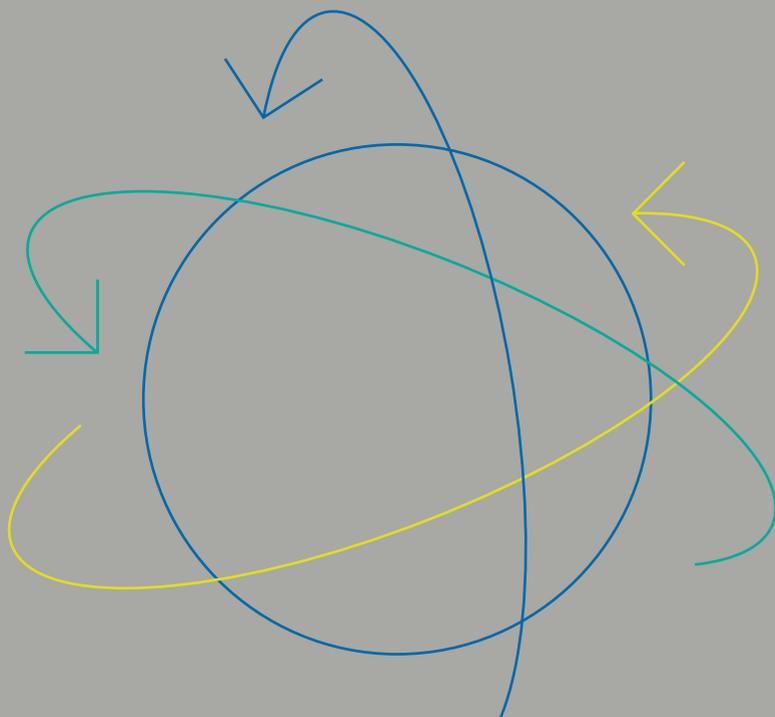


# International Cooperation between National Commissions for UNESCO



**unesco**

German Commission  
for UNESCO



**International  
Cooperation  
between  
National  
Commissions  
for UNESCO**



# Contents

---

Introduction 6

---

Legal basis 10

---

Objectives 14

---

Benefits,  
Requirements,  
and Constraints 20

---

Role of Headquarters  
and Field Offices 25

---

Levels of Cooperation 30

---

Cooperation at the  
Global Level 32

---

Cooperation at the  
Regional Level 35

---

Cooperation at the  
Subregional Level 39

---

Success Factors and Benefits  
of Regional and Subregional  
Cooperation 44

---

Bilateral Cooperation 46

---

Portraits of National  
Commissions Particularly  
Active in International  
Cooperation with other  
National Commissions 50

---

Outlook 61

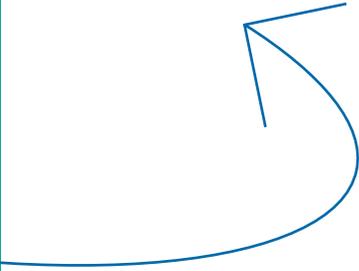
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Imprint 66

# Introduction



National Commissions are a constitutional part of UNESCO: More than 75 years after the creation of the United Nations Specialized Agency, they are more relevant than ever, and remain an innovative type of institution in the wider UN family.



→ National Commissions are of enormous value to UNESCO in many dimensions, as highlighted in the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy 2022–2029 (41 C/4):

‘At the country level, they remain uniquely placed to be the main agents for change at that level to accelerate UNESCO’s response to global challenges and maintain the relevance of UNESCO’s mandate. [...] They secure UNESCO’s presence and visibility within Member States, in the long term and across programmes, including at States’ different territorial levels, with national institutions, umbrella associations, academia, NGOs and civil society.’<sup>1</sup>

→ In addition, National Commissions support **‘universal and inclusive multilateralism’**<sup>2</sup> and foster international trust and collaboration in line with the objectives of the UNESCO constitution through the cooperation between them at subregional, regional and interregional level. The effects of such cooperation are manifold: strengthened capacities of National Commissions, upstream and downstream implementation of conventions and recommendations, transnational serial nominations for the World Heritage list, the Intangible Cultural Heritage lists or the Memory of the World register, strengthened international networks of UNESCO designations with an orientation towards the benefit of local communities, and peace-building networks among National Commissions themselves.

→ In recent years, the responsibilities of National Commissions in international cooperation, as well as the formats and the intensity of this cooperation, have evolved considerably. These developments have received only limited attention from the Programme Sectors of the UNESCO Secretariat, the Field Offices, many Permanent Delegations and even from a number of National Commissions themselves. This brochure aims to change that by highlighting the richness of the interaction already taking place between National Commissions.

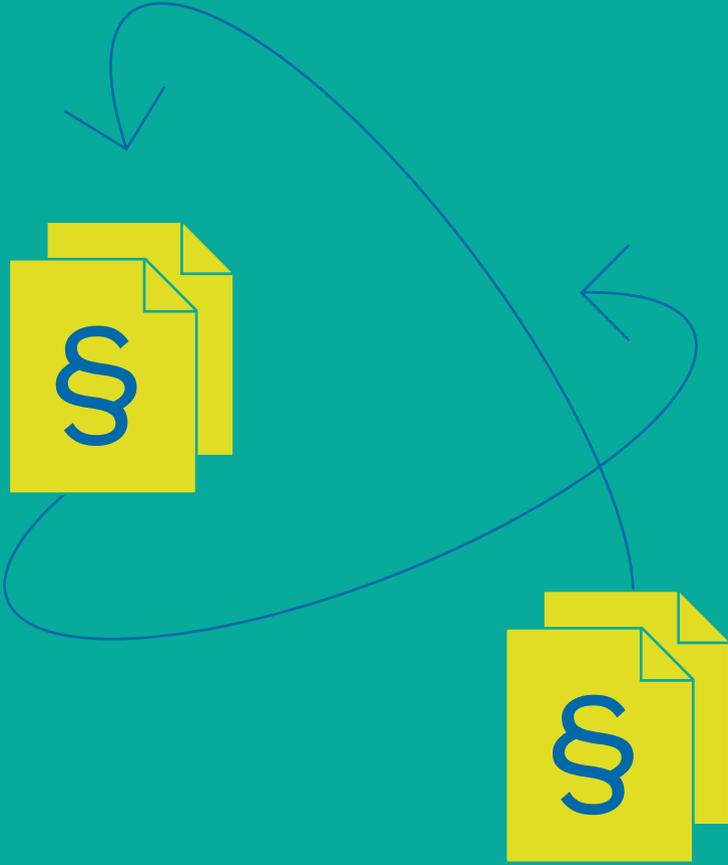
→ It is the third edition in a series initiated by the French and German National Commissions and published jointly with the UNESCO Secretariat. In each brochure, National Commissions provide a comprehensive overview of different aspects of their work. The initiative was launched by the French Commission for UNESCO, with the first brochure explaining the role and essential missions of National Commissions.<sup>3</sup> The second edition was prepared by the National Commission for UNESCO of Morocco and provides guidance on crisis management.<sup>4</sup>

→ This third edition focusses on international cooperation between National Commissions. Its main objective is to make the case to the wider UNESCO family that international cooperation and partnership between National Commissions is the norm, not the exception. The global network of 200 National Commissions worldwide is an integral part of UNESCO's unique infrastructure. This brochure aims to contribute to a strengthened 'universal and inclusive multilateralism'<sup>5</sup> and towards building global trust and peace by offering inspiration to all National Commissions for increased and improved international cooperation, as well as ways to promote their international partnerships.



→ This brochure is itself the result of cooperation between National Commissions, with more than a dozen National Commissions worldwide contributing to its preparation. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all National Commissions that contributed to this brochure for enriching it with their examples and best practices of international cooperation. We are particularly grateful to the UNESCO Secretariat, especially the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations (PAX), and the French National Commission for UNESCO, for their constant support and invaluable guidance in the preparation of this brochure – this work would not have been possible without the close cooperation with UNESCO PAX and our sister National Commissions around the world.

# Legal basis





At very first sight, the mandate of National Commissions for UNESCO seems to address only the national level. As set forth in Art. VII.1 of the **UNESCO Constitution**, their core aim is to improve the association of the respective Member State, in particular ‘its principal bodies interested in educational, scientific and cultural matters’<sup>6</sup>, with the work of UNESCO and its Governing Bodies.

However, there is more to National Commissions’ mandate. It is already Art. VII.2 of the UNESCO Constitution which paves the way for the cooperation with other National Commissions: ‘National Commissions [...] shall act in an advisory capacity [...] in matters relating to the Organization and shall function as agencies of liaison in all matters of interest to it.’<sup>7</sup> These ‘matters relating to the Organization’ encompass more than the Member State’s contact with the intergovernmental organization – ‘matters relating to the Organization’ are also transnational and transboundary affairs. A National Commission can only develop its full potential if its work is not limited to the national level and to exchanges with the UNESCO Secretariat. This is why formalised cooperation between National Commissions began as early as in the 1950s, when several National Commissions organised international seminars involving other National Commissions and relevant stakeholders from other Member States.



To remove any doubt, this international mandate was explicitly spelled out in the 1978 **Charter of National Commissions**. The Charter, adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> General Conference, unambiguously states that National Commissions should ‘collaborate with each other [...] in fostering regional, sub-regional and bilateral cooperation in education, the sciences, culture and information, particularly through the joint formulation and execution of programmes. This cooperation may bear upon the preparation, implementation and evaluation of projects and may take the form of joint surveys, seminars, meetings and conferences and exchanges of information, material and visits’<sup>8</sup>.

Subsequent resolutions<sup>9</sup> of the UNESCO General Conference have consistently reaffirmed and reinforced the factual reality, necessity and legitimacy of cooperation between the National Commissions for UNESCO. These resolutions were also a response to the fact that this dimension (international cooperation) of their work was still too often overlooked.

