ The resolution integrates education into the international peace and security agenda and reinforces its legally binding nature.⁶⁷

Through its frameworks, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes crisis-resilient education.⁶⁸ As the leading United Nations agency devoted to promoting and protecting education, UNESCO develops policy guidance, organizes and mobilizes international support, and promotes inclusive, quality education.⁶⁹ The *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960) highlights non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and inclusive education for all.⁷⁰ Further, UNESCO’s *Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development* (2023) serves as the only global standard-setting instrument that outlines how education can be leveraged to promote lasting peace and advance human development.⁷¹ Additionally, UNESCO’s *Strategic Framework for Migration, Displacement, Emergencies and Education 2024-2029* (2024) aims to protect education during crises by bridging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus through immediate and long-term actions, including training teachers to ensure continuity of education during a crisis, establishing technology-based

⁶⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 21, 25-26.

⁶¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 21; United Nations Office for Sustainable Development. *10 - Reduced Inequalities*. N.d.

⁶² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 16*. N.d.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ United Nations, Security Council. *Children and armed conflict (S/RES/2601/(2021))*. 2021. pp. 3-4.

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 3-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁷ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945; United Nations, Security Council. *Children and armed conflict (S/RES/2601/(2021))*. 2021. pp. 3-4.

⁶⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What you need to know about education in emergencies*. 2025.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention against Discrimination in Education*. 1960. p. 2.

⁷¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development*. 2023.



learning, and rehabilitating infrastructure.⁷² Monitoring and evaluation includes gathering data from individual programs to ensure accountability and annual, mid-term, and final evaluations.⁷³

Role of the International System

UNESCO safeguards education by recognizing the growing frequency and severity of crises, and promoting safe, inclusive, and equitable education as a cornerstone of resilience during and after conflicts.⁷⁴ Since 1950, UNESCO has committed to the right to education in emergencies, having implemented 320 initiatives across 133 Member States, and reaching 42.5 million people in emergencies.⁷⁵ Such initiatives include enhancing digital access, delivering mental health and psychological support, strengthening data systems, monitoring infrastructure damage, and promoting crisis-sensitive planning to build resilient education systems.⁷⁶ Furthermore, UNESCO participates in global, regional, and national mechanisms to enhance efforts in Education in Emergencies.⁷⁷ These mechanisms include, among others, the INEE, the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack.⁷⁸ The Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies fosters collaboration among governments, humanitarian, development, and academic actors to promote transformative action, dialogue, and partnerships. It further mobilizes political and financial commitments to ensure safe, quality education for crisis-affected children and youth.⁷⁹ In 2024, the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies placed Education in Emergencies within and beyond the humanitarian ecosystem, mobilizing key partners, bridging the research-policy-practice gap, and producing evidence-based reports to strengthen the protection of education.⁸⁰

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international actors often collaborate to safeguard education.⁸¹ UNICEF plays a key role in coordinating education in emergencies and crises, working to ensure inclusive learning opportunities for all children, especially those out of school.⁸² Efforts by UNICEF include facilitating catch-up classes, delivering non-formal education, providing learning materials, and training teachers to help children continue learning despite disruptions following crises and disasters.⁸³ Non-formal education, in contrast to formal education, refers to learning provided outside the formal institutions, for example through workshops, to support lifelong learning, expand access to education for all age groups, and offer responses to evolving educational needs.⁸⁴ For example, following the crisis in western Libya, UNICEF, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, supported displaced children through catch-up classes, non-formal education in shelters, distribution of learning materials, and

⁷² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Strategic Framework for Migration, Displacement, Emergencies and Education 2024-2029*. 2024. pp. 3, 17.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 29.

⁷⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Education in emergencies*. N.d.

⁷⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What you need to know about education in emergencies*. 2025.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Genève internationale. *Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies – EIE*. 2025.

⁸⁰ Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. *Annual Progress Report 2024*. 2024. pp. 7, 9.

⁸¹ United Nations Children's Fund. *Education in emergencies and crises*. 2016.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *Non-formal education*. N.d; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Non-formal education*. 2011; The Council of Europe. *Formal, non-formal and informal learning*. 2025.



teacher training to ensure access to education despite conflict-related disruptions.⁸⁵ Administered under UNICEF's regulations, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) supports learning through a global fund for the education of children and youth in emergencies and crises.⁸⁶ Since ECW was founded in 2015, it has reached 11.4 million children through context-specific assistance, including the delivery of learning materials and school feeding, and has mobilized a total of \$1.661 billion for its trust fund.⁸⁷ ECW serves as the United Nations' global fund dedicated to supporting Education in Emergencies and crises to ensure that children and youth have access to quality learning.⁸⁸ In 2025, ECW ensured lifesaving education programs in Burkina-Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria with \$3.05 million in funding from Japan.⁸⁹ Moreover, through coordinated efforts among United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, youth groups, donors, and the private sector, the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) supports child rights and resilience in the education sector worldwide.⁹⁰ Members of the GADRRRES include, among others, UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), INEE, and ECW.⁹¹ In 2016, the UNDRR Office in Northeast Asia created the School Safety Programme, focusing on a child-centered DRR in the Republic of Korea by using child-friendly and fun-oriented educational materials.⁹²

Regional organizations play an essential role in safeguarding education in conflict and post-disaster contexts.⁹³ As outlined in Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), Member States should take measures to prevent attacks on schools and protect students, teachers, and education facilities during and after conflict on a national and domestic level.⁹⁴ Through its Policy Framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, the African Union (AU) aims to rebuild education systems in post-conflict settings to ensure access to education as a fundamental right, considering the high proportion of youth among combatants and the increasing number of street children in post-disaster settings.⁹⁵ The Safe School Initiative (ASSI), launched in 2012 in coordination with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and civil society, promotes a regional approach to school safety by aiming to build disaster resilience and ensure secure learning environments for students in South-East Asia.⁹⁶ The three pillars through which the ASSI aims to achieve its goals include safe learning facilities, disaster management, including an educational continuity plan, and risk reduction and resilience education, including teacher training.⁹⁷ The application of these pillars is evident at a school in Cambodia, where, since 2014, hazard mapping, safety initiatives, and small-scale infrastructure improvements have enhanced preparedness and safety awareness, fostering a culture of risk reduction within the school.⁹⁸ In Myanmar, the third pillar

⁸⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. *Education in emergencies and crises*. 2016.

