

MOPAN

2017-18 ASSESSMENTS

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**Organisational Performance Brief**

**United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural  
Organization (UNESCO)**

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## UNESCO's performance at a glance

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**UNESCO has a clear strategic vision aligned to global normative frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.**

UNESCO's work to establish norms and standards that fall under its mandate aims to enable policy change at both the national and international levels. In seeking to achieve sustainable development, support human rights and build peaceful societies conducive to dialogue, UNESCO's current strategic plan reflects its two global priorities: Africa and gender equality. The organisation centres its work on access to equitable and quality education through co-ordination and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 4; the development of science, technology and innovation; the promotion of cultural heritage and cultural diversity; and freedom of expression.

**MOPAN's survey of external partners confirms that stakeholders value UNESCO's contribution to promoting cross-cutting agendas, with gender equality being a particular strength.**

This is achieved through Gender Equality Action Plans that direct how gender equality is incorporated into the planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of all UNESCO's programmes. In addition, UNESCO makes important contributions to the promotion of human rights. The assessment noted a significant number of programmes and expected results that relate to human rights programming or explicitly to UNESCO's human rights mainstreaming work. Further, UNESCO contributes to policy development on environmental sustainability and climate change, mainly within its education and science sectors, and ensures that relevant indicators and targets are embedded throughout its programming.

### UNESCO KEY FACTS

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**MISSION AND MANDATE:** UNESCO seeks to contribute to peace-building, poverty eradication, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

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**GOVERNANCE:** The General Conference, comprising representatives of its 193 member states and 11 associate members, determines the policies and main lines of UNESCO's work; it meets every two years and sets the organisation's programme and budget. The General Conference elects the 58-person Executive Board and appoints the Director-General. The Executive Board meets twice a year and ensures the overall management of UNESCO. The Secretariat is UNESCO's executive branch and is accountable to the Director-General.

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**STRUCTURE:** Headquartered in Paris, UNESCO currently employs approximately 2 300 staff, 30% of whom are deployed in the field. It has 53 field offices around the world with a mix of thematic regional bureaux, as well as cluster, national and liaison offices and other flexible entities such as antennae and project offices. UNESCO hosts the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Institute for Statistics and has nine Category 1 institutes. UNESCO has a global network of 199 national co-operating bodies (National Commissions).

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**FINANCE:** UNESCO is funded by assessed contributions (47% in 2017) from member states and by voluntary contributions. Total receipts were USD 548 million for 2017. UNESCO has faced an extremely difficult financial situation owing to the suspension, in late 2011, of contributions by two member states: Israel and the United States (22% of assessed contributions for 2012-13). UNESCO's funding gap for 2018-19 was 29% (USD 339 million).

**The organisation's capacity for realistic, flexible and proactive planning and decision-making is limited.** UNESCO has been operating under particular stress since late 2011 following a 22% reduction of its operating budget. Priority setting of the programme of work remains inadequate, and the volume of available resources does not match the ambition of the mandate and current programming. Resources remain spread too thin and a lack of discipline towards driving greater selectivity and prioritisation across the organisation is evident.

**The institutional architecture at headquarters reflects UNESCO's mandate; yet global field presence is unnecessarily complex, which compromises agility and relevance.** The organisation aims to carry out its global and normative work at headquarters and regional levels and to undertake policy advice and capacity building at the national level. An incomplete reform of the field network has left UNESCO with a heterogeneous field structure, resulting in parallel operating structures and inconsistent reporting lines. Performance management of decentralised structures is weak, and accountability remains limited. Current field reforms are underway, seeking to ensure that representation is in line with both resources and ongoing United Nations (UN) Reform processes.

**Human resource capacities and skillsets do not fully reflect UNESCO's strategic focus, are limited in flexibility and are not sufficiently performance-oriented.** MOPAN's partner survey indicates a high degree of respect for the professionalism of UNESCO staff, with nearly 60% of respondents reporting that the organisation excels at providing sufficiently skilled and experienced staff. Despite this, a high number of respondents identified insufficient staffing levels as an impediment to delivering results. UNESCO's ability to plan its human resources effectively has been hampered by the persistent budget gap: between 2011 and 2015, staff costs were reduced by 14%, and training budgets were reduced by 96%. As a result, promotion of talent, identification of poor performance and opportunities for mobility remain underdeveloped. As UNESCO seeks to modernise, evidence suggests that various management tools are being developed to address these challenges, including linking of individual performance to the achievement of results, articulation and application of management competencies, and annual performance reviews of all staff.