The list of possible forms of cooperation between National Commissions compiled in the 1978 Charter was meant to be neither comprehensive nor final. To be more specific, several General Conference resolutions that followed in later years explicitly listed concrete forms of cooperation, such as staff exchanges and the strengthening of North-South and North-South-South cooperation.<sup>10</sup>



A crucial document of the more recent past is the UNESCO Executive Board decision on the **Action Plan of the Tripartite Working Group (191 EX/33)** – a document prepared by a joint working group of National Commissions, Permanent Delegations and the UNESCO Secretariat in the early 2010s, which was mandated to propose improvements to processes in the triangle of these three entities. Two of the 14 recommendations of the Action Plan relate to cooperation between National Commissions. Recommendation 8 asks for strengthened regional, subregional and global meetings of National Commissions. Recommendation 9 calls upon ‘each National Commission which is in a position to assist other, less well-equipped National Commissions take steps to make its position known and actively explore avenues for lending a hand in this way. Twinning system, staff exchange programme and cooperative network among National Commissions are most welcome and encouraged’.<sup>11</sup>



The **Comprehensive Partnership Strategy** of UNESCO (most recent version as at September 2019, 207 EX/11) does not feature National Commissions within the ‘external partner’ category of UNESCO. There are two reasons: On the one hand, because they are foreseen in the UNESCO Constitution as an integral part of the Organization, and on the other due to their essential task

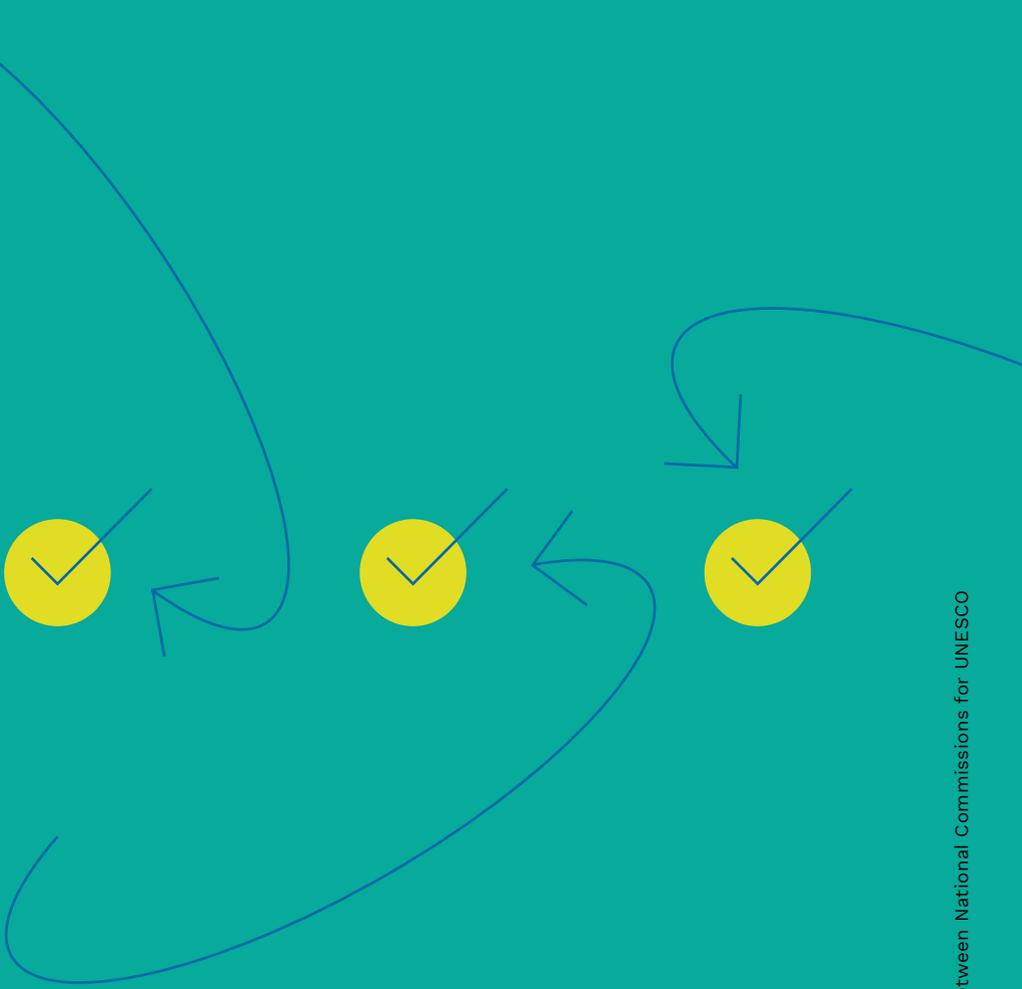
of meaningfully engaging – together with UNESCO Secretariat – all other, truly ‘external’ partners. This being said, the Comprehensive Partnership Strategy addresses National Commissions only in their national liaison function.



Most recently, the new **UNESCO Medium Term Strategy 2022–2029** strongly emphasises the important role National Commissions and their mutual collaboration play for multilateralism: ‘Cooperation with the National Commissions for UNESCO will be consolidated to ensure their involvement in the effective planning and implementation of UNESCO’s programmes, with a view to, among other things, strengthening intersectoral collaboration and partnerships, and supporting universal and inclusive multilateralism through cooperation between them at the international level’.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, there is – and has been – a robust legal framework for the cooperation between National Commissions since 1945. This legal framework empowers and encourages National Commissions to engage in all types of cooperation between them, without any legal restrictions.

# Objectives



Firstly, cooperation and partnership between National Commissions has a very important instrumental purpose, in that it enhances the implementation of UNESCO's Programme and Budget or its conventions and intergovernmental programmes.

In addition, cooperation and partnership between National Commissions is an objective in itself, supporting universal and inclusive multilateralism. But why is this the case and what does this mean?

Multilateralism is understood as the cooperation of states in jointly addressing international challenges; this is the key principle of the United Nations. The past decades have shown that multilateral approaches are more credible, fair, just and effective than unilateral or bilateral approaches. Multilateralism means: a rules-based international order filled with life.

Traditionally, multilateralism refers to agreements and joint approaches of governments. However, over the last decades (at least since the 1992 Earth Summit and the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights) it has become obvious that effective UN policymaking also requires the inclusion of civil society. Since then, beginning in the early 1990s, civil society has played a new and important role in the United Nations through the 'Major Groups' (officially designated groups such as farmers, women and local authorities). Before long, UNESCO also significantly changed its approach to non-governmental organisations. UNESCO's history of effective civil society participation goes back much further, including the establishment of the International Conference of NGOs in 1950, the creation of many international NGOs at UNESCO's initiative as early as the late 1940s and the strong role of NGOs in many UNESCO conventions.

However, UNESCO's most important – and indeed unique – mechanism for involving civil society in its work is the National Commissions. Although the Commissions are very diverse in character (for example, their governmental character varies widely), almost all of them meaningfully involve

# UNESCO's five functions



## Laboratory of ideas

anticipating the great upheavals and assess the future of education, sciences, culture and communication.



## Standard-setter

setting, applying, monitoring and reviewing international norms and standards.



## Clearing house

collecting, exchanging and disseminating information in its designated fields of competence.



## Capacity-builder in Member States

providing advice and assistance on national policy and development programmes.



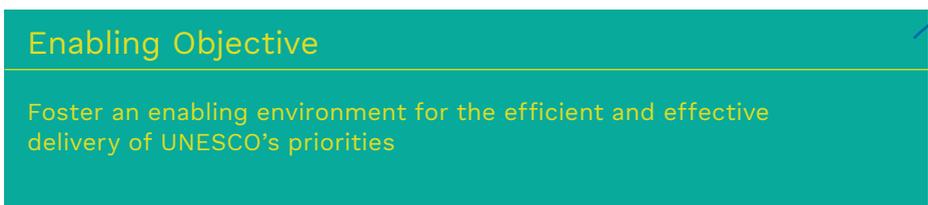
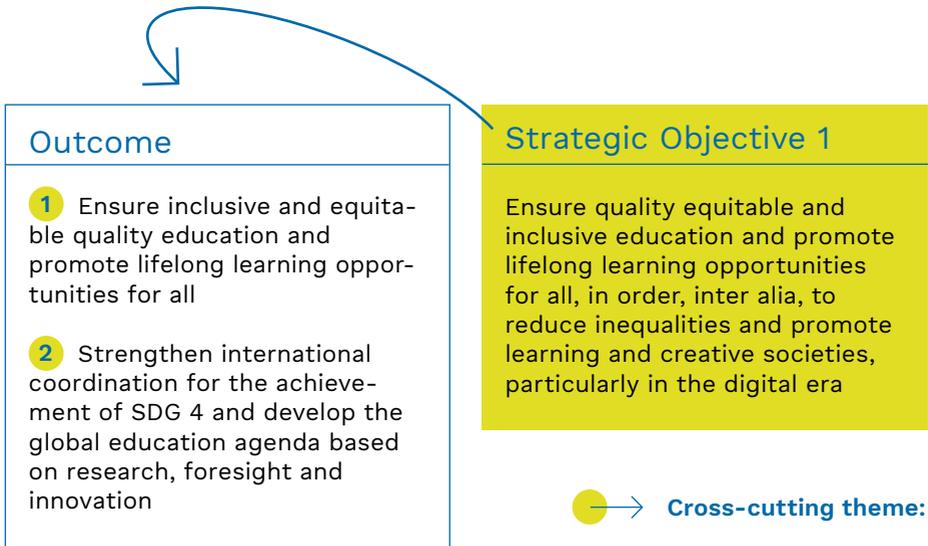
## Catalyst for international cooperation

civil society in their structure. They provide an avenue for civil society involvement both in UNESCO's global policymaking and in bi- and multilateral cooperation formats between National Commissions. National Commissions act as the natural interface with national networks and partners of the civil society in promoting UNESCO's universal values. This is why 41 C/4 refers to National Commissions as supporting 'universal and inclusive multilateralism'.<sup>13</sup>

Since National Commission are mechanisms of international cooperation, they can effectively contribute to **SDG 17 of the 2030 Agenda** ('Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development'<sup>14</sup>), whenever they act in effective bilateral and multilateral partnerships with other National Commissions. In particular, since they involve civil society, National Commissions are in a unique position to contribute to **Target 17.16** by building 'multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries'<sup>15</sup>.