⁸⁶ Education Cannot Wait. *Who we are*. N.d.

⁸⁷ Education Cannot Wait. *Main Results Dashboard*. 2024.

⁸⁸ Education Cannot Wait. *News & Stories*. 2025.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector. *Who we are*. N.d.

⁹¹ Ibid; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What you need to know about the Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030*. N.d.

⁹² United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *School safety programme*. N.d.

⁹³ African Union. *Policy framework on post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD)*. 2006; Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *ASEAN Safe School Initiative: A compilation of case studies*. 2016.

⁹⁴ United Nations, Security Council. *Children and armed conflict (S/RES/2601/(2021))*. 2021. pp. 3-4.

⁹⁵ African Union. *Policy framework on post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD)*. 2006. p. 25.

⁹⁶ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *ASEAN Safe School Initiative: A compilation of case studies*. 2016. p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 6.



was further applied as DRR materials reached over 10,000 teachers and helped integrate DRR into school curricula by 2016.⁹⁹

The Role of Adult Education in Post-Crisis Recovery

Adult learners include marginalized populations, chiefly women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.¹⁰⁰ As of 2025, there are at least 754 million adults who cannot read or write, with vulnerable groups, such as women, older persons, and persons with disabilities, disproportionately affected, a situation often worsened by conflict and disaster.¹⁰¹ Vulnerable groups must have equal access to general and vocational training, as this is essential for strengthening resilience during conflicts and disasters, promoting independence, and enabling participation in society.¹⁰² While UNESCO's Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) highlight progress, they also emphasize the need for women's involvement in education and the need for adult education to be accessible and gender-responsive during and post-conflict.¹⁰³ The strategies used for adult education must be extended to marginalized groups and must be maintained during and after conflict.¹⁰⁴

Adult learning and education (ALE) is fundamental for lifelong formal and non-formal learning, regardless of legal age, to acquire and strengthen skills for active participation in society.¹⁰⁵ ALE is an integral part of Education in Emergencies, as access to quality learning opportunities for adults is necessary during and after crises.¹⁰⁶ ALE supports personal, community, and societal development through sustained learning opportunities that adapt to evolving definitions of adulthood across cultures.¹⁰⁷ ALE must become a force that promotes lifelong reskilling and flexible learning in a rapidly changing world to help adults obtain livelihoods.¹⁰⁸ Adult education, especially non-formal education and literacy programmes, is underfunded, with most Member States allocating less than 3% of their national education budget to it.¹⁰⁹ The COVID-10 pandemic highlighted the importance of ALE during crises and the growing likelihood of future

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. pp. 4, 8; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The right to lifelong learning: Why adult education matters*. 2023.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. pp. 4, 8; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The right to lifelong learning: Why adult education matters*. 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What you need to know about literacy*. 2025.

¹⁰² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. pp. 4, 8; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The right to lifelong learning: Why adult education matters*. 2023.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*. 2015. pp. 3, 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. *Education in Emergencies*. N.d.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*. 2015. pp. 3, 6-7.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Right to Education. *Adult education and learning*. 2014.



emergencies.¹¹⁰ Consequently, there is an urgent need to recognize ALE as a public health and disaster preparedness tool.¹¹¹ By equipping adults with literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, ALE enables access to critical information and fosters civic engagement, which is essential for social resilience after crises.¹¹² UNESCO's Recommendation on ALE sets principles aiming to allow adults to participate in society and the workforce to contribute to work opportunities.¹¹³ Additionally, UNESCO's GRALE monitors Member States' implementation of ALE commitments by providing data-driven policy analyses to demonstrate how ALE is advancing SDGs.¹¹⁴

Adult education contributes to broader recovery efforts.¹¹⁵ ALE plays a vital role in supporting individuals and societies before, during, and after conflicts and disasters by contributing to prevention, resilience, and long-term recovery.¹¹⁶ The integration of disaster preparedness and conflict resolution skills into ALE is essential for economic and social recovery, while also increasing access to information related to health, safety, and legal rights.¹¹⁷ *The Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (2022) highlights the strong synergy between global citizenship and sustainable development, as many ALE programs focus on the full scope of sustainable development in their curricula, including climate change and biodiversity, and increasing disaster preparedness.¹¹⁸ For instance, Romania implemented a school-based program for adult learners that integrates environmental knowledge, covering biodiversity, pollution, and sustainable resource use to promote sustainability and active global citizenship.¹¹⁹ This program enhances disaster preparedness by fostering environmental literacy, promoting sustainable resource use, and empowering communities to reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards.¹²⁰

Gender Responsiveness and Inclusive Education in Conflict and Post-Disaster Contexts

Conflict and disasters exacerbate gender disparities.¹²¹ According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, crises and disasters often intensify existing inequalities and place

¹¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)*. N.d.

¹¹¹ Lopes et al. *Adult learning and education as a tool to contain pandemics: The COVID-19 experience*. 2020. p. 1.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*. 2016. pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)*. N.d.

¹¹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022; Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. *Adult Learning and Education in Times of War and Conflict*. 2023.

