



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Statement on UNESCO's Environmental and Social Policies

This Statement introduces UNESCO's policies regarding environmental and social harms that may be unintended consequences of the Organization's projects, programmes and functions.

The Statement aims to consolidate existing, both implicit or explicit, policies that are relevant to social and environmental issues -- such as those related to risk assessment, transparency, accountability and visibility, evaluation, gender equality, human rights and climate neutrality, which are central to UNESCO.

The Statement also explicitly lays out a range of topics that are central to environmental and social harms, which the Organization takes into account in the design and implementation of its work.

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, and in line with its Constitution, UNESCO acts with States and societies to strengthen the foundations for lasting peace, for the eradication of poverty, and for sustainable development and intercultural dialogue.

For this, the 'soft power' of education, the sciences, culture, communication and information are essential enablers and drivers. As spelled out in Article I 1 of the Constitution, UNESCO is committed "*to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, culture, language, religion or sexual orientation.*"

As set forth in the current Medium-Term Strategy (2014-2021), UNESCO acts according to five core functions that are defined as follows:

1. Serving as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice in its fields of competence;
2. Developing and reinforcing the global agenda in its fields of competence through policy analysis, monitoring and benchmarking;
3. Setting norms and standard in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation;
4. Strengthening international and regional cooperation in its fields of competence, and fostering alliances, intellectual cooperation, knowledge-sharing and operational partnerships; and
5. Providing advice for policy development and implementation, and developing institutional and human capacities.

In this light, the majority of UNESCO interventions fall, in each of its fields of competences, under capacity development, information dissemination and awareness raising, policy review and studies, along with advisory services.

UNESCO is neither a development agency nor a funding institution. As such, the Organisation has not defined explicit policies on all environmental and social related topics. However, they are all in line with UNESCO's mission as stated above.

The Director-General has determined that risk management is a priority to strengthen the overall governance and accountability in UNESCO. In 2008, UNESCO started taking

measures towards establishing an integrated risk management framework, following recommendations made at the United Nations level and further reinforced by the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee. To this end, the Organization includes a review of risks, including environmental and social risks, from the very outset of project development. The UNESCO standard template for preparation of project document specifically requires an explanation of how gender equality will be addressed and requires an annex on risk analysis and mitigation, with indication of the risk owner (person accountable for the risk management). The risk categories explicitly mentioned for inclusion are environmental, political, economic and social risks. In project monitoring and reporting, the “conclusions of a risk analysis related to the implementation” are required along with “the measures foreseen to mitigate the negative impact of a threat”, if any. UNESCO’s Risk Management Training Handbook (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001906/190604E.pdf>) provides background to increase the competency of programme specialists, while a senior management committee on risk review meets regularly.

Public access to information is key to UNESCO’s commitment to transparency and accountability. In addition to its general Internet site, UNESCO has spearheaded the Transparency Portal (<http://opendata.unesco.org/>) created in accordance with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Activity Standard. This enables public access to information about the Organization’s activities across sectors, countries, and regions.

In addition, the Organization has crafted an increasingly strong evaluation culture -- precisely to improve project design, implementation and reporting over time by placing emphasis on knowledge generation, accountability and organizational learning. In this respect, the UNESCO Evaluation Policy for 2014-2021 was revised and significantly strengthened in spring 2015 ([196 EX/24.INF](#)).

There are several paths by which the public can deliver complaints to UNESCO about suspected social or environmental harms caused by its projects and programmes. On the bottom of the main page of UNESCO’s website (<http://en.unesco.org/>), one may find information for the protection of human rights (see Annex).

Reports of fraud, corruption or abuse can be made via a form on the website of the Internal Oversight Services (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/how-we-work/accountability/internal-oversight-service/divers/report-fraud-corruption-or-abuse/>).

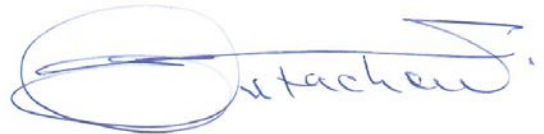
The World Heritage Centre, the Man and the Biosphere Programme and the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme all are required, according to their operational guidelines, to respond to complaints, which can be sent to the centre/programme or its Director/Secretary, by mail or email (including general email addresses such as mab@unesco.org).

In addition, all mail or email received by the UNESCO Director-General is routed to the appropriate unit for response. All complaints are reviewed and appropriate investigation and follow-up is undertaken. It is UNESCO policy for all correspondence to receive at minimum an initial reply within two weeks. In the case of designated sites, the complaint may need to be referred to the Government in question, or the national committee of the concerned programme for investigation.

In all of this, UNESCO is firmly committed to abide by the internationally set environmental and social policies and standards, in line with the World Bank Group, regional development

banks and members of the United Nations system, as well as the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, including for the topics listed in the Annex.