Of course, their international cooperation also contributes to all four of UNESCO's 'Strategic Objectives' for 2022–2029, all eleven outcomes of 41 C/4 (in particular 'enabling outcome 10') as well as all 'five functions' of UNESCO. The cooperation between National Commissions fosters international trust, cross-border and transcultural collaboration and peace – fully in line with the objectives of the UNESCO constitution.

# UNESCO's strategic objectives and outcomes





### Strategic Objective 2

Work towards sustainable societies and protecting the environment through the promotion of science, technology, innovation and the natural heritage

### Outcome

- 3 Enhance knowledge for climate action, biodiversity, water and ocean management, and disaster risk reduction
- 4 Advance international cooperation in science, technology and innovation

### crisis preparedness and response

### Strategic Objective 4

Foster a technological environment in the service of humankind through the development and dissemination of knowledge and skills and the development of ethical standards

### Outcome

- 8 Foster knowledge sharing and skills development in the digital age
- 9 Develop ethical standards, norms and frameworks for action to meet the challenges of innovative technologies and digital transformation

### Outcome

10 Reinforced partnerships, outreach and advocacy in support of UNESCO's action

11 Accountable, efficient and effective management in pursuit of the Organization's results

# Benefits, Requirements and Constraints

While international cooperation of National Commissions has positive effects on multilateralism and UNESCO's work, international partnerships and co-operation also yield many tangible **benefits** for National Commissions and their Member States:

→ Knowledge exchange and learning from each other allows the National Commissions to build on best practices from their partners and thus improve the quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of their work.

→ Their joint positioning can help National Commissions to strengthen the influence of their position and their visibility.

→ The pooling of financial and/or staff resources and/or the division of labour enables National Commissions to (a) implement operational projects that they could not realise on their own, (b) use their resources more efficiently, and (c) improve the quality of the results.

→ Funding from other National Commissions or from donors in other Member States enables them to do additional operational work.

In order to fully benefit from the advantages of international cooperation, certain **requirements** should be considered and fulfilled:

OK!

### National authorisation

Even though the unrestricted mandate for international cooperation has been stated unambiguously in UNESCO documents (see above), in practice it may often be necessary for a National Commission to obtain explicit authorisation from its relevant authorities that it may indeed engage in specific international cooperation formats. Such an authorisation should be wide-ranging or even blanket to allow for different formats of collaboration according to emerging needs. It should entail the mandate to physically visit the partner National Commission, implement joint activities, communicate directly, etc. A blanket authorisation for any form of cooperation with all National Commissions for UNESCO globally is the ideal option.



### Proper understanding of cooperation

Cooperation between National Commissions is – and should always be – understood as a cooperation between equals, ‘on equal footing’, in line with the principle of UNESCO where ‘one State equals one vote’. It may not be understood as a form of ‘donor-recipient’ relationship, neither by Commissions of low and middle income countries nor those of high-income countries, even if there are obvious differences in financial and other resources.

Each partnership requires commitment and patience, since processes of a partner National Commission may be more time-consuming or less transparent than what the other partner expects. It is essential to accept delays and alternative decision-making processes, as all forms of bureaucracy are different – and bureaucracy exists in all Member States. Accepting from the outset that processes will be different with the new partner

is an indispensable prerequisite for effective and equal partnerships.

National Commissions that want to engage in international partnerships need to be aware of their own role and limitations. They should try not to ‘copy’ pre-defined cooperation formats. As always, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach and each National Commission has the right to choose its own way forward. It is advisable for prospective new partners to develop their own way of working together that is appropriate to each of the partner National Commissions involved, their particular framework conditions and specific needs.



## Language

Historically, successful cooperation between National Commissions has often emerged in cases where they share a language (e.g., one that is not a UNESCO working language). The German-speaking National Commissions, for example, have been cooperating since the 1950s. The close collaboration between the Lusophone National Commissions is another example.

While it is helpful for cooperation between some National Commissions if they share a common language, this is by no means a prerequisite for successful cooperation. It is sufficient to share the same ‘international working language’ (i.e., one of the six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, or Spanish). And it is perfectly possible to work together even if the National Commissions involved do not use the same international working language.



## Staff

International cooperation almost always requires the full support of the President/Chairperson and of the Secretary-General of the National Commissions involved. At the same time, the establishment and maintenance of an international partnership typically depends on the active and ongoing involvement of one or more senior staff members below the Secretary-General, who are

available as focal points. It is helpful if the staff acting as focal points have a multi-annual mandate (unlike the sometimes short terms of Secretary-Generals, which is associated with a high rate of rotation). This person or these persons acting as focal point can build trust and understanding with other National Commissions and is/are able to understand and address specific requirements in a cooperation. These focal points do not necessarily need to be formally tasked to act as 'programme officers for international cooperation' but it is helpful if they are entrusted to fulfil this mandate in practice. Frequent and/or short-term staff changes at all levels will significantly hamper and obstruct international partnerships.



## Financial resources

International cooperation between National Commissions is greatly facilitated when each partner can provide at least basic financial resources for the collaboration. For example, the possibility of visiting the partner National Commission from one's own resources for short-term visits without having to apply for separate funding from the partner National Commission or from third parties will greatly facilitate the establishment of partnerships on equal terms. In any case, the budget should at least allow for participation in the regular meetings of National Commissions, such as those alongside the Executive Board, the annual inter-regional meeting and the regional and subregional meetings, where they exist.

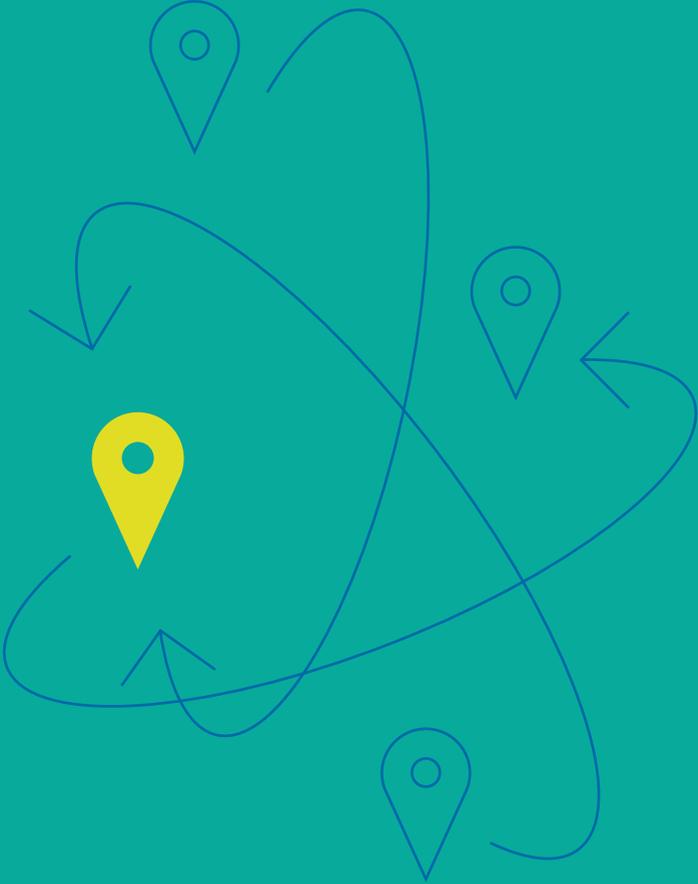
Only a few National Commissions dispose of a larger dedicated budget for international cooperation or for supporting other National Commissions. Others may apply to third parties or the UNESCO Secretariat for supporting such cooperation projects, notably via the Participation Programme. In order to move forward, National Commissions are encouraged to seek establishing a permanent budget line for their international cooperation and partnership.



## Other possible constraints

Large geographical distances between the seats of the partner National Commissions can make effective cooperation a little bit more difficult, especially when working hours vary significantly due to time differences. At the same time, cooperation can also be hampered by very different political frameworks of the partner National Commissions or if they have very diverging institutional settings – for example, if one of them is fully integrated into a ministerial hierarchy and the other is organised in a rather autonomous way. The same applies if they have very diverse agendas (e.g., one of them focusses mainly on culture, the other almost exclusively on education). Before National Commissions enter into cooperation, it is therefore important to openly discuss these framework conditions and their possible implications with all parties involved.

# Role of Headquarters and Field Offices



Over the last ten years, the UNESCO Secretariat has strengthened its work in favour of cooperation and coordination between the National Commissions. This was in response to the 2013 Action Plan of the ‘Tripartite Working Group’ (compare above) and the ‘Comprehensive Partnership Strategy’ of UNESCO. The reinstatement of the National Commissions Unit within the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations (PAX) was an important and effective step in UNESCO’s support for cooperation between National Commissions.





The UNESCO Secretariat contributes decisively to the global interconnection of the National Commissions (see next chapter). At the same time, it plays a crucial role in informing National Commissions about current developments and upcoming opportunities at UNESCO and about activities of the National Commissions themselves, as well as in providing training and funds to strengthen National Commissions in their capacities.

Since 2020, the UNESCO Secretariat has been organising regular (approximately monthly) 1-hour **digital information sessions** for all National Commissions globally on important ongoing issues. They complement the well-established information sessions for Permanent Delegations. In 2022, for example, such information sessions have covered the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, Results-Based Management, UNESCO activities in the field of water, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and the Fellowships Programme. It is foreseen that this series of information sessions will be further enriched by sessions organised by National Commissions themselves.

A special type of information session is the **training for new Secretaries-General**, typically hosted in autumn of uneven years a few days or weeks ahead of the General Conference. The

training used to be ‘in person’ in Paris, but in 2021 it was organised digitally due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, the training is held annually in a digital format. The aim of the training is to provide new Secretaries-General with basic knowledge about National Commissions and their cooperation with the Secretariat, as well as knowledge about recent trends within UNESCO.