¹¹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. p. 5; Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. *Adult Learning and Education in Times of War and Conflict*. 2023. p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *5th global report on adult learning and education: citizenship education: empowering adults for change*. 2022. p. 3.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. 2022.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. N.d.



women and girls at heightened risk of discrimination and limited access to humanitarian assistance, including education.¹²² Women and girls in crisis face an increased risk of being burdened with caregiving roles.¹²³ To combat this, the Educational Technology (EdTech) Hub, partnering, among others, with the INEE, the World Bank, and UNICEF, develops distance learning tools like radio learning or digital self-study materials to ensure continuity of education in cases of conflict or natural disaster.¹²⁴ Working with UNICEF in Bangladesh and Indonesia, EdTech improves numeracy and learning outcomes for marginalized learners, especially girls.¹²⁵

Girls and women face increased barriers to education, both vocational and general.¹²⁶ While the correlation between education and gender equality is well established, as of 2025, 122 million girls are still out of school worldwide.¹²⁷ When families face economic hardship and costs are associated with sending children to school, parents often prioritize boys' education, while girls are disproportionately excluded due to barriers such as early marriage.¹²⁸ Girls living in conflict- and disaster-affected areas are almost three times more likely to be out of school compared to girls in stable environments.¹²⁹ Moreover, the absence of essential services in schools, such as food, hygiene products, and social support, increases their isolation.¹³⁰ In addition, girls living in crisis-affected areas face heightened risks of gender-based violence, making them more vulnerable to dropping out of school and being targeted in attacks on education.¹³¹ Gender equality is crucial for education during and post-emergencies as a consequence of increased barriers to education during these situations.¹³² To counter this, ECW empowers women and girls in crisis-affected Member States by promoting equity and gender equality, expanding access to education, and creating safe learning environments, having reached more than 364,000 girls globally.¹³³ UNESCO further emphasizes the need to integrate equality across all aspects of the education system, including access, content, context, outcomes, and opportunities, and, through its *Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education* (2019–2025), focuses on strengthening data availability and promoting gender-responsive teaching and learning practices.¹³⁴

Female literacy and education levels are positively correlated with improved health outcomes and lower child mortality rates, as well as with disaster preparedness and recovery.¹³⁵ Women's education is a force

¹²² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. N.d.

¹²³ Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere. *Women and Girls in Emergencies*. 2018.

¹²⁴ Educational Technology Hub. *EdTech for Education in Emergencies*. 2025.

¹²⁵ Educational Technology Hub. *Girls' Education & Technology*. N.d.

¹²⁶ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Women Count, & United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*. 2024.

¹²⁷ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Women Count, & United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*. 2024; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Women Count. *Fast facts: 30 years of uneven progress for adolescent girls*. 2025.

¹²⁸ Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere. *Women and Girls in Emergencies*. 2018.

¹²⁹ World Bank Group. *Girls' education in conflict is most at risk: Here's how to reach them*. 2024.

¹³⁰ Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere. *Women and Girls in Emergencies*. 2018.

¹³¹ Education Cannot Wait. *Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls*. N.d.

¹³² Education Cannot Wait. *If not now, when*. 2022.

¹³³ Education Cannot Wait. *Girls in Crisis – Orange the World*. 2018.

¹³⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Gender equality and education*. N.d.

¹³⁵ Kaffenberger et al. *Estimating the Impact of Women's Education on Fertility, Child Mortality, and Empowerment when Schooling Ain't Learning*. 2018. p. 1.



for improving health, with positive effects on child health and women's self-determination.¹³⁶ Mothers with more academic education tend to have higher child survival rates, indicating a causal link between maternal schooling and reduced child mortality.¹³⁷ Basic education, including formal and non-formal education that meet essential learning needs across all ages as outlined in the 1990 *World Declaration on Education for All*, has led to a reduction in child mortality by 68%.¹³⁸ It improves women's health knowledge and enables them to improve this knowledge beyond school, for example, through the ability to read medication labels.¹³⁹ Moreover, as women often are caretakers of households, their education is essential for disaster preparedness and navigating recovery expectations to make them agents of change during and after disasters.¹⁴⁰ Since 2015, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women has strengthened gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience across 51 countries, reaching over 778 million people, by working with national governments, 1,407 women's organizations, and 50 United Nations entities to expand women's access to early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, services, and livelihoods.¹⁴¹ For example, in 2020, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women supported the Women leaders and defenders from Chocó: Humanitarian Agents and Cartographers project in Colombia, which empowers women through capacity-building to lead disaster risk management and resilience-building efforts in post-crisis contexts.¹⁴²

Conclusion

Education must be safeguarded during times of crisis to ensure long-term stability, health, and safety for affected communities.¹⁴³ Education in emergency and post-crisis contexts is not only a fundamental human right but also a stabilizing mechanism for individuals and communities.¹⁴⁴ International and regional frameworks like the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the Sendai Framework, and the SDGs establish education as both a protective measure and a pathway to long-term recovery.¹⁴⁵ UNESCO and UNICEF, along with regional bodies such as the AU and ASEAN, demonstrate that safeguarding and rebuilding education systems requires coordinated, inclusive, and gender-responsive

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 6.

¹³⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Basic Education*. N.d; Kaffenberger et al. *Estimating the Impact of Women's Education on Fertility, Child Mortality, and Empowerment when Schooling Ain't Learning*. 2018. p. 1.

¹³⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Basic Education*. N.d; Kaffenberger et al. *Estimating the Impact of Women's Education on Fertility, Child Mortality, and Empowerment when Schooling Ain't Learning*. 2018. p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. *Disaster Recovery Guidance Series - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Disaster Recovery*. N.d.

¹⁴¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Report for the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster and Risk Reduction (2015-2030)*. 2022. p. 5.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁴³ Smith. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Education and Conflict*. 2011. p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific. *Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in education: an imperative for education policymakers*. 2011.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217/A (XXVI))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/69/283)*. 2015; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.



efforts.¹⁴⁶ Addressing the needs of marginalized populations, including women, girls, and adult learners, is essential to achieve resilience and equity.¹⁴⁷ As global crises intensify in frequency and scale, education must be prioritized not only as a tool for survival but as a cornerstone of peacebuilding, sustainable development, and human dignity.¹⁴⁸

Further Research

As delegates continue their research and explore ways to address this topic, they may consider the following: To what extent has the fundamental right to education been realized globally? What role might education play in resolving politically-motivated conflicts? What funding opportunities are available to Member States during times of crisis? What role do cultural expectations concerning family and education play during times of crisis? How might extended conflict change or influence the role of UNESCO in promoting and protecting education? How might digital or remote learning solutions enhance access to education? What digital or remote learning solutions are available to conflict-affected communities? How can these solutions be made cost-effective and accessible to most communities?