This Statement is effective immediately.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Getachew Engida', with a large, stylized circular flourish on the left side.

Getachew Engida
Deputy Director-General
26 October 2016

Annex

Compliance with the Law

As stated in UNESCO Constitution, UNESCO strives to comply with all existant internationally set legislation on environmental and social matters.

Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups

UNESCO gives special emphasis to marginalized and vulnerable groups, including through its two global priorities, Africa and Gender Equality, and three priority groups: Small Island Developing States, youth and least developed countries. The Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021 is accompanied by an Operational Strategy on Youth and also aims to address most marginalized social groups.

Human Rights

As stated in the UNESCO Constitution, and as part of the United Nations system, UNESCO is committed to promote the human rights-based approach in all programming, as defined in the UN Development Group Guidelines on the Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation. This, along with Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, as well as basic principles found in other human rights instruments provide a normative framework to guide the work of all United Nations agencies, programmes and funds including UNESCO. This human rights-based approach underpins all of UNESCO's activities.

Since 1978 there has been a procedure for dealing with any suspected violations of human rights, available at the following site:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ERI/pdf/BrochureProcedure104_2016EN.pdf

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

UNESCO considers gender equality as a fundamental human right, a building block for social justice and an economic necessity. It is a critical factor for the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals, as well as a goal in and of itself. This is why one of UNESCO's two global priorities since 2007 is gender equality and why the organisation's Medium-Term Strategy (2014-2021) is accompanied by the Gender Equality Action Plan II, which provides all key definitions, explains UNESCO's adherence to the UN-System Wide Action Plan on gender equality, institutionalizes gender equality in UNESCO's organizational culture, structure and process, and defines expected results for gender equality within all Sectors and services of UNESCO. See:

(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002272/227222e.pdf>).

The Division of Gender Equality, located in the Office of the Director-General, oversees a network of over 150 gender focal points, who ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed in UNESCO activities. This was strengthened in September 2016 with the adoption of the revised "UNESCO current standard template for preparation of project document" which explicitly requires gender analysis of new proposals: "...a gender analysis covering gender roles, division of labour, opportunities and constraints for women and men to access and control resources, and women's and men's different practical and strategic needs.

Sex-disaggregated data and statistics are vital. The perspectives and needs of women and girls are considered from the standpoint of project beneficiaries as well as project implementers, so as to ensure that projects and programmes are equitable and do not reinforce existing inequalities.

In relation to climate change and gender, UNESCO has actively advocated since 2007 that women are differentially and more severely affected by climate change, particularly in developing countries, and worked to ensure women's participation in climate science and policy, including for the Global Framework for Climate Services, in IPCC AR5, in UNFCCC COPs, in collaboration with partners within the UN system and beyond. UNESCO also is active in incorporating women's role in disaster risk reduction and empowering women as agents of change for both disasters and climate change. See:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/gender-and-science/cross-cutting-issues/climate-change-and-gender-equality/>

Core Labour Rights and Working Conditions

UNESCO complies with ISSC guidelines on employment and its employees, including consultants and short-term contractors, have access to staff unions, an ethics office and a mediator for any grievances.

Indigenous Peoples

The UNESCO Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples was examined by the 202nd session of the UNESCO Executive Board (autumn 2017) and taken note of with satisfaction. As part of the UN system, UNESCO adheres to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, and contributes to the System Wide Action Plan on Indigenous Peoples. The UNESCO Policy contains sections on non-discrimination; equity and equality; self-determination, culturally appropriate development; participation and inclusion; free, prior and informed consent; rights to lands, territories, resources, knowledge, and cultural heritage; empowerment and capacity strengthening; and gender equality in the context of indigenous peoples. The Policy was drafted by an intersectoral team led by the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Programme of UNESCO, which has contributed extensively to the IPCC and IPBES science-policy processes.

See: <https://en.unesco.org/indigenous-peoples/policy>

Protection of Natural Habitats

UNESCO has three main programmes that directly or indirectly protect natural habitats: The 1972 World Heritage Convention, which is one of the six UN biodiversity conventions; the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme created in 1971 which is based on a tripartite land use scheme of a legally constituted core protected area, buffer zone and transition zone; and since 2016 the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme. Some sites are covered by more than one of these designations. In addition, UNESCO holds the legal instrument for the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Any UNESCO project taking place in the UNESCO-designated sites should only propose interventions outside core protected areas. Further, UNESCO does not finance construction or rehabilitation of large or complex dams, nor does it finance conversion of natural habitats to plantation forests, biofuel or agricultural crops.

Conservation of Biological Diversity and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources

In addition, UNESCO does not finance introduction or use of potentially invasive, non-indigenous species or undertake activities that degrade or convert critical natural habitat. Several of its programmes aim in part to conserve biodiversity, whether in the oceans, freshwater or on land.