The **annual report of National Commissions** has been published every year since the 2013 edition. An exception was the year 2021, when instead the comprehensive ‘75 years of action – National Commissions tell their stories’<sup>16</sup> report was published. The structure of the annual reports has been largely identical across the years: Each National Commission provides an update about its activities and major achievements in the previous year, typically including one success story and a photographic illustration, as well as future priorities and possibilities for joint collaborative work between National Commissions. Usually, about 130 to 150 National Commissions respond to the call for the annual report, demonstrating the added value of the work of National Commissions and their contribution to UNESCO’s ideals and programs. In 2022, the Secretariat released a new version of its **‘Architecture of National Commissions’** publication.<sup>17</sup>

The UNESCO Secretariat also hosts a **Sharepoint collaborative website**<sup>18</sup> for National Commissions, and it publishes **weekly and monthly newsletters**. The Sharepoint website provides opportunities for National Commissions to share their success stories, update their profiles as well as access documents and presentations held during information sessions and other events. Every Wednesday or Thursday, the UNESCO Secretariat publishes the **‘News Digest’** newsletter, a summary of the announcements and news distributed on the collaborative Sharepoint site during the previous days.

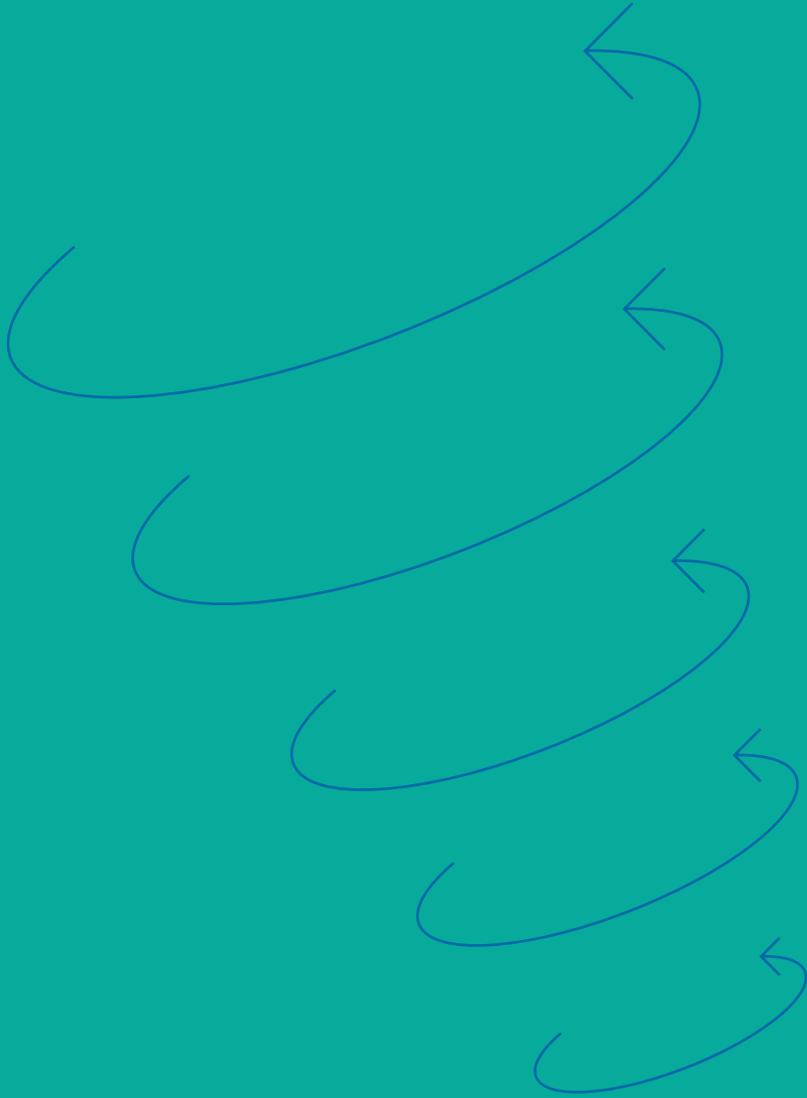
Also, at the end of each month, the UNESCO Secretariat (PAX) publishes its **‘Monthly Letter of National Commissions’**, which summarises important events of the last few weeks and, maybe even more importantly, provides a preview of

upcoming important events. This newsletter also features changes in the positions of Presidents/ Chairpersons and Secretaries-General of National Commissions.

Established in 1957, the **UNESCO Participation Programme** is an important mechanism to support concrete regional and subregional cooperation between National Commissions. While Member States and NGOs are also entitled to submit applications, most come from National Commissions. They can apply for up to USD 38,000 for regional applications. However, regional and subregional applications are still quite rare. Among the 498 projects approved in the 2020–2021 cycle (excluding NGO and emergency assistance), there were only eight regional projects. Also for the 2018–2019 cycle, only eight out of 476 projects were regional. This low figure is no coincidence, since the General Conference resolution on the Participation Programme allows for only two regional requests per region. Another obstacle is that only three percent of all Participation Programme funds may be provided to regional projects. Subregional and interregional requests are even included in the quota of seven applications per Member State (only regional applications are excluded). These restrictions mean that the Programme cannot yet fully exploit its potential to foster subregional, regional and interregional cooperation.

In most cases, UNESCO Regional **Field Offices** organise regular meetings of the National Commissions of the Member States covered by the Office. The National Commissions are also usually involved in the elaboration and implementation of Regional Support Strategies, where they exist. However, the picture is rather uneven, as the structure of UNESCO Field Offices is currently evolving towards a ‘two-tier system’. In Africa, ‘Multisectoral Regional Offices’ have been in existence for almost ten years now (complemented by National Offices and Liaison Offices), while in other regions this new system is to be introduced in the next few years.

# Levels of Cooperation



Cooperation between National Commissions takes place on many different levels: globally, on a regional or subregional level, and bilaterally. This chapter presents the various existing formats on the different levels. The list of these formats does not claim to be exhaustive and more formats may be added in the future.

Most of these forms of cooperation do not require prior formalisation between the participating National Commissions (e.g., through a Memorandum of Understanding, MoU). Contractual formalisation of the cooperation is the norm only when the cooperation involves financial transactions.



# Cooperation at Global Level



1

All formats in which National Commissions for UNESCO exchange information and experience at the global level are currently implemented, supported and/or co-organised by the UNESCO Secretariat.

Since 2014, **interregional meetings** have been held annually, in which representatives of all National Commissions worldwide are invited. In even-numbered years, these meetings are hosted by and in a UNESCO Member State (2014 Astana, Kazakhstan; 2016 Shanghai, China; 2018 Diani, Kenya), in odd-numbered years, the interregional meetings are held for one or two days immediately before the General Conference in Paris. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the meetings were hosted as online meetings with support from a Member State (2021 Switzerland; 2022 Jamaica with additional support from France). The objective of these interregional meetings is to inform National Commissions on important developments within UNESCO (including the Field Offices), to discuss joint priorities and to facilitate knowledge exchange between the National Commissions. The meetings are chaired by a representative of a National Commission, supported by one vice-chair per region and the Secretariat. The directors of the Field Offices often participate in the meetings to ensure synergies and exchange between Commissions and Field Offices.

In addition to the interregional meetings, the UNESCO Secretariat hosts **meetings of National Commissions alongside the sessions of the Executive Board**. These meetings usually comprise two 90-minute sessions in the morning of the first plenary session days. They are chaired by a representative of one National Commission.

The last few years have seen an increasing number of formats through which National Commissions themselves enrich their interregional cooperation and exchange.

## Examples

- 1 The Canadian National Commission (in cooperation with the Slovenian National Commission) published an important **toolkit for Youth Engagement** (a first edition in 2011, and an updated one in 2020). In both editions, the development of this toolkit has been a collaborative exercise involving some 60 National Commissions. The 2020 publication contained 23 best practices, collected in a bottom-up process.<sup>19</sup>
- 2 The UK National Commission for UNESCO has started a series of publications entitled **‘Wider value of UNESCO to the UK’** in 2012, now known as ‘The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the United Kingdom’<sup>20</sup>. The first report was published in 2013, the most recent report in 2020. This report series has inspired National Commissions from around the globe to undertake similar forms of analysis.
- 3 Since 2005, the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO has been organising its **Lugano meetings** in order to foster exchange on a specific topic in an informal setting with a small number of National Commissions. Ten meetings have taken place up to 2022. Originally, these meetings were only aimed at National Commissions from Europe but are now held in an interregional format.
- 4 The Turkish National Commission for UNESCO invited the National Commissions whose Member States are **members of the Executive Board** to a meeting in Istanbul in September 2019.

- 5 The National Commissions of the UK and Switzerland, in cooperation with the National Commissions of Germany, Iceland, the Republic of Korea, Portugal and Slovenia, implemented the '**VINCI Project**' as a joint research project between 2017 and 2019, resulting in the 'Assessing the Value of UNESCO within a Framework of International Cooperation (VINCI): The Impact of UNESCO Chairs on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' report.<sup>21</sup>
- 6 The French and the German National Commission have initiated this **series of brochures for National Commissions**. This initiative is open to all interested National Commissions. Its aims to help strengthen their capacities through the exchange of knowledge and best practices, increase their visibility among public and private partners, and contribute to UNESCO's modernisation efforts in the context of its Strategic Transformation.

# Cooperation at Regional Level

## 2



The first Regional Meeting of National Commissions in the world was held in Havana, Cuba as early as 1950, while the first Regional Meeting in Europe was held in Aix-en-Provence, France in 1956.

The most important regular meetings and opportunities for exchange between National Commissions until 2011 have been the 'Regional Consultations on the Programme and Budget'. Depending on the region, these meetings were held on a quadrennial basis (C/4 consultations) or every second year (C/5 consultations) and usually lasted three days. Their main purpose was to obtain National Commissions' input at an early stage in the strategy planning cycle for the preparation of UNESCO's C/4 or C/5 documents. When the United States suspended its financial contributions to UNESCO in 2011, these Regional Consultations were discontinued due to a lack of funding and replaced by a questionnaire.

It took a few years until National Commissions – on their own initiative – re-established meeting formats that compensated for the discontinuation of the 'Regional Consultations'. The regional networks that exist today vary in their modalities and level of activity.

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## African Network

In September 2022, the first pan-African Regional Meeting of National Commissions since 2010 was hosted by the Ghana National Commission, with financial support from UNESCO (under the Participation Programme) and the National Commissions of Azerbaijan, Canada, France, and Germany. The overarching objective of the meeting was to raise awareness of the five flagships of the Global Priority Africa Flagship Programme and for National Commissions to be able to prioritise and participate in the implementation of Priority Africa. The participants, as part of a declaration resolved to hold these meetings every two years; the next one will take place in Angola in 2024.