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Children's Fund. *Education in emergencies and crises*. 2016.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. N.d; Right to Education. *Adult Education and Learning*. 2023.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Gender equality and education*. N.d.



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2. Promoting Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Introduction

Local and Indigenous knowledge systems (LINKS) play a key role in the achievement of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015).¹⁴⁹ With centuries of experience and compounded knowledge on nature and natural resources, Indigenous groups have developed LINKS, which refer to practices and skills that promote environmental sustainability and community welfare.¹⁵⁰ Although there is no official United Nations definition for Indigenous people, the term commonly refers to groups that self-identify as Indigenous Peoples, have predated colonial and settler societies, have distinct political, social, and economic systems, practice distinct cultures and languages, represent non-dominant groups in a society, and are committed to preserving their ancestral environments.¹⁵¹ A related term to LINKS is traditional knowledge, which, according to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) refers to “the knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous Peoples.”¹⁵² The importance of LINKS has been championed by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which established the LINKS Programme in 2002 as an intersectoral initiative that aims to provide a platform for knowledge cooperation and exchange that promotes the use of local and Indigenous knowledge within scientific and environmental policy processes.¹⁵³

There are multiple positive examples of how LINKS have promoted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the years.¹⁵⁴ Traditional food systems have taken a holistic approach to food production, which promotes both the preservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage in line with SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 15 (life on land), specifically in regard to developing agricultural methods to sustainably use and restore terrestrial lands to halt desertification, land degradation, and overall combat climate change and its impacts.¹⁵⁵ Traditional knowledge also offers techniques for controlling wildfires and conserving biodiversity that both protect culture and promote sustainable practices, such as the use of slow-burning to prevent large-scale wildfires and predicting cyclical changes in populations of endangered species to protect them from extinction.¹⁵⁶

Although Indigenous practices offer significant contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, many Indigenous groups are marginalized, even though they are disproportionately affected by climate change and biodiversity loss.¹⁵⁷ Indigenous populations represent only 6.2% of the global population, and

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015; ICCA Consortium. *Territories of Life: 2021 Report*. 2021.

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS): Mission*. 2024; SDG Research Centre. *Indigenous Knowledge*. 2025.

¹⁵¹ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Who are Indigenous Peoples?*. 2015.

¹⁵² United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Backgrounder*. 2019.

¹⁵³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Traditional knowledge - an answer to the most pressing global problems?*. 2019.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. *Tapping into Indigenous knowledge to protect nature*. 2022.

¹⁵⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems*. 2025; SDG Research Centre. *Indigenous Knowledge*. 2025.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Tapping into Indigenous knowledge to protect nature*. 2022.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *Indigenous Peoples and the nature they protect*. 2020.



yet they collectively manage around 21% of the global land mass.¹⁵⁸ This accounts for 40% of all ecologically intact landscapes.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Indigenous groups are often excluded from consequential conversations on climate action and decision-making processes due to marginalization and disregard for Indigenous rights.¹⁶⁰

Further, LINKS are at risk of loss and misappropriation even though the safeguarding of traditional knowledge is enshrined in many international legal instruments.¹⁶¹ Many modern scientific and pharmaceutical advancements are based on ancestral practices; however, the Indigenous groups that developed these practices are often not compensated or recognized for their contributions.¹⁶² Companies often leverage traditional knowledge at the expense of Indigenous groups, including loss and exploitation of Indigenous lands and the loss of access to natural resources they rely on.¹⁶³ Another threat affecting the preservation of Indigenous knowledge is loss of language: loss of traditional knowledge is tightly coupled to the loss of Indigenous languages and cultures, which continues to be an ongoing issue globally.¹⁶⁴ In light of the varied challenges threatening LINKS, including misuse and misappropriation, and to harness the power of Indigenous knowledge for the achievement of sustainable development, UNESCO and the international community continue to collaborate to further promote and protect LINKS globally.¹⁶⁵

International and Regional Framework

The rights of local and Indigenous communities over their LINKS are anchored in several key international declarations, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (2007).¹⁶⁶ While UDHR establishes the fundamentals of human rights, including Indigenous rights, UNDRIP specifically highlights aspects of Indigenous life largely unaddressed in UDHR.¹⁶⁷ For example, UNDRIP recognizes Indigenous communities' collective intellectual property rights over traditional resources and cultural heritage.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Indigenous Peoples*. N.d.; ICCA Consortium. *Territories of Life: 2021 Report*. 2021. p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Tapping into Indigenous knowledge to protect nature*. 2022.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change - here's why*. 2024.

¹⁶¹ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Backgrounder*. 2019.

¹⁶² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Traditional knowledge - an answer to the most pressing global problems?*. 2019.

¹⁶³ Lowe et al. *Indigenous washing: the exploitation of Indigenous people by the pharmaceutical industry*. 2022; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Indigenous Peoples' Territories, Resources Still Being Seized, Exploited, Despite International Standards Guaranteeing Their Rights, Speakers Tell Permanent Forum*. 2022.

¹⁶⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. 'Preserve, revitalize and promote' Indigenous languages, or lose a 'wealth of traditional knowledge', UN chief says. 2019; United Nations Trade and Development. *Ongoing Loss Of Traditional Knowledge Calls For Urgent Action, Says Unctad*. 2004.

¹⁶⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples*. 2018. pp. 7-10; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. 2025.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. pp. 1-11.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. p. 9.