**The financial and budgeting capacity for transparent decision-making has improved in recent years.**

The Integrated Results and Resources Framework for the period 2017-19 sets out how total resources are allocated to defined outcomes and results, relying on criteria that reflect the priorities of the organisation's Medium-Term Strategy. UNESCO has systems to ensure funds are disbursed as intended and tracked against targets; delays in spending trigger alerts and management reviews. A comprehensive results-based budgeting system provides budget estimates based on expected results for both programmes and services, and information about sources of funds and estimated funding gaps are integrated into the system. UNESCO's revised cost-recovery policy provides a transparent basis for classifying costs and attributing management costs across all sources of funding.

**Internal audit is strong and there are comprehensive anti-fraud systems in place, but broader operational and financial management capacity is overstretched.**

The internal audit function (accredited with the highest compliance rating by the Institute of Internal Auditors) was assessed by the UN Joint Inspection Unit as having the highest degree of internal audit function independence, with the head approving the internal audit plan directly without approval from the executive head or Executive Board. Recent reports from auditors and the Oversight Advisory Committee highlight a growing degree of operational risk in key control functions, including risk management, which is perceived as incomplete and strained. Evidence suggests that this is being addressed, with policies now being established to ensure risk "holders" monitor ongoing risks while escalating unmitigated risks upwards.

**UNESCO aligns its activities to its partners' priorities, plans, capacities and financial systems.**

With an emphasis on context analysis and consultation with government counterparts, country strategies and interventions are well-aligned with national and regional priorities. A review of evaluations notes that UNESCO is recognised for its distinct interdisciplinary and participatory approach to programming, most notably in the design phase. Building human and institutional capacity among partners is evident throughout the organisation's work, though strategies for doing so are not always sufficiently articulated in programme design documentation. In the education sector, the 28-country Capacity Development for

Education for All programme was evaluated as particularly effective as it was tailored to countries' needs and their abilities to adapt and respond to evolving contexts. Evidence from evaluations of the International Oceanographic Commission and of the Communication and Information and the Culture sectors echo the achievement of similar, tangible results.

**Although a results-oriented leadership and culture has emerged in recent years, the organisation's results focus is not consistent across all sectors or field operations.** UNESCO's new Corporate Reporting System, its Programme Implementation Reports, its Strategic Results Report and its Analytical Programme Implementation Report reflect a strengthened results-based management focus, but gaps exist. Evidence that explains the results logic for how major programmes build a coherent whole is fragmented. In most areas of UNESCO's work, the causal logic underlying activities is not sufficiently clear. As a result, aspects such as the causal analysis, the choice of indicators, and the scope and coverage of monitoring and reporting are often weak or incomplete.

**UNESCO produces high-quality corporate evaluations, yet decentralised evaluations are markedly weak.** UNESCO's evaluation function, which is operationally and financially independent, oversees corporate and thematic evaluations based on strong design, planning, implementation and quality assurance. Evaluations managed by the sectors and field offices are weaker, and coverage is limited, as the three most recent synthetic reviews attest. A review of education sector evaluations found that none of the decentralised reports fully met widely accepted UN Evaluation Group or OECD standards. This is due to both staff capacity and other resource issues. In the absence of decentralised evaluation staff, the Evaluation Office has established an Evaluation Focal Point network aimed to strengthen staff capacity and the quality of decentralised evaluations. In terms of financing, the UNESCO evaluation policy sets an overall target of 3% of programme expenditure as the recommended minimum level of investment in evaluation. While the target remains aspirational, it is expected to increase coverage, and current trends indicate an upward trajectory of allocation towards evaluation across all sectors.

**It is unclear how management responds to cases of poor programmatic performance.** UNESCO produces programme monitoring reports on all activities on a biannual basis. Corporate systems track budget implementation and the substantive performance of interventions. Poor performance in either area should trigger a management response and action, but reports that identify poor performing interventions and disseminate lessons, and evidence of management response, are not available.

**While interventions broadly achieve their objectives, evidence is limited.** UNESCO's evaluations reveal that the organisation is coherent in its delivery of interventions, aligning to relevant national, regional and global priorities. However, evidence suggests that the organisation's ability to respond to changing needs and prioritised target groups varies. Slow disbursement of funds impedes effective implementation. The organisation's ability to deliver in a cost-effective manner is the weakest element of the organisation's results reporting. Concerning the sustainability of UNESCO's interventions, the results are mixed; in the absence of evaluative evidence, UNESCO's self-reporting suggests that capacity-building initiatives supporting normative and programmatic work do lead to long-term change in the practices of governments and institutions. To elevate the credibility of these findings, further investment towards building a substantive evidence-base and strengthening strategic results reporting will continue to be of importance going forward.