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## Arab Network

The Regional Meeting of Arab National Commissions in February 2020 brought together 14 National Commissions from the Arab Region with representatives from the UNESCO Secretariat and some European National Commissions. The goal of the four-day meeting was to build capacities and exchange good practices; the meeting also gathered input for the elaboration of 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 (2021-2022). The planned regular continuation of the meeting was prevented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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## Asia-Pacific Network

The first Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of National Commissions since 2010 took place in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, in September 2018, with around 100 participants from 30 countries. It was co-organised by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Bangkok Office. The meeting built on the Korean National Commission's long-term commitment to capacity-building for its sister National Commissions in Asia and the Pacific, for example, by organising training and capacity-building workshops and projects from 2011 to 2017. The Korean National Commission also supported regional networking activities through repeated financial and technical support to the East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network. At the Gyeongju meeting, it was proposed holding such Regional Meetings on a regular basis. However, this was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In February 2015, European National Commissions established an ‘informal network of cooperation and exchange’ at their first meeting in Bonn, Germany. The main reason for establishing the network was to promote exchanges between European National Commissions, with a view to aligning perspectives on issues that fall within the mandate of the European Union and UNESCO. Thus, membership in this network is foreseen for the Commissions of those UNESCO Member States (and Observers) that are EU members, EFTA members, EU candidate countries or former EU members. Since the network is informal, it does not have a chair or spokesperson; it takes no joint decisions nor makes joint network statements. However, the meetings have already led to many joint initiatives of the network members.

The members of this informal network meet every year for three days. They have been held in Germany (2015), Poland (2016), Greece (2017), Slovenia (2019), Portugal (2020), Iceland (2022), and Andorra (2023). Each meeting is usually attended by 50 to 70 participants, including representatives of the UNESCO Secretariat. Typically, there are two participants per country, the Secretary-General and one additional staff member. Participants cover their own travel and accommodation costs; the host covers the catering and conference facility costs. The meetings in this informal format are held in English only.

Each meeting covers two to five topics in plenary sessions. The overall meeting design is the responsibility of the host together with a ‘troika’ of the organisers of the previous and future meetings – to ensure continuity – plus a management or steering group of National Commissions chosen by the host. In addition, each meeting has up to 12 break-out sessions/working groups: Their topics are determined in a bottom-up approach, in which each network member can propose a topic. There are also digital forms of cooperation and exchange between meetings, for example, to ensure meeting follow-up.

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## Latin American and Caribbean Network

The first Regional Meeting of National Commissions of Latin America and the Caribbean since 2010 was held in Uruguay in November 2018. The meeting resulted in a plan to establish a voluntary and informal Network of National Commissions for UNESCO of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the establishment of the Network was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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## Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Network

National Commissions of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have been meeting on several occasions, with UNESCO Apia and Kingston Offices playing a key facilitating role in this regard. Thus, the 9<sup>th</sup> Consultation of Pacific SIDS National Commissions was organised in Fiji in September 2023 by the UNESCO Apia Office, with the financial support of the French National Commission. The meeting focussed, inter alia, on partnerships among National Commissions for addressing the development challenges of SIDS as well as crucial issues such as the Operational Strategy for SIDS, the field reform, the Fellowship and Participation Programmes as well as other collaborative actions in UNESCO's key areas.

Caribbean SIDS National Commissions equally maintain regular communications and exchanges. The UNESCO Regional Office for the Caribbean has implemented training seminars for Secretaries-General of Caribbean National Commissions for UNESCO and preparatory meetings for each General Conference over the years. These meetings/seminars were organised to discuss common topics of interest before the General Conferences. Starting in 2007 (Curaçao via the Participation Programme), they then took place in Dominica (2009), Guyana (2011) and Jamaica (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019). The next meeting of Caribbean SIDS National Commissions for UNESCO is expected to be held in Curaçao in the first half of 2024.

# Cooperation at the Subregional Level



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## Cooperation of Nordic National Commissions

Below the large regional networks, National Commissions have formed networks with varying degrees of formalisation at sub-regional level or on the basis of a common national language.

Since a first meeting in 1956, the Nordic National Commissions (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and more recently the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands as Associate members of UNESCO) have met almost continuously every year. The goal is to pool material and intellectual resources, exchange information, and plan joint projects. In fact, it is the members of these National Commissions who meet at these annual meetings – together with the Secretaries-General and the Nordic UNESCO Delegations. The meetings rotate within the Nordic countries. They are informal and result in non-binding recommendations. The cooperation also serves ‘conscious identity building’, namely the ‘building a regional cultural bloc’.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1960s, the annual meetings of the Nordic Commissions have also worked to agree on joint positions for the General Conference. The rotating representation of the Nordic countries, which share one seat on the Executive Board, also dates back to the 1960s. In addition, the cooperation has led to the creation of a Nordic World Heritage Sites Network and a Nordic network on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

A recent outcome of the cooperation is the ‘Nordic non-paper on UNESCO reform’ of 2018. In addition to these annual meeting, there are also meetings where only the Secretaries-General of the Nordic National Commissions come together.

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### Cooperation of National Commissions of South-East Europe/ Balkans

This cooperation dates back to 1964. Between 1964 and 1990, 14 meetings and conferences of the National Commissions of ‘Balkan countries’ (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkish, and Yugoslavia) took place. In 1967, a joint meeting with the Nordic National Commissions was held. After the end of the Cold War, these meetings stopped. They were resumed in 2017 on the initiative of the Turkish National Commission and with additional support of the UNESCO Venice Office, now with many more National Commissions participating. A second meeting took place in Slovenia in 2018. In October 2023, the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO and the Croatian Commission for UNESCO organised the third informal meeting of the National Commissions of the South-East European Countries under the theme ‘Education, Science and Culture in Emergencies’. Among other things, the representatives discussed possible cooperation activities in the field of culture as well as the outcomes of MON-DIACULT 2022.

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### Eastern African Network

From 2008, the National Commissions of Eastern Africa have been cooperating and meeting annually. Initially, the network consisted of the National Commissions of the five founding members of the East African Community: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Since then, the East African network has expanded to include the National Commissions of all UNESCO Member States covered by the Nairobi Field Office, as well as Burundi. The annual meetings are usually attended by the Secretaries-General, sometimes with one other staff member. The network is supported by a ‘Permanent Secretariat’, which was initially hosted by the Uganda National Commission and is now presented by the Kenya National Commission. The chair of the Network (currently the Secretary-General of the National Commission of the United Republic of Tanzania)

rotates. The meetings have been co-financed by its members, the Nairobi Field Office and the German Commission for UNESCO. An important output is the ‘Capacity Development Training Manual for National Commissions’ (2015, published in English and French).<sup>23</sup> The National Commissions also have specific modalities to learn from each other, such as job shadowing.

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### Southern African Network

The National Commissions of Southern Africa have been cooperating and meeting annually since 2012. The Southern African network consists of the National Commissions from those nine Member States, which are covered by the Harare Field Office. The annual meetings are usually attended by the Secretaries-General and one other staff member. These annual meetings have been co-financed by its members, the Harare Field Office and the German Commission for UNESCO. An important outcome is the 2017 Joint Action Plan. Many of the 21 joint activities outlined therein have already been implemented. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the last meeting was held in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2019.

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### Cooperation of German-speaking National Commissions

Since the early 1950s, the four German-speaking National Commissions (Austria, Germany (until 1990: West Germany), Luxembourg, and Switzerland) have been meeting annually for two days to plan and review joint activities as the ‘Committee of Four’. These meetings serve to agree on joint priorities and plan the implementation of joint projects, such as the translation of UNESCO publications into German. To date, the four Commissions carry out five to ten joint projects annually, including projects with a global reach such as the World Map of Biosphere Reserves. In 2019/2020, they jointly developed the influential non-paper on UNESCO’s Strategic Transformation entitled ‘National Commissions for renewed multilateralism’.

In December 2017, the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO organised a five-day workshop in Portugal (Oeiras) to intensify the cooperation between the UNESCO National Commissions of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP).

In May 2023 the Angola National Commission, under the pro tempore presidency of Angola in the CPLP, organised a two-day meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO of Lusophone countries in a hybrid format, in order to develop common cooperation and consultation strategies in line with UNESCO recommendations. The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices, develop projects and ideas, and build technical capacity to follow up and monitor the strategic plans identified and recommended to the National Commission of each Member State.



The National Commissions for UNESCO from the CPLP are traditionally invited and participate, in person and after 2020 virtually as well, in the annual meeting of the Portuguese Associated Schools of UNESCO Network. The Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO participates also by invitation in the meetings of the Associated Schools of UNESCO Network of other countries of the CPLP (e.g., in the network meetings of Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe). Over the years many projects of cooperation involving schools and the National Commissions of the referred countries have taken place.

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### Cooperation of TURKSOY (Turkic language- speaking) National Commissions

Since 2010, the National Commissions of the Turkic-speaking countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), in cooperation with TURKSOY (International Organization of Turkic Culture), have been meeting regularly to discuss possible areas of cooperation. The first meeting was held in Ankara (Türkiye) in 2010, followed by meetings in Russia in 2011, Kazakhstan 2012, Türkiye 2013, Azerbaijan 2014, Türkiye 2016, Kyrgyzstan 2019 and Türkiye 2022. The ninth and most recent meeting took place in Baku (Azerbaijan) in April 2023. The meetings are attended by the President and/or Secretary-General of the National Commissions as well as Permanent Delegations, relevant government agencies, and other institutions (such as the Organization of Turkic States, Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States, International Turkic Academy). The main purpose of the meetings is to exchange experiences and identify opportunities for cooperation – especially with regard to the preparation of joint (multinational/serial/transboundary) nominations to UNESCO’s natural and tangible/intangible cultural heritage programmes/conventions. Recommendations from the meetings are made public in the form of a ‘Final Declaration’.

