Promoting open access to information for all, supporting multilingualism and improving access to information for marginalized groups

Key challenges

Access to reliable information is crucial for citizens to contribute to the sustainable development of their communities, and to hold their governments to account. While technological advances have improved access to information and knowledge, they have also introduced new forms of exclusion and inequalities.

Beyond the digital divide, language barriers continue to hinder the right to information of indigenous and minority language users.

While a mere 5% of the languages of the world are present on the Internet, around 40% of the 7,000 languages used worldwide are today at risk of disappearing. Indigenous languages, in particular, are disappearing at an alarming rate around the world, jeopardizing unique knowledge systems and cultures as a whole.

Other marginalized populations such as persons with disabilities and women and girls also continue to face obstacles in accessing information, which risk compounding the inequalities they already face.

The restrictions on accessing offline information due to the closure of educational establishments and libraries, and to online information due to the digital divide, has exacerbated the information accessibility challenges faced by marginalized groups.

Effectively addressing these challenges requires inclusive and open modes of data, and information as well as knowledge democratization supported by adapted policy frameworks and an innovative use of digital technologies.
With your support, UNESCO will...

- Protect and promote the right to access to information, as a fundamental freedom and a key pillar for building inclusive knowledge societies.
- Lead global monitoring and data collection on access to information and produce a global report on progress towards access to information. UNESCO will continue developing and improving monitoring and reporting tools for SDG indicator 16.10.2 to assist countries in tracking their progress on improving access to information.
- Strengthen and scale up the actions of the Information for All Programme (IFAP), an intergovernmental platform for discussing policies on access to information and knowledge.
- Foster multilingualism and linguistic diversity through the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, developing resources such as the World Atlas of Languages, and by co-leading the implementation of the 2022-2032 International Decade of Indigenous Languages together with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Promote inclusive solutions for the empowerment of persons with disabilities, through awarding the UNESCO/Emir Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities prize and the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- Advocate for open access to scientific information and open data to foster equal access to knowledge, bridging scientific gaps, building capacities and disseminating tools for open access.

Recent UNESCO achievements include...

- Promoting and protecting indigenous languages through organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, which saw more than 900 events held worldwide.
- Building capacities to improve the monitoring and reporting capacities of Member States on SDG indicator 16.10.2, and coordinating global reporting on this indicator with support from UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).
- Highlighting the importance of the right to access information by leading the global commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI). The 2019 edition focused on the role of access to information in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind, while the 2020 edition highlighted the key role of access to information in times of crisis.
- Mobilizing members of the Information for All Programme (IFAP) to help mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by providing support to projects aimed specifically at strengthening access to information and knowledge in the wake of the crisis. One such project focused on teacher training using Media and Information Literacy in a post-COVID world, and another on harnessing artificial intelligence to promote sustainable development in the context of the pandemic.
- Fostering South-South cooperation on Open Access by organizing opportunities for knowledge exchange and exploring strategies for strengthening universal access to research in specific country contexts, and by producing capacity-building resources.
- Through technical assistance and capacity-building, contributing to improved access to information legislation in 15 countries across three regions (Africa, the Arab states and Asia and the Pacific) in accordance with international standards.

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More information: UNESCO and Universal Access to Information, Information for All Programme (IFAP), UNESCO/Emir Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities