



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Social and Human Sciences Sector

Dialogue with Permanent Delegations to UNESCO on the future Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)

- Pillar 3 of UNESCO's Strategic Transformation -

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Introductory note

I. Global, regional and cross-regional trends and challenges

The world is changing at a pace and a direction that is truly transformative, calling on UNESCO to reorient and reposition itself if it is to remain relevant.

Growing inequalities in the world are a major feature of contemporary social transformations. They risk blocking the achievement of the social dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063 aspirations for social inclusion, the eradication of extreme poverty, as well as inclusive and participatory decision-making. Addressing intersectional and multidimensional inequalities – including gender inequities – is central to designing effective policies to Leave No One Behind (LNOB). This commitment entails reaching the poorest of the poor as well as combating discrimination and its root causes within and amongst countries

Frontier technologies are increasingly disrupting peace, justice, freedom, dignity, gender equality, the wellbeing of humankind (especially of the most disadvantaged), and the sustainability of life on earth. In addressing rapid technological advances and their impacts on societies, it is important to take due account of the needs of developing countries, particularly in Africa. Ethical reflection on science, technology and innovation is essential in this regard.

Climate change is a global challenge that requires internationally coordinated action. Its social and ethical dimensions are critical to successful climate policies. Achieving basic needs, realization of human rights, equity, decent work, safe migration and good governance in the face of climate challenges means recognizing the role of people as victims and agents of environmental transformation. Climate change presents ethical challenges that force citizens to confront serious ethical issues of fairness and responsibility as individuals, and even more so as members of larger political systems.

The interplay of identity and diversity has given rise to both exclusionary and broad-based inclusive and participatory practices and discourses. Identity is being used both to fight diversity and to embrace it – both to exclude groups from public life and to create more inclusive and interconnected societies. The relationship between identity and diversity is an important determinant of the inclusiveness and peacefulness of our increasingly diverse societies, which in turn enable the achievement of Agenda 2030 as a whole.

Assertive young people emerge today as critical stakeholders for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and particularly of LNOB, as reflected in the UN Youth Strategy *Youth2030*. The current generation of youth is the largest ever and the proportion of young people is growing fast in Africa. Young people thus offer a key demographic dividend that can actively contribute to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental.

In **Africa**, major issues to be addressed include the growing gap between research and policy making and the lack of interaction between governments and the research community; the growing demand for governments to meet international standards for democracy, good governance and the rule of law, while responding to the challenges of poverty, inequalities, and other challenges at home; growing ethnic/religious divisions in the political arena, impeding effective governance; and the growing demand for the participation of women and youth in decision-making, often manifested during election cycles, and resulting in election-related violence.

The focus on knowledge-informed policy advice and capacity-building remains critical, particularly for the Social and Human Sciences (SHS) sector in the area of three Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (targets 16.6 and 16.7); SDG 10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries” (targets 10.2, 10.3 and 10.7); and SDG 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (target 11.3). Targets 6 and 7 of SDG 16 – calling for inclusiveness of institutions and decision-making at all levels – are of transversal significance in this regard, yet have very weak indicator frameworks. Developing concepts and methods and supporting capacity is essential in this regard.

Opportunities for a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach, both within SHS and between SHS and other Sectors, are being scaled up. Examples include work on cities, through the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and in cooperation with other city network in-house, as well as on youth, building on the success of the NET-MED Youth project and of activities on youth and peace building. The Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme also offers a valuable platform for interdisciplinary integration to strengthen the connection between the production of knowledge and policy-making.

II. International Conferences and global commitments, and lessons learned from recent evaluations and audits

International Conferences

The [UN Security Council Resolution 2250 \(2015\) on Youth, Peace and Security \(YPS\)](#) highlights the role of young people in peacebuilding efforts, and acts as a framework for the Youth Programme's violence-prevention actions. Furthermore, the **Youth2030: UN Youth Strategy** established youth engagement for peace and security as its Fifth Priority.

The World Humanities Conference, held in 2017, contributed to setting a global agenda for the humanities. It emphasized the need for new initiatives, especially particular at regional level, to strengthen knowledge institutions, facilitating interdisciplinary knowledge exchanges, and to ensure better connections with public debate and policy processes.

The [Kazan Action Plan of MINEPS VI](#) and the sport policy follow-up framework was launched in 2017 and acknowledged by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/73/24) as a reference for fostering international convergence amongst policy-makers, as well as a potential tool for aligning international and national policy. UNESCO is entrusted with the leadership role in coordinating the global follow-up to the Kazan Action Plan.

In 2022, the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures will come to an end. In taking stock of the achievements of the Decade as set out in its Action Plan, UNESCO Member States and the broader UN community have the opportunity to shape the next generation of programmes, building on successful partnership initiatives.

Lessons Learned from Evaluations

Some important lessons were drawn from the evaluations of the Bioethics programme, the International Convention against Doping in Sport and the Fund for the Elimination of Doping in Sport, and the mid-term review of the UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth (2014 – 2021). The evaluations generally underlined the high relevance of these programmes. They also highlighted the need to attract greater resources and to take better account of gender equality, in order to meet the growing demands from Member States, and ensure long-term sustainability. The evaluations found that there was a need for broader consultations, stronger ownership and greater visibility of the high-quality products produced by SHS.

The evaluation of UNESCO's Operational Strategy on Youth (2014 – 2021), found that youth engagement was increasingly being mainstreamed in UNESCO's youth work. UNESCO is now recognized as a knowledge-holder in the field of youth and appreciated for its convening power among other stakeholders and multilateral partners. However, there is currently no UNESCO-wide programmatic framework for the Organization's youth work, nor is there a dedicated budget or set of specific targets and indicators.

III. A few ideas for reflection

With the above challenges, opportunities and future trends in mind, SHS has embarked on an internal visioning exercise to rethink strategic alignment and focus on critical work streams informed by the

demands of Member States and lessons learned from the past. A core objective is the promotion of human rights-based approaches, reaffirmed as key programming principle in the recently endorsed UN Development Cooperation Framework guidance. Among themes being explored are growing inequality; peace-building and conflict prevention; economic, social and political exclusion; and the societal impact of disruptive technologies.

The dialogue with Permanent Delegations, starting on 24 July, is an opportunity for UNESCO and, in particular, for SHS to exchange with its major constituencies, and deepen reflection on the main issues that UNESCO should focus on in the next decade.

- a) In your view, what are/will be the key global trends, opportunities and challenges of relevance to SHS mandate over the next 10 years?
- b) How to best ensure UNESCO's support to the Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in its various domain while we also think beyond it?
- c) Each of the four overarching challenge areas sketched above – peace, inequalities, technologies, the environment – demands an integrated approach Where and how can you see opportunities for a more integrated and interdisciplinary UNESCO approach?
- d) Given the emphasis in SHS on mainstreaming, how can the Global Priorities Africa and Gender be better reflected in our programmes?