# Success Factors and Benefits of Regional and Subregional Cooperation



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From the experiences of the existing networks in the last decades, the following aspects can be identified as being crucial for a successful regional and subregional network:

- the existence of at least one relevant characteristic common to the participating National Commissions, such as the membership of the countries in a common important regional or subregional intergovernmental organisation, the coverage by the same UNESCO Field Office and/or a common language,
- annual meetings, at least part of which have an informal or semi-formal setting to build trust and meaningful personal relationships,
- joint tangible products and outputs that demonstrate the outcome of the cooperation, and
- assumption of responsibility and leadership by one or more National Commission to promote the cooperation.

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National Commissions and their Member States can profit in various ways from a National Commission's engagement in a (sub)regional network, since

- National Commissions can learn a lot from sister National Commissions operating in a similar context and under similar conditions,
- coordinating their positions may give more weight to the interests of their Member States in UNESCO's fora and allows for a division of labour between the National Commissions, and
- the pooling of resources and expertise enables National Commissions to (a) implement operational projects that they could not realise on their own, (b) use their resources more efficiently and (c) improve the quality of the results.

# Bilateral Cooperation

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Over the past decades, National Commissions have developed a variety of formats in which they successfully cooperate at the bilateral level. Cooperation ranges from complex joint projects to low-threshold formats such as the regular exchange of publications. The following formats, among others, have proven successful:

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## Regular (Online) Meetings

This is the simplest form of cooperation: at the level of the Secretaries-General or programme officers from two or more National Commissions, there is a regular exchange on content-related and strategic issues.

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## Joint Publications

There is a long list of examples where two or more National Commissions have joined forces to produce a joint publication, such as a brochure on a UNESCO-related topic to inform the public, policymakers or a specific expert community. Joint production allows for a broader perspective, increases legitimacy and reduces costs. A typical example for a joint brochure is 'An Introduction to UNESCO's Updated Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers' by the Canadian and the Netherlands National Commissions in 2018.<sup>24</sup> However, joint publications can also be more comprehensive: In 2020, the Korean National Commission initiated a joint research project and

study with ten National Commissions in the Asia-Pacific region (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Vietnam), which aimed to identify common challenges and foster cooperation for common solutions among the participating National Commissions.<sup>25</sup>

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### Joint Translations

There is also a long tradition of jointly producing translations of important UNESCO texts. These joint endeavours are usually undertaken by National Commissions whose common national language is not one of the six official UN languages. For example, the four German-speaking National Commissions coordinate their translations of official UNESCO texts into German.

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### Joint Events

In the past decades, quite a number of events have been jointly organised and hosted by two or more National Commissions. While this may be time-consuming and cause friction due to the coordination effort required, it also has clear advantages: (1) greater visibility and legitimacy, (2) greater diversity of speakers and perspectives, and (3) a reduction of costs and workload for each partner National Commission. Recent examples include a joint side event on Fair Culture at MON-DIACULT by the National Commissions of France, Germany, Kenya, and South Korea as well as the Colombian Ministry of Culture in September 2022 and an online information sharing seminar for National Commissions on the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of artificial intelligence (AI) by the German and the Korean National Commission in December 2022. In the same month, the Canadian and the UK National Commissions co-organised a side event to the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity on a report titled ‘Sites for Sustainable Development: UNESCO sites at the forefront of innovative local solutions to the global biodiversity crisis’ – itself a collaboration between the two National Commissions. National Commissions can also cooperate in organising subregional consultation meetings for official UNESCO processes. In August 2020, the South African and Rwanda National Commissions

for UNESCO co-organised a Subregional Consultation on the first draft of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Eastern and Southern Africa.

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### Joint Transnational Serial Nominations of Projects

Transnational nominations are possible and strongly encouraged by UNESCO and its Member States for most types of UNESCO designations. In many cases, National Commissions are mandated and responsible for preparing and submitting nominations for some or all types of UNESCO designations. In all these cases, they are strongly encouraged to focus increasingly on such transboundary/transnational approaches. One example of the great potential of transboundary/transnational nominations is the UNESCO Chairs/UniTwin programme, which, as the name suggests, promotes international networks of academic institutions (= UniTwin networks).

Another example are the 43 transboundary properties on the World Heritage List. About half of these are transboundary contiguous areas (e.g., the ‘W-Arly-Pendjari Complex’ shared by Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger), roughly the other half are transnational serial nominations, which means non-contiguous areas or buildings, sometimes spanning continents (e.g., ‘The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier’ in Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Japan, and Switzerland). Similarly, there are now 75 transnational elements in the Intangible Cultural Heritage lists (some of them with a high number of participating countries, as in the case of ‘Falconry’, with 24 participating countries in the Arab countries, Asia, and Europe), 22 transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and four transboundary UNESCO Global Geoparks. Transnational nominations are also becoming increasingly important for the Memory of the World Register. For the ASPnet schools, there are well-established subregional ASPnet networks like the ‘Baltic Sea Project’.

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### Joint Implementation of Projects

Joint ‘on-the-ground’ projects are a more complex form of cooperation between National Commissions. A typical example is regional Participation Programme projects, such as the National Com-

missions of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda conducting a joint study in 2019/2020 on the feasibility of designating the Lake Victoria Basin Ecosystem as a UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve. Also through the 2021 Participation Programme, the National Commissions of Curaçao and of Sint Maarten cooperated to build capacity for ASPnet National Coordinators and teachers in the Caribbean.

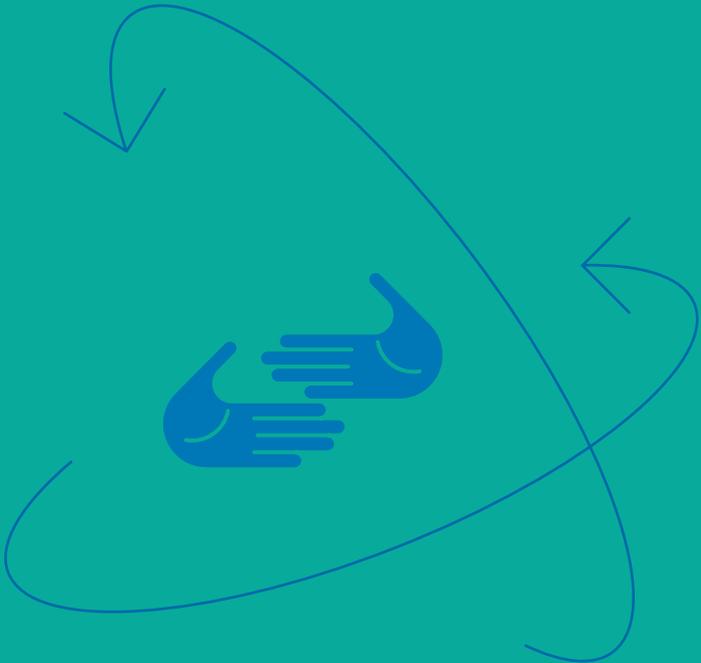
A few of the better-equipped National Commissions have either a dedicated budget for cooperation projects or managed to obtain additional programme funds (e.g., from third party funders) to implement specific projects with partner National Commissions. In this context, the Korean National Commission has been implementing the BRIDGE Programme with partner National Commissions from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia since 2010 (see next chapter) and the German Commission cooperating with Southern African National Commissions to support the implementation of MAB Programme in the region since 2018.

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## Staff Exchange

The exchange of National Commission staff at different levels (Secretaries-General as well as Programme Officers) has a long tradition. The Japanese National Commission has offered such an exchange programme for many years already. Exchanges have been particularly successful when (1) the visiting National Commission understood the working language of the visited National Commission, (2) the set-up and working conditions of the two National Commissions were similar, (3) there had been a clear definition of what the visiting National Commission wants to learn from its sister National Commission, and (4) visiting staff could be maintained for the subsequent period. Successful examples include staff exchanges between the Eswatini and the Estonian National Commissions in 2020, between the National Commission of Korea and the National Commissions of China, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and Germany from 1982 to the present, and the Kenya National Commission hosting an officer from the Namibia National Commission in 2023.

# Portraits of National Commissions Particularly Active in International Cooperation with other National Commissions



This chapter presents the international cooperation activities carried out by National Commissions around the world. These examples have been selected to demonstrate the variety of possible collaborations across sectors and regions. They are not exhaustive and there are many more National Commissions whose work and experience could be presented here.

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### Angola National Commission for UNESCO

The Angola National Commission for UNESCO is involved in several international ASPnet projects, including the ‘Soundscapes of the Atlantic’ project with Spain. The project aims to create multidisciplinary learning centres that promote knowledge of the different Atlantic cultures and their interrelationships throughout history. To promote a Culture of Peace, the Angola National Commission is developing a Cultural Diversity Festival involving ASPnet Schools in Southern Africa and is part of a cooperation project with other Portuguese-speaking countries – as well as Spain and Argentina – that uses sport to combat violence and bullying in schools and communities. The Angola National Commission will also host the Regional Meeting of African National Commissions in June 2024.

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### National Commission of the People’s Republic of China for UNESCO

The National Commission of the People’s Republic of China for UNESCO also has significant international activities. The International Youth Forum on Creativity and Heritage along the Silk Roads (since 2017), the UNESCO-Africa-China Forum on World Heritage Capacity Building and Cooperation in Paris (2019), the UNESCO-Africa-China High-Level Dialogue for Supporting Priority Africa in the COVID-19 and Post-COVID Context (2020), and the Staff Exchange Programme between Asia National Commissions are prominent examples for the Chinese National Commission’s activities.

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### French National Commission for UNESCO

In 1956, the French National Commission for UNESCO organised a conference in Aix-en-Provence, which for the first time brought together a number of European National Commissions and argued that National Commissions should not be limited to a consultative role. In 1989, it organised

an interregional meeting of National Commissions – again in Aix-en-Provence – on the eve of the General Conference, to make useful contributions towards preparing the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy, Draft Programme, and Budget. For many years, the French National Commission also organised a meeting of the French-speaking National Commissions just before the opening of the General Conference sessions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the French National Commission was assigned by UNESCO to organise training sessions for ‘Third World’ and ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries. During this period, it took part in a number of large-scale operations, by contributing to the training of managerial staff of institutions like the ‘écoles normales supérieures’, engineering schools and universities that are essential to the economic and social development of these countries. It has also contributed to the enhancement of the human resources of African countries, through the establishment of ‘écoles normales supérieures’, universities, and research centres.