Further, UNDRIP grants the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop LINKS, including the right to mandate free prior and informed consent before Member States may adopt any measures affecting Indigenous knowledge or resources.¹⁶⁹

Several international United Nations frameworks highlight the significant role local and Indigenous communities play in issues such as protecting biological diversity and advancing climate action.¹⁷⁰ Recognizing LINKS as crucial for climate mitigation, the 1992 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) aims to integrate Indigenous perspectives into national and international climate policies by establishing platforms such as the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) to achieve SDG 13.¹⁷¹ Prior to UNDRIP, UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* (2005) established ethical principles to protect cultural diversity, traditional knowledge, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of science, health, and technology.¹⁷² In 2016, the United Nations Environment Programme adopted the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) to acknowledge LINKS as crucial to the protection of global biodiversity and thereby requiring its preservation.¹⁷³ Building on the momentum from the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the *System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2017) embeds the promotion of LINKS in every level of United Nations operations, from policy to implementation, by supporting the application of UNDRIP in United Nations programs and beyond.¹⁷⁴

A key aspect of promoting LINKS and recognizing Indigenous rights is ensuring that LINKS are preserved as legal assets and protected as intellectual property.¹⁷⁵ As a supplementary agreement to the CBD, the 2011 *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from the Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity* (Nagoya Protocol) acts as one of the strongest international legal mechanisms protecting LINKS.¹⁷⁶ The protocol recognizes LINKS as legal assets and mandates that benefits derived from LINKS by institutions, financial or otherwise, be shared

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 5-6, 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1992. pp. 1-18; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*. 2005; Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Convention of Biological Diversity*. 2011. pp. 2-30; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *System-wide action plan (SWAP) on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2017. p. 10.

¹⁷¹ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1992. pp. 1-18.

¹⁷² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*. 2005.

¹⁷³ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Convention of Biological Diversity*. 2011. pp. 2, 8, 13-14.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples*. 2014; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *System-wide action plan (SWAP) on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2017. p. 32.

¹⁷⁵ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from the Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity*. 2011. p. 7; Indigenous Environmental Network. *Ethical Protocol for the Protection and Use of Traditional Indigenous Systems*. 2024. pp. 3-4; World Intellectual Property Organization. *WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge*. 2024. pp. 2-7.

¹⁷⁶ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from the Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity*. 2011. p. 7.



with the local and Indigenous communities.¹⁷⁷ The *Ethical Protocol for the Protection and Use of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (2023) was newly adopted through a collaborative effort between Indigenous communities and policymakers, establishing guidelines for the protection and use of LINKS in research and policy contexts.¹⁷⁸ By emphasizing ownership, informed consent, and benefit-sharing, the protocol ensures Indigenous voices remain central in decisions about the use of their LINKS.¹⁷⁹ The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) adopted the *WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge* (2024), which marks a major step forward in protecting LINKS within the global intellectual property system.¹⁸⁰ As the Treaty requires a mandatory patent disclosure, the Treaty closes a gap in international property rights set out by the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol by obliging applicants to indicate any sourced traditional knowledge.¹⁸¹

Apart from international frameworks, regional initiatives further promote LINKS and complement global efforts as they adapt international standards to regional contexts.¹⁸² The *Asian Framework on Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty* (2023) affirms Indigenous Peoples' rights to govern their LINKS in accordance with their own customs and values.¹⁸³ However, while it reinforces community governance over LINKS, the framework fails to adopt regional practices and broader international standards.¹⁸⁴ In Latin America and the Caribbean, the 2018 *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean* strengthens Indigenous environmental governance and knowledge-based activism in the region.¹⁸⁵ The *African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources* (2000) was drafted to recognize and protect LINKS regarding biodiversity, agriculture, and seed systems, while encouraging farmers' rights to use and sell seeds based on traditional practices.¹⁸⁶ Although the law did not take its desired effect due to its non-binding nature, conflicts with national policies, and resulting limited political support, it has inspired the adoption of multiple national legislations that include aspects on farmers' rights, recognition, and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Indigenous Environmental Network. *Ethical Protocol for the Protection and Use of Traditional Indigenous Systems*. 2024. pp. 1-4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ World Intellectual Property Organization. *WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge*. 2024. pp. 2-7.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 2-10.

¹⁸² Council of Europe. *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. 1995. pp. 2-8; Organization of African Unity. *African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources*. 2000. pp. 2-25; Organization of American States. *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2016. p. 44; United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2018. pp. 12, 20.

¹⁸³ Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact. *Asian Framework on Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty*. 2023. pp. 1-4.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 4-10.

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2018. pp. 12, 20.

¹⁸⁶ Organization of African Unity. *African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources*. 2000. pp. 11, 13.



benefit-sharing.¹⁸⁷ In the polar region, the Arctic Council's *Ottawa Traditional Knowledge Principles* (2015) promotes LINKS by recognizing Indigenous knowledge as intellectual property and requiring its inclusion at all stages of Council work.¹⁸⁸

Role of the International System

By adopting multiple key resolutions on the promotion and preservation of LINKS, the General Assembly serves as one of the most prominent international actors on the intersection of LINKS with sustainable development, human rights, and cultural preservation.¹⁸⁹ General Assembly resolution 78/161 on “Culture and sustainable development” constitutes a paradigm shift by recognizing LINKS not only as enabling but also as actively driving sustainable development across social, economic, and environmental dimensions.¹⁹⁰ General Assembly resolution 79/159 on “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” lays the groundwork for Indigenous rights’ global recognition, strengthens institutional support within the United Nations framework, and expands the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, which supports the participation of Indigenous communities in UN mechanisms.¹⁹¹ Further, the General Assembly established the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages as well as the 2022-2032 International Decade of Indigenous Languages to promote the preservation of Indigenous languages.¹⁹²

As a principal actor in the promotion of LINKS, UNESCO connects local and Indigenous communities with science, environmental policy, and international standards by implementing initiatives such as the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme (1971) and the *UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples* (2018).¹⁹³ As one of the pioneering initiatives on integrating LINKS into environmental conservation and sustainable development, the MAB Programme has fostered major strides in promoting sustainability by recognizing areas of terrestrial and marine ecosystems as Biosphere Regions, consequential for the formation of a global biosphere reserve network.¹⁹⁴ Yet, the Programme faces shortcomings such as inconsistent integration of local and Indigenous communities, limited resources, monitoring gaps, and uneven global coverage.¹⁹⁵ Across all its programs, UNESCO works with local and Indigenous communities as per the *UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples*, which

¹⁸⁷ International Environmental Law Research Centre. *Community, Farmers’ and Breeders’ Rights in Africa*. 2003. p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ Arctic Council. *Ottawa Traditional Knowledge Principles*. 2015. p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Culture and sustainable development (A/RES/78/161)*. 2023. pp. 5-11; United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 7-15.