Land and Soil Conservation

UNESCO generally does not undertake activities that would degrade land or lead to soil erosion. Any projects with physical components in natural landscapes take reasonable measures to conserve soil, retain runoff and protect desert crust.

Land Acquisition and Involuntary Resettlement

UNESCO does not engage in projects that require acquisition of land or involuntary resettlement of local communities. UNESCO sites (World Heritage sites, biosphere reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks) are nominated by national governments, which are required to work with local communities and all potentially affected people in the nomination process using a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to governance. Sites remain under national sovereignty.

UNESCO biosphere reserve core areas are set aside for preservation of ecosystems by national legislation (i.e. as natural parks) in advance of adoption by the MAB Programme. Therefore, no economic displacement of local communities is attributable to MAB.

Climate Change

UNESCO contributes to the UN system-wide efforts towards carbon neutrality, “Greening the Blue”. The outcome of the current exercise has been published by UNEP with the endorsement of the UN Secretary-General (“Moving towards a climate neutral UN: The UN system’s footprint and efforts to reduce it”). By way of comparison with other agencies, UNESCO has lower-than-average emissions, with total emissions per personnel at 4.28 (tCO₂eq/personnel), compared with a UN average of 8.31 – e.g., FAO (3.24), ILO (3.24), UNDP (4.18), UNEP (8.15), WHO (9.60), IMF (22.07), etc. Efforts to reduce UNESCO’s carbon footprint have included sharp reductions in the amount of air travel and near exclusion of air travel in business class. (<http://www.greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/MTCNUN-24.11.15-sequential.pdf>)

In this regard, in 2011 UNESCO updated its Administrative Manual following work of its Climate Change Task Force and Greening UNESCO Group: “Administrative Manual Item 15.2 “*General Provisions concerning Travel on Mission*” has been amended in order to incorporate cost saving and greening measures, clarify policy and processes to end-users and respond to audit findings and recommendations. The key changes concern air travel class downgrade, [...], mandatory travel by train for trips up to four hours in Europe...”.

In 2010, the Greening UNESCO team published the *Staff Guide to Greening UNESCO* (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001914/191471e.pdf>) which provides guidance on the carbon footprint of alternative commuting options, as well as energy saving tips for the office. The Greening UNESCO Group’s efforts led to improved energy efficiency being incorporated as a priority into the main offices during their restoration at that time and in future planned renovation works, as well as to the standardized adoption of recycling, safer cleaning products and greener office supplies. In addition to the Procurement Section, the Headquarters Committee and the Health and Safety Committee address such issues, as does the Organisation’s Sustainability Management Focal Point.

Through its programmes dedicated to education, natural and human and social sciences, culture and communication and information, UNESCO is actively contributing to addressing climate change-related challenges in its Member States. For additional information, refer to UNESCO's Strategy for Action on Climate Change, endorsed at the 39th General Conference of UNESCO in autumn 2017 (39 C/46).

UNESCO's Director-General as Chair of the UN High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) had led the Committee to unanimously endorse the system wide roadmap for UN climate neutrality by 2020 towards enhancing environmental sustainability of UN operations. This was then adopted by the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB) in April 2015.

Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency

In addition to the changes introduced by the Greening UNESCO Group, pollution prevention and resource efficiency are taught at the graduate level at the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, while the Education Sector's work on education for sustainable development includes a focus on sustainable production and consumption and the Natural Sciences Sector is addressing emerging pollutants in wastewater treatment, green chemistry and locally-relevant renewable energy adoption.

Public Health, Safety and Security

Projects do not use or promote use of any substances listed under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, or any other substances known to pose a risk to the health of people, biodiversity or the environment, throughout the entire lifetime of the substance from manufacture to ultimate breakdown.

UNESCO has long managed projects to mitigate certain health and safety risks: on natural disaster risk reduction including through the build back better and safe schools campaigns, and recently to address the environmental and health problems caused by abandoned small scale mines in Africa.

Pest Management

If any project calls for the suppression of pests or disease vectors, it is to be done accordance with Integrated Pest Management or Integrated Vector Management practices (based on ecological knowledge) to the maximum extent possible. Any use of pesticides is to be limited to substances with well-defined and minimal risk to the health of people, biodiversity and the environment.

Physical and Cultural Heritage

UNESCO is the custodian agency for the 1972 World Heritage Convention, covering sites of natural and/or cultural international significance. The Convention's regulations foresee a watch List of World Heritage in Danger for sites that require major operations to maintain their conservation status and for which assistance has been requested to address imminent threats or potential dangers.

For seventy years, UNESCO has preserved and helped to restore damaged heritage as part of its core mandate. In recent years all the UNESCO culture conventions advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage via the [#unite4heritage](#) campaign. No project of UNESCO should harm physical or cultural heritage.