The French National Commission is also active internationally through the Paris-based International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), a UNESCO Category 1 Institute, for instance, through its annual training programme. The French Commission, together with other National Commissions, has also greatly supported the ‘Revival of the Alexandria Library’ project, including providing advice, organising secondments, awarding scholarships, encouraging the donation of large amounts of publications and arranging contacts and networks. A key result of the project in 2000–2004 was a new online university degree in Information Sciences.

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### German Commission for UNESCO

The (West) German Commission for UNESCO already carried out significant bilateral cooperation projects in the 1970s – for example working with the Polish National Commission for UNESCO across the iron curtain to establish a joint Polish-German textbook commission. As a result, history and geography textbooks were revised to overcome stereotypical images of the former enemy. In the 1970s, the East German National Commission

in turn established annual training courses in seismology and in environmental management for the Global South (which continue to this day at the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences). From 1998 onwards, the German Commission cooperated with its Israeli and Palestinian counterparts in peace education for several years. In 2001, as a result of bilateral cooperation with the National Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it launched the education server D@dalos, offering material on human rights education in nine languages.

In 2008, the German Commission launched a major initiative to support African National Commissions, based on priorities jointly defined in Bonn the same year. An important component of the initiative is the support of subregional networks in Eastern and Southern Africa (see above) and the provision of financial and technical support for projects of African National Commissions. Since 2010, the German Commission has also been working closely with its sister Commissions in Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mexico, the Philippines, Uganda and, most recently, South Africa to include practice-oriented modules on entrepreneurship education in the curricula of universities in these countries (STEP project, each for three years or more years). In 2020 and 2021, the German Commission provided emergency support under its #SOSAfricanHeritage programme for over 30 projects on the African continent to address the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on UNESCO-designated sites.

Since 2009, the German Commission has also been working with many other National Commissions in the framework of its international youth volunteer 'kulturweit' programme, which offers each year around 450 young Germans aged 18 to 26 the opportunity to work for six or twelve months in schools, museums and other cultural institutions abroad, including in National Commissions and UNESCO designated sites worldwide. To date, the Commission has dispatched a total of almost 5,000 volunteers to Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe. Since 2015, the German Commission has also made it possible for young volunteers to come to

Germany – until 2021 only from North Africa, but since 2022 also from Sub-Saharan Africa in significant numbers.

The Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO has been collaborating with other National Commissions in various formats and contexts for years.

At the 2019 General Conference, together with Ghana and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and in collaboration with other countries (including Bangladesh, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Lithuania, Kenya, Slovenia, and Saint Lucia), it successfully presented and led to the adoption of the Proclamation for the International Global Week for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) (to be held annually from 24 to 31 October). This process began when Jamaica hosted, for the first time in the Caribbean, the feature conference of the Global MIL Week 2017, the Seventh Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) Conference.

Other successful international initiatives and collaborations with partners from the region and beyond include joint inscriptions, such as inscriptions in the Registry of Slaves of the British Caribbean (1817-1834) with Belize, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom, and the inscription of The Silver Men: West Indian Labourers at the Panama Canal in the Regional Memory of the World Register in 2011 with Barbados and Panama.

The Jamaica National Commission also has a long track record of co-organising international workshops and trainings with other National Commissions, such as the 1st and 2nd Website Development Training in 2014 and 2015 and the Memory of the World Training Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015 with the Korean National Commission, a UNESCO Open Science & Decolonization of Knowledge webinar for the Caribbean Region in 2021 with the Canadian Commission, as well as other workshops under the Participation Programme.

It also hosted several international meetings, forums and conferences such as the 15th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (together with the Regional Office for the Caribbean and chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission, Hon Olivia Grange), which was being held for the first time in a fully online modality from Jamaica in 2020 as well as the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Policy Dialogue Forum of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 in 2018, the UNESCO Caribbean Forum: Advocating for Small Island Developing States in 2019, the Fight against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property in the Caribbean in 2020, the International Day for Universal Access to Information – A Caribbean Perspective (in partnership with the Media Institute of the Caribbean) in 2020, and the Artificial Intelligence for Information Accessibility AI4IA Conference in 2021. In addition, the Jamaican National Commission, in cooperation with its UNESCO Clubs, hosted the International Youth Leadership Conference in 2020, with over 200 international participants and concretised an exchange programme with the Kazakhstan National Commission when COVID hit.

The Jamaican National Commission has also been cooperating closely with the German Commission through the 'kulturweit' programme for over ten years hosting volunteers at the Commission's Secretariat as well as at various sister agencies. This has had an important impact on the agencies where the interns have been placed and has proved beneficial to the interns in obtaining a better understanding of the work of UNESCO.

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### Kenya National Commission for UNESCO

The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM) cooperates with other National Commissions in various contexts: It hosted an officer from the Namibia Commission for UNESCO in 2023 for one week to share experiences, lessons learnt and best practices in order to promote South-South collaboration in areas of mutual interest. The Commission also successfully collaborated with the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO in the nomination process for the designation of Mount Elgon as the second

UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve in Africa in 2023 (the application that was approved by the International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme in June 2023). In 2022, with the support of the UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), the Kenya National Commission hosted an African Regional Workshop on UNESCO Global Geoparks to promote the uptake of the Geopark concept in Africa and to address under-representation of Africa in the UNESCO Global Network List. The workshop was attended by representatives of National Commissions from across Africa.

In addition, the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO has ongoing culture related cooperation with the German National Commission to promote the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention and culture and creative industries in Kenya. Joint initiatives include a project to strengthen the capacity of Kenyan stakeholders on cultural statistics based on the UNESCO 2030|Culture indicators in 2022, a project to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders from the cultural sector to promote gender inclusive and fair practices in the culture and creative industries in Kenya in 2023, and activities under the initiative ‘Fair Culture, a Key to Sustainable Development’, where KNATCOM is a member of the Fair Culture Advisory Committee and co-hosted (with the German Commission and other partners) three side events to promote Fair Culture practices during the MONDIACULT 2022 (UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development) in Mexico and during the Intergovernmental Committee and Conferences of Parties of the 2005 Convention in Paris in February and June 2023.

The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO has also been cooperating closely with the German National Commission under the ‘kulturweit’ programme (see portrait of German Commission). Kenya has been hosting volunteers at the Commission’s Secretariat and various UNESCO sites around the country for the past thirteen years (except for the two-year interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic). So far, a total of 24 German volunteers have benefitted from this programme.

The Korean National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU) has been a pioneer in providing bilateral assistance to other National Commissions. As early as 1990, it organised the dispatch of the first cohort of 'Korea Youth Volunteers'. This programme led to the establishment of the 'Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)' the following year, which also took over the Volunteer Programme from the National Commission.

In 2010, the Korean National Commission launched its largest international bilateral support project, the BRIDGE Programme. This project contributes to achieving SDG 4 by promoting accessibility to education for the underprivileged in Least Developed Countries. Initially, in the first phase of the Bridge Programme, 18 young volunteers from Korea were dispatched to local communities in six African countries as field workers to facilitate community-driven development at a grassroots level. From 2016 until 2020, the BRIDGE Programme supported the National Commissions of eight sub-Saharan countries (BRIDGE Africa) as well as seven countries in South Asia (BRIDGE Asia). The Korean National Commission seconded project managers to its sister National Commissions, and together, bilaterally, they conducted needs assessments and established national committees in the partner countries. In most countries, new Community Learning Centres were built or existing ones were significantly upgraded (e.g., by providing electricity and sewing machines, building additional classrooms). Annual training workshops were organised. The Korean National Commission has launched the next phase of the Programme with Bhutan, Laos, and Timor Leste in 2020, and Malawi in 2021. In total, KNCU has worked with 24 countries worldwide through the BRIDGE Programme, including 13 in Asia, eight in Africa, and three in other regions (Jordan, Uruguay, and the Solomon Islands).

The Korean National Commission also provides professional training and consultation to countries of the Global South on preparing UNESCO World Heritage applications and on preservation of these sites. In addition, the Commission has held training workshops on documentary heritage for approximately ten countries every year since

2009 (seven items were subsequently inscribed in the Memory of the World register). It also supports craft design in countries like Laos or Uzbekistan.

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### Turkish National Commission for UNESCO

The Turkish National Commission for UNESCO organised the ‘Roundtable Meeting for Experience Sharing between Arab States and Türkiye in UNESCO Fields’ in 2017 with the aim of enhancing the cooperation with the National Commissions of Arab States and discussing possible areas of cooperation. A second meeting was held online in 2021, focusing on cultural and natural heritage. In 2017, the Turkish National Commission also held the first ‘Roundtable Meeting for Experience Sharing between Latin American-Caribbean States and Türkiye in UNESCO Fields’, followed by a second meeting in 2021 (held online due to the pandemic).

In the context of Priority Africa, the Commission organised a first meeting with National Commissions of North and West Africa in 2015 to discuss the current status of Intangible Cultural Heritage in formal and informal education. The meeting paved the way for increased cooperation between the participating states. As a result, a second meeting on ‘Natural, Cultural and Intangible Heritage’ was arranged in 2017 under the chairmanship of the Turkish Ministry of Culture with the participation of 37 African National Commissions for UNESCO. A third meeting was held online in 2021 because of the pandemic.

With its focus on fostering intercultural dialogue for building peace, the Turkish National Commission has collaborated with the National Commissions of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, and Romania to identify common cultural values.

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### United Arab Emirates National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

The United Arab Emirates National Commission for Education, Culture and Science cooperates with National Commissions of other countries, with a particular focus on submitting files for inscription on the UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List. In 2019, the ‘Date Palm’ file was

inscribed in a joint submission of the UAE with 12 other State Parties of the Arab region. The inscription of 'Falconry' in 2021 was a result of the joint work of the National Commission of the UAE with 23 other State Parties from the Arab Region, Asia, and Europe.

In November 2022, the Commission signed an agreement with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) to inscribe African heritage games on the Intangible Cultural Heritage lists of ICESCO and UNESCO. In addition, in January 2023, the UAE and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) signed an agreement to support Arab countries in Africa to submit joint files for inscriptions on the same lists.