¹⁹⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Culture and sustainable development (A/RES/78/161)*. 2023. pp. 5-11.

¹⁹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 1-15; United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples*. 2025.

¹⁹² United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 10, 12.

¹⁹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples*. 2018. pp. 7-10; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)*. 2025.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)*. 2025.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB): Strategy and roadmap*. 2024.



upholds Indigenous rights and ensures their perspectives are incorporated in all of UNESCO's work.¹⁹⁶ The policy marks a turning point by reframing UNESCO's priorities to center Indigenous self-determination, community leadership, and the protection of LINKS as integral to sustainable development.¹⁹⁷

To further champion LINKS globally, UNESCO's LINKS Programme (2002) specifically addresses the promotion of cultural biodiversity, biocultural resilience, and knowledge equity.¹⁹⁸ Since its founding, the LINKS Programme has facilitated dialogue and collaboration between owners of LINKS and individuals in the fields of science and environmental policy, contributing to international norms, standards, and the development of transdisciplinary knowledge cooperation.¹⁹⁹ It carries out its mandate by hosting platforms for dialogue, organizing capacity-building workshops, producing policy guidance, and supporting Indigenous communities in documenting, preserving, and transmitting their LINKS.²⁰⁰ In the Arctic, for instance, the LINKS Programme collaborated with the Aborigin Forum and Indigenous Leaders from Siberia on the United Nations Water Action Decade to establish the first Forum of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Water Action for Sustainable Development.²⁰¹ Despite the successes of the LINKS Programme, challenges remain in ensuring consistent recognition, safeguarding, and equitable participation of LINKS holders across different contexts.²⁰²

Various United Nations bodies aim to leverage LINKS to advance issues such as climate action and food security while addressing ethical and participatory challenges.²⁰³ In their 2022 report on *Indigenous women and the development, application, preservation and transmission of scientific and technical knowledge*, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples highlights Indigenous women's key role in preserving LINKS and provides recommendations to strengthen their participation, such as ensuring their access to education and training and promoting their participation in leadership roles in research and policy.²⁰⁴ In its capacities as a high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on Indigenous issues, the UNPFII promotes the inclusion of Indigenous representatives and civil society in ECOSOC recommendations, and offers a direct connection between LINKS and effective

¹⁹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO policy on engaging with Indigenous Peoples*. 2018. pp. 7-8.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO policy on engaging with Indigenous Peoples*. 2018. p. 9.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. 2025.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS): North America and the Arctic*. 2024.

²⁰² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Brazil's Initiative for Indigenous Linguistic Diversity in Health Education*. 2024.

²⁰³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *UNPFII Eighteenth Session: 22 April – 3 May 2019*. 2019; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Indigenous women and the development, application, preservation and transmission of scientific and technical knowledge (A/HRC/51/28)*. 2022. pp. 7-12; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *IPBES technical support unit on Indigenous and local knowledge*. 2024; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)*. 2025.

²⁰⁴ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Indigenous women and the development, application, preservation and transmission of scientific and technical knowledge (A/HRC/51/28)*. 2022. pp. 7-12; United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2025.



global policies on sustainable development.²⁰⁵ The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) integrates LINKS in its global biodiversity assessment by involving Indigenous knowledge-holders in production processes and by recognizing LINKS as a distinct knowledge system alongside science, thereby setting a precedent for leveraging LINKS in sustainable development.²⁰⁶ However, due to LINKS' context-specific and traditionally orally transmitted nature, their use in quantitative methods continues to be a challenge.²⁰⁷

Regional organizations and civil society organizations equally contribute to promoting LINKS within policy-making circles and scientific communities.²⁰⁸ The Indigenous Peoples Food System Coalition (2021) emerged from the United Nations Food Systems Summit to advance the preservation and sustainable use of LINKS in food systems in support of SDG 2.²⁰⁹ By creating healthy, fair, and sustainable food systems, Member States, agencies, and other key actors unite to address target 2.3 on “doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, Indigenous Peoples, and others by 2030.”²¹⁰ Aiming at decolonizing and transforming LINKS production in Africa, the African Institute in Indigenous Knowledge Systems was founded as UNESCO Category II Centre to promote African LINKS through research, policy advice, and capacity building.²¹¹ As a non-profit organization advocating for the rights of Indigenous groups on issues such as genetic research, biotechnology, and the commercialization of LINKS, the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism plays a key role in shaping the global discourse on Indigenous rights in science and bioethics.²¹² To promote the achievement of SDG 13, the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group advances community-based climate adaptation strategies by incorporating LINKS in regional climate responses in cooperation with Arctic governments, Indigenous organizations, and scientific bodies such as the International Arctic Science Committee.²¹³

Preserving and Promoting the Use of LINKS

LINKS have been under threat of loss due to legacies of colonialism, discrimination, and structural inequalities that have marginalized local and Indigenous communities and devalued their LINKS, but many initiatives have been established to combat this loss and preserve LINKS globally.²¹⁴ National and international actors are working on preserving LINKS by recognizing Indigenous communities' rights

²⁰⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *UNPFII Eighteenth Session: 22 April – 3 May 2019*. 2019; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)*. 2025.

²⁰⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *IPBES technical support unit on Indigenous and local knowledge*. 2024.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact. *Network of Civil Society Organizations, Indigenous Peoples, Local Community representatives tackled climate, biodiversity, and tenure for its 10th annual meeting*. 2024.