# Key findings

The United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, pursues its objectives through five major programmes in the fields of education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. Its strategic vision is aligned with global agendas, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Throughout its work, UNESCO effectively mainstreams

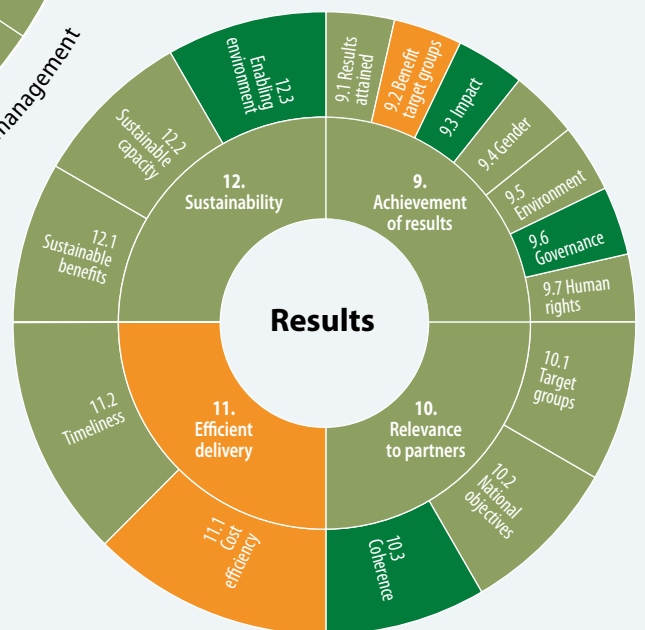
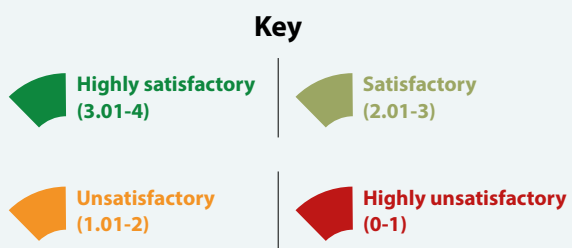
cross-cutting issues including gender equality, good governance, environmental sustainability and human rights.

UNESCO has had to compromise the quality of its central services and corporate systems in favour of its normative and programmatic work, following the 2011 budget crisis which has reduced its overall core budget. Despite notable improvements to financial management systems and strengthened results-based management, evaluation and audit functions, the organisation is facing a number of key challenges.

These include prioritisation of its areas of work, management of risk, the modernisation of human resources management systems and the rationalisation of its structurally complex field network.

The 2017-18 assessment by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) found that UNESCO has a strong appreciation of these challenges and is working to position itself to be more efficient and effective in the future through ongoing reforms.

## PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



## About this assessment

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is a network of 18 countries<sup>1</sup> that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds. The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base is intended to contribute to organisational learning within and among the organisations, their direct clients and partners, and other stakeholders. Network members use the reports for their own accountability needs and as a source of input for strategic decision-making.

UNESCO is one of the 14 organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18. This was the first MOPAN assessment of UNESCO. Norway championed this assessment on behalf of the Network.

This brief accompanies the full assessment, published in early 2019, which can be found on MOPAN's website

at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org). UNESCO's management response will be made available on the MOPAN website as well.

The assessment of performance covers UNESCO's headquarters and regional and country field presence. It addresses organisational systems, practices and behaviours, as well as results achieved during the period 2016 to mid-2018. It relies on three lines of evidence: a document review, interviews with staff and small groups, and an online partner survey.<sup>2</sup>

### MOPAN's evidence lines for UNESCO

- Review of 161 documents
- 120+ staff interviews / focus groups
- 122 partners surveyed in 12 countries

The MOPAN 3.0 methodology entails a framework of 12 key performance indicators and of micro-indicators. It comprises standards that characterise an effective multilateral organisation. More detail is provided in MOPAN's methodology manual.<sup>3</sup>

### Organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18:

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|-------|-------|--------|------------|----------|---------|-------|
| ● ADB | ● GEF | ● IFAD | ● OHCHR    | ● UNESCO | ● UNHCR | ● WFP |
| ● FAO | ● GPE | ● IOM  | ● UN Women | ● UNFPA  | ● UNRWA | ● WHO |

1: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – and two observers, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

2: The online survey was conducted among partners of UNESCO in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Tunisia.

3: Available at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org)