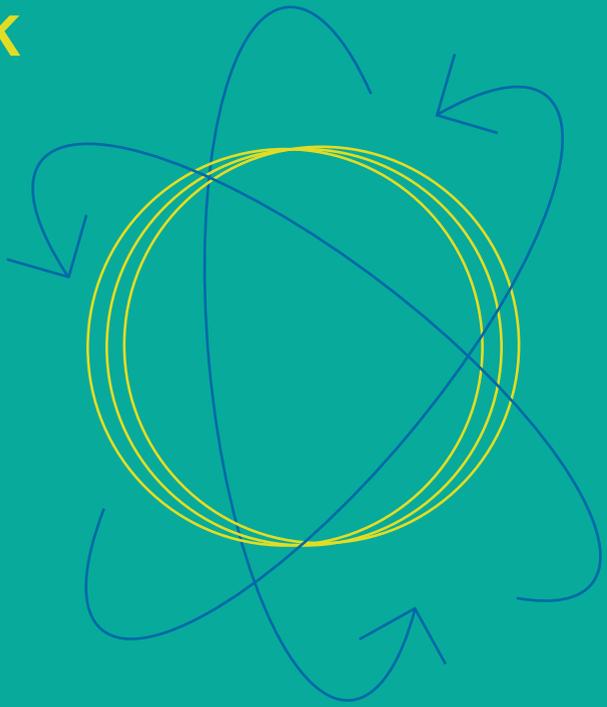
Other examples of the UAE National Commission's international cooperation activities include the collaboration with the Andorran National Commission in hosting the 'Art Camp Andorra 2022' at Ajman University, which was the first time that such a high-profile art project was being held in the Arab world. The event, with the title 'Building Bridges through Art', reflected the ethos of bridging racial and cultural diversity through art, gathering more than 25 talented artists from the Middle East to create works dedicated to peace and tolerance.

The UAE National Commission has also cooperated with other National Commissions in the joint preparation/co-sponsorship of Executive Board decisions (e.g., 212 EX/Decision 46 together with the National Commissions of Bangladesh and Colombia) and co-hosted side events, such as the 'Promoting the Creative Orange Economies' event at the Intergovernmental Committee of the 2005 Convention together with the National Commissions of Colombia and Indonesia in 2020, and organised joint celebrations of International Days like the virtual dialogue session with Colombia, Greece, and South Korea in celebration of World Book and Copyright Day.

The National Commission of Uruguay for UNESCO cooperates closely with other National Commissions in the region, supporting nominations and projects of National Commissions in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2018, the Commission hosted in Montevideo the first Regional Meeting of National Commissions of Latin America and the Caribbean since 2010.

For many years, the National Commission of Uruguay has also been working closely with the German Commission, hosting young volunteers from the 'kulturweit' programme in the Commission's office and facilitating their stays in the country's designated UNESCO sites. This exchange has been particularly helpful in the development of the 'Rutas UNESCO Uruguay'<sup>26</sup> project, which links nine Uruguayan UNESCO sites. In 2022 and 2023 alone, 15 German volunteers have been accepted by the Commission to work in two Biosphere Reserves, one Global Geopark, one World Heritage Site and the National Commission's office.

# Outlook



Peace is the goal at the heart of the United Nations and UNESCO mission. Recent years have shown that the UNESCO Constitution is as relevant as it was in 1945: ‘Peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world. Peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.’<sup>27</sup>

Peace depends on solidarity. Solidarity depends on trust. Trust depends on acquaintance and cooperation: Not only between governments and companies, as rightly stated in the UNESCO Constitution – cooperation among the peoples of the world. Who would be better placed than National Commissions for UNESCO to ensure the promotion of cooperation between the peoples of the world?

As this publication shows, best practice exists for all types of cooperation between National Commissions. All National Commissions globally are encouraged to replicate and ramp up this best practice. Specifically, the following recommendations are made:

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→ Member States and the Secretariat should engage more closely with National Commissions to better understand and exploit the opportunities that they offer for international cooperation.

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→ Member States should encourage their National Commissions to cooperate internationally and provide them with specific funding to enable them to attend international meetings, participate in reciprocal working visits, and engage in bi- and multilateral cooperation partnerships.

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→ Member States are encouraged to discuss at the General Conference how the rules and procedures of the Participation Programme could be revised with a view to reducing or eliminating obstacles to subregional, regional and interregional cooperation projects. For example, limits on regional applications per region could be lifted, the share allocated to regional projects could be increased, and subregional and interregional applications could be excluded from the Member State quota.

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→ The Secretariat is requested to continue all current forms of engagement with National Commissions.

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→ Regional Field Offices are encouraged to meet more regularly with the National Commissions of the Member States they cover and involve them in transboundary implementation work.

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→ All National Commissions are encouraged to appoint a focal point for international cooperation.

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→ All National Commissions are encouraged to use videoconferencing for bilateral meetings and to provide digital seminars, information sessions and training courses for other National Commissions.

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→ All National Commissions should encourage their staff – like programme officers, not only the Secretary-General – to participate in meetings (particularly digital ones) and information sessions of the Secretariat and of National Commissions to get to know their counterparts from other National Commissions.

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→ National Commissions should encourage staff exchange programmes, especially among programme staff in order to enhance knowledge sharing and capacity building in the spirit of South-South and North-South-South cooperation.

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→ All National Commissions should promote international cooperation not only through their own staff but more importantly also via members of UNESCO networks (ASPnet, Clubs, Chairs, Cities, World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Memory of the World entries, UNEVOC centres, Category 2 centres, goodwill ambassadors, etc.), other associated institutions, civil society and other non-governmental organisations, grassroots groups, youth, local and indigenous communities, as peace requires multilateralism to be experienced and understood at the grassroots level.

- 1 UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2029 (41 C/4, paragraph 73)  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083
- 2 *Ib.*
- 3 See Role and Missions of National Commissions for UNESCO  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374460
- 4 See Crisis Management and Business Continuity User Guide for UNESCO's NatComs  unesco.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/natcoms/Multimedia%20Library/Moroccan%20NatCom%27s%20publication%20on%20Crisis%20Management?cs-f=1&web=1&e=gFGga5
- 5 UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2029 (41 C/4, paragraph 73)  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227860  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083
- 6 UNESCO Constitution (Art. VII.1)  www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/basictexts?hub=66535
- 7 *Ib.* (Art. VII.2)
- 8 Charter of National Commissions (Art. I.4)  www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/charter-natl-coms
- 9 For example 'encourage the National Commissions to undertake exchanges of views at the regional and inter-regional levels for the purpose of promoting multidisciplinary and intercultural reflection in all fields relating to the mandate of Unesco' (1985 23 C/Resolution 18.3, 3.c), and 'assist the National Commissions in developing their activities and cooperating among themselves with a view to promoting multidisciplinary and intercultural reflection in UNESCO's fields of competence' (1987 24 C/Resolution 18.2, 3.c) etc.
- 10 'promoting cooperation between the National Commissions, with the possible incorporation of such cooperation within programmes agreed bilaterally' and 'intensify regional and inter-regional cooperation in the Organization's future programmes and budgets, in particular through the participation of observers from other regions in regional conferences and meetings of National Commissions' (1989 25 C/Resolution 15.212, 1.a and 2.d) and 'enhancing the capacity of National Commissions as focal points for UNESCO in the Member States by strengthening their operational and management capabilities, by promoting closer cooperation among them at international, regional and sub-regional levels, by further developing their complementary role vis-à-vis the Secretariat and in particular the field offices' (1999 30 C/Resolution 59, a.i) 11 37 C/50 (Action plan of tripartite Working Group), (Art. IV)
- 12 UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2029 (41 C/4, paragraph 73)  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083
- 13 *Ib.*
- 14 See Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015  www.unfpa.org/resources/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development, p. 26.
- 15 See *Ib.*, p. 27.
- 16 See 75 years of action. National Commissions tell their stories  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379721.locale=en

- 17 See Architecture of National Commissions for UNESCO, 2022  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384012
- 18 See Sharepoint collaborative website  unesco.sharepoint.com/sites/natcom/en-US/Pages/default.aspx
- 19 See Youth Engagement in National Commissions for UNESCO - Toolkit  en.ccunesco.ca/-/media/Files/Unesco/Resources/UNESCO-TOOLKIT-EN\_compressed.pdf and Youth Engagement in National Commissions for UNESCO – Towards a Model of Meaningful Youth Engagement, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Partnerships  en.ccunesco.ca/-/media/Files/Unesco/Resources/2020/01/YouthEngagementToolkit.pdf
- 20 See National Value of UNESCO to the United Kingdom  unesco.org.uk/national-value/
- 21 See Assessing the Value of UNESCO within a Framework of International Cooperation (VINCI). The Impact of UNESCO Chairs on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals  www.unesco.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/VINCI-2018.pdf
- 22 Haggrén, H. 2009. The 'Nordic group' in UNESCO: informal and practical cooperation within the politics of knowledge. in EBNGAHH (ed.), Regional cooperation and international organizations: the Nordic model in transnational alignment. Routledge advances in international relations and global politics, vol. 70, London, Routledge, pp. 88-111.
- 23 See See Capacity Development Training Manual for National Commissions  unesco.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/natcoms/Multimedia%20Library/Human%20Resource%20Capacity%20Development%20of%20NatComs\_training%20manual%202015?csf=1&web=1&e=td3ujv
- 24 See An Introduction to UNESCO's Updated Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366770
- 25 See Joint Research Report on National Commissions for UNESCO in East and Southeast Asia  www.unesco.or.kr/assets/data/report/kALWuneYAm7yNrElmrQlhBY-IC7VYNc\_1606868535\_2.pdf
- 26 See Rutas UNESCO Uruguay  www.comisionunesco.org.uy/rutas-unesco/
- 27 UNESCO Constitution  unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380873

# Imprint

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## As of

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November 2023

## ISBN

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978-3-947675-44-9

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## Design and Layout

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Panatom

## Print

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Brandt GmbH  
[www.druckerei-brandt.de](http://www.druckerei-brandt.de)  
printed on [enviro@polar](mailto:enviro@polar)

supported by



Federal Foreign Office



With the support of