²⁰⁹ United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. *Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Coalition*. 2025.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Terms of References: African Institute in Indigenous Knowledge Systems – AIKS – in the Republic of South Africa as a UNESCO Category II Centre*. 2025.

²¹² Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. *Resolutions by Indigenous Peoples*. N.d.

²¹³ Arctic Council. *International Arctic Science Committee (IASC)*. 2025; Arctic Council. *Sustainable Development Working Group*. 2025.

²¹⁴ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Background*. 2019. p. 1.



through instruments like UNDRIP and CBD.²¹⁵ Efforts include preserving Indigenous languages, integrating local and Indigenous communities into decision-making and LINKS into sustainable development and environmental management, and promoting education that sustains cultural heritage and biodiversity through a multitude of programs.²¹⁶

To prevent the loss of LINKS, whether intentional or accidental, different methods have been adopted, including physical archives and museums as well as digital libraries and knowledge management systems.²¹⁷ Traditional museums and physical archives play a vital role in protecting LINKS as they not only safeguard world heritage but also combat illicit trafficking of cultural property through preservation, research, education, and public engagement.²¹⁸ By extension, initiatives such as the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library in India and the National Indigenous Knowledge Management System in South Africa aim to digitalize LINKS to streamline the collection, use, and distribution of LINKS by providing a platform that secures collection and controls distribution of LINKS, recognizes community ownership, and avails translations of LINKS.²¹⁹ These databases are crucial as they assist patent examiners in identifying fraud by ensuring that patent claims are verified against documented LINKS before patents are granted.²²⁰ To save their tangible and intangible cultural heritage from rapidly-rising sea levels, Tuvalu leveraged virtual reality to create an online repository that functions as a living archive of its LINKS, including oral histories, serving as a new preservation technique that goes beyond physical archives and traditional digital libraries.²²¹

Although many initiatives have achieved progress in preserving and promoting the use of LINKS globally, the potential loss of Indigenous languages continues to pose a material threat to the preservation of LINKS.²²² Indigenous languages are essential to the preservation of LINKS as they provide the means through which LINKS are recorded and sustained.²²³ In Mexico, the UNESCO World Atlas of Languages classified 16 Indigenous languages as critically endangered.²²⁴ To help reverse this trend, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors promote the use of Indigenous languages in daily life and literature by organizing events at international book fairs.²²⁵ The 2019 Year of Indigenous Languages and the 2022-2032 International Decade of Indigenous Languages constitute initiatives designed to safeguard and promote Indigenous languages by focusing the related action plan on language revitalization and increasing

²¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. pp. 1-11; Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Convention of Biological Diversity*. 2011. pp. 2-30; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Backgrounder*. 2019. p. 2.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Culture and sustainable development (A/RES/78/161)*. 2023. pp. 5-11.

²¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 1-5.

²¹⁹ National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office. *The National Indigenous Knowledge Management System*. 2022; World Intellectual Property Organization. *About the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library*. 2025.

²²⁰ World Intellectual Property Organization. *About the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library*. 2025; National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office. *The National Indigenous Knowledge Management System*. 2022.

²²¹ Global Forum in Migration and Development. *An online repository for the cultural heritage of Tuvalu*. 2024.

²²² United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Backgrounder*. 2019. p. 2.

²²³ Ibid. p. 1.

²²⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Daily use of Indigenous languages boosts social justice*. 2025.

²²⁵ Ibid.



access to education and information in Indigenous languages.²²⁶ However, while the Year proved successful and the Decade continues to advance action, the need for more global awareness and coordinated preservation efforts is ongoing.²²⁷

Disregarding Indigenous perspectives in decision-making further marginalizes communities and accelerates the erosion of LINKS, while undermining their potential to contribute to climate adaptation and peacebuilding.²²⁸ 80% of armed conflicts between 1950 and 2000 occurred in biodiversity hotspots.²²⁹ These regions are rich in species and ecosystems, and are often attributed as Indigenous lands, which have shown lower anthropogenic and environmental impacts, suggesting that Indigenous stewardship fosters land resilience.²³⁰ Consequently, integrating Indigenous peace and reconciliation practices into peacebuilding efforts proves essential to enhance their effectiveness.²³¹ This sentiment is echoed in the General Assembly resolution 79/159 on “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” which emphasizes integrating Indigenous perspectives by upholding their rights, including free, prior, and informed consent and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes.²³²

Combatting the Misappropriation of LINKS

Instances of misappropriation of LINKS, specifically involving their unauthorized use, continue to occur across the globe.²³³ The misappropriation of LINKS refers to the unauthorized use, reproduction, commercialization, or exploitation of LINKS, cultural expressions, or intellectual property such as sacred symbols and rituals by individuals or external entities.²³⁴ Examples include the incorporation of a sacred sun symbol originating from the Indigenous Zia Peoples in the New Mexican flag in the USA without permission, and the reproduction of the Wajãpi Indigenous communities’ body art on wallpaper by a Brazilian home decor company without authorization.²³⁵ While the Zia not only lost ownership but were also forced to tolerate the misappropriation of their LINKS with the flag remaining the same until today, the Wajãpi demanded production to be halted, existing stocks to be destroyed, and contributions toward a community project to be made, to which the company complied.²³⁶ These examples highlight the importance of adopting policies that strengthen Indigenous voices and protect their rights.²³⁷ LINKS

²²⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The International Year of Indigenous Languages*. 2021. p. 9; United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 3, 6, 13.

²²⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 3, 6, 13.

²²⁸ United Nations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. *Spotlighting the Role of Indigenous Peoples’ Peacebuilding for Climate, Peace and Security*. 2025.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/79/159)*. 2024. pp. 3, 6, 13.

²³³ Saez. Intellectual Property Watch. *Indigenous Knowledge Misappropriation: The Case Of The Zia Sun Symbol Explained At WIPO*. 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Expert meeting on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, Analysis of issues and trends*. 2023. p. 2.

