**Draft General Comment by the Committee on Economic, Social and cultural rights:**

**Science and economic, Social and cultural rights**

**UNESCO contribution**

UNESCO would like to welcome the elaboration by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the draft General Comment on science and economic, social and cultural rights referring to articles 15: 15.1b, 15.2, 15.3 and 15.4. Science is not only important for the consolidation of peace, as the UNESCO Constitution underscores in its article I, but is also a cornerstone of sustainable development, as is evident in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The absence of normative guidance in this respect has been a longstanding obstacle to a more systematic and robust implementation of this crucial set of Covenant provisions.

Hence, a General Comment on this matter will increase and improve the discussion among the States Parties through a more rigorous reporting – this qualitative leap will certainly spill over into other monitoring mechanisms and procedures. It will also give an impetus for more systematic efforts to translate the right into appropriate regulatory frameworks and praxis at the national level.

UNESCO would like to commend the Committee for its thorough work in preparing this text and notably for the comprehensive approach to the set of issues relating to science and the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. In addition, the Organization would like to express its appreciation for the acknowledgment of its multi-faceted contribution to this agenda, spanning from the elaboration of standard-setting instruments in the field of science and bioethics (particularly the 2005 Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights[[1]](#footnote-1)\* and the 2017 Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers) to the pioneering Venice Statement on the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

Drawing on past, ongoing and upcoming work, UNESCO would like to put forward the following recommendations:

* **Mainstream ethics in the elements of the right**: UNESCO would like to advocate for the integration of ethics teaching and the application of ethical principles in connection not only to acceptability but also to: a) accessibility as part of the information concerning the risks and benefits of science (Section III-A paragraph 23); and b) the quality parameters referring to the process of scientific creation and to the access to the applications and benefits of science (Section III-A paragraphs 24-25).
* **Recognize the linkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**: the Agenda 2030 acknowledges the contribution of science, technology and innovation to the fulfilment of human rights and to making sure that no one is left behind. With that in mind, it would be important to underline (under section VI of the draft on international cooperation) the potential benefits for implementing a rights-based vision for science to capitalize on the political commitment behind the Agenda 2030 and the robust monitoring of its specific targets.
* **Acknowledge the connections with anti-doping**: within the section referring to controlled substances (Section V-E of the draft General Comment) include reference to the [UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID%3D31037%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html), adopted by its General Conference in October 2005.
* **Underscore the gender bias in the development of new technologies**: the recent UNESCO publication [“I’d blush if I could”](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000367416.page%3D1) produced in collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the EQUAL skills coalition pointed to new technologies reproducing harmful gender biases and gender divides.

Furthermore, UNESCO would like to inform the Committee that its General Conference at its 40th session in November 2019 decided to launch the elaboration of [two normative instruments on the ethics of artificial intelligence and on open science respectively](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000372579). A general comment will be a significant source and reference point for this upcoming work, considering it will be important for monitoring the 2017 Recommendation on science and scientific researchers that will be soon initiated. With all that in mind, UNESCO would like to reiterate its commitment to strengthening cooperation with the Committee and OHCHR towards a reinforced implementation of article 15 of the Covenant.

1. \* Of direct relevance to the draft General Comment is the 2015 Report of UNESCO’s International Bioethics Committee on the principle of the sharing of benefits available at: [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233230/PDF/233230eng.pdf.multi](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000233230/PDF/233230eng.pdf.multi) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)