²³⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Traditional knowledge - an answer to the most pressing global problems?*. 2019.

²³⁵ Saez. Intellectual Property Watch. *Indigenous Knowledge Misappropriation: The Case Of The Zia Sun Symbol Explained At WIPO*. 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Expert meeting on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, Analysis of issues and trends*. 2023. p. 2.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.



extend beyond symbols and art to include religious rituals, which can suffer even greater harm, as illustrated by private businesses and local authorities commercializing the Traditional Feast of January in Chiapa de Corzo, Mexico.²³⁸ Not only were LINKS misappropriated, but their historical traditional ritual cycle was disrupted, which affected community cohesion.²³⁹ Misappropriation of LINKS not only denies Indigenous communities' ownership over their LINKS but also undermines cultural continuity, erodes social structures, and hinders the intergenerational transmission of LINKS.²⁴⁰

Defined as the domination and exploitation of LINKS by external colonial powers without consent, biocolonialism further undermines Indigenous sovereignty by enabling biopiracy.²⁴¹ Representing one mechanism of misappropriation, biopiracy involves the appropriation, patenting, or commercialization of biological materials from LINKS without proper acknowledgment or fair benefit-sharing.²⁴² Multiple examples of biopiracy of LINKS by pharmaceutical companies without consent or fair compensation have been recorded, such as in the case of the commercialization of San people's knowledge of the Hoodia plant's appetite suppressant properties by the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).²⁴³ Following disputes, CSIR acknowledged the San's contribution and established one of the first benefit-sharing agreements, granting the San people a share of the profit from the resulting patent and products.²⁴⁴ This case exposes the harms of biopiracy and sets a precedent for protecting LINKS and Indigenous rights through authorization and benefit-sharing agreements.²⁴⁵

Together, international frameworks and local civil society initiatives demonstrate effective strategies for protecting and promoting LINKS.²⁴⁶ In partnership with WIPO, the Maasai people of Kenya digitally recorded artifacts such as traditional songs, and stories to enable the community to claim copyright over

²³⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Expert meeting on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, Analysis of issues and trends*. 2023. p. 2.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Saez. Intellectual Property Watch. *Indigenous Knowledge Misappropriation: The Case Of The Zia Sun Symbol Explained At WIPO*. 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Expert meeting on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, Analysis of issues and trends*. 2023. p. 2.

²⁴¹ Breske. *Biocolonialism: Examining Biopiracy, Inequality, and Power*. N.d. pp. 1-8; Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. *Resolutions by Indigenous Peoples*. N.d.; Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. *The Convention on Biological Diversity's International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing: Background and Considerations for Indigenous Peoples*. 2006. p. 4; Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. *Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Genetic Resources and Indigenous Knowledge*. 2007; Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. *Convention of Biological Diversity*. 2011. pp. 2, 8, 13-14.

²⁴² Breske. *Biocolonialism: Examining Biopiracy, Inequality, and Power*. N.d. pp. 1-8; Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. *The Convention on Biological Diversity's International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing: Background and Considerations for Indigenous Peoples*. 2006. p. 4.

²⁴³ Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing. *The Commercial Development of Hoodia*. N.d.; World Intellectual Property Organization. *Leveraging Economic Growth through Benefit Sharing*. 2010; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Traditional knowledge - an answer to the most pressing global problems?*. 2019.

²⁴⁴ Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing. *The Commercial Development of Hoodia*. N.d.; World Intellectual Property Organization. *Leveraging Economic Growth through Benefit Sharing*. 2010.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ World Intellectual Property Organization. *Leveraging Economic Growth through Benefit Sharing*. 2010.



these cultural expressions and control their distribution.²⁴⁷ Through community-led initiatives, in Thailand, the Karen Indigenous community works to revitalize traditional rotational farming and forest management practices by documenting their traditional knowledge, strengthening local land management systems, and connecting customary practices with education and policy to foster long-term ecological and cultural sustainability.²⁴⁸

Conclusion

The promotion and preservation of LINKS is a key factor in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and consequential for achieving elements of sustainable development such as the conservation of biodiversity and responsible consumption and production.²⁴⁹ Many efforts have been established to promote and protect the use of traditional knowledge and leverage it alongside modern knowledge, including international frameworks and mechanisms such as UNDRIP and SWAP, as well as regional and local initiatives by both Member States and civil society.²⁵⁰ UNESCO itself has championed efforts to protect and promote LINKS through its LINKS Programme, which continues to work with local and Indigenous communities, the scientific community, and policy makers to establish platforms for knowledge sharing and cooperation.²⁵¹ Although many efforts have been established, multiple challenges continue to hinder the effective use and protection of traditional knowledge, including disregard for Indigenous rights, exclusion of Indigenous groups from decision-making processes, theft of Indigenous resources and exploitation of Indigenous knowledge, and loss and neglect of cultural heritage.²⁵²

Further Research

What challenges hinder the integration of traditional knowledge within current policies? How are LINKS affected by the loss of languages and intangible cultural heritage? In what ways can Member States integrate LINKS with modern knowledge systems? How can UNESCO work with other United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations to promote and preserve the use of LINKS? How can efforts be localized to integrate regional differences and particularities?

²⁴⁷ Wendland. World Intellectual Property Organization Magazine. *Managing rights in digitized indigenous music*. 2016.

²⁴⁸ The International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative. *Promoting and Enhancing the Karen Indigenous Sustainable Socio-ecological Production System in Northern Thailand*. 2019.

²⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015; ICCA Consortium. *Territories of Life: 2021 Report*. 2021.

²⁵⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. pp. 1-11; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *System-wide action plan (SWAP) on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2017.

²⁵¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. 2025.

²⁵² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Traditional knowledge - an answer to the most pressing global problems?*. 2019; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Traditional Knowledge Backgrounder*. 2019; United Nations Environment Programme. *Indigenous Peoples and the nature they protect*. 2020.



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