



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

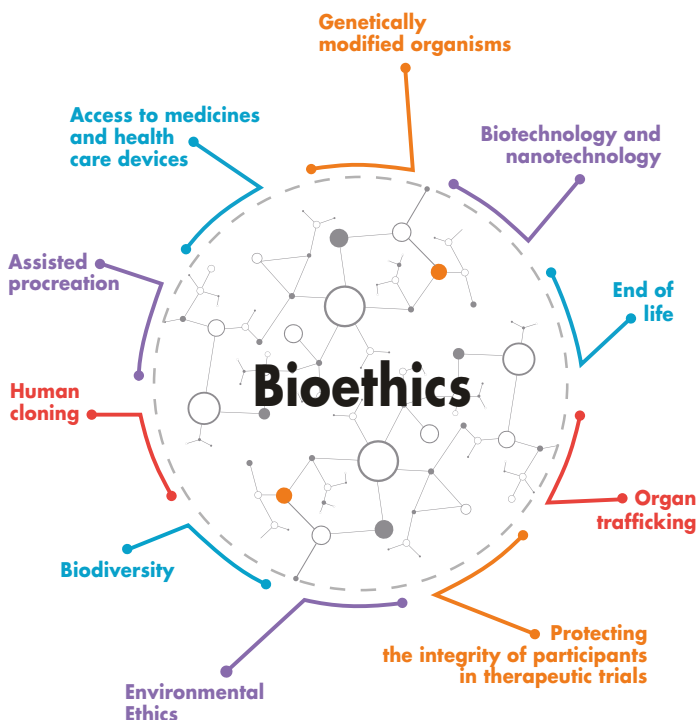
# UNESCO and BIOETHICS

SHS/2015/PI/H/9

# Make **BIOETHICS** Everyone's **business**

In a world undergoing seismic change, the mission of the “critical thinking” bestowed upon UNESCO by the United Nations at its inception, is becoming ever more important. As a leader of the United Nations in the areas of ethics and bioethics UNESCO has, in this respect, unrivaled and widely recognized expertise.

Bioethics was born with the objective of fostering ethical reflection on the social implications of science and the use of knowledge and technology; during a time where the world was witnessing significant development in these matters. This is a democratic challenge which must be tackled by all members of a society, from the expert to the layperson. To this end, UNESCO has focused on the social and political considerations, convinced that the resolution of ethical issues raised by the use of science and technology determines the way we live together and the choices made by society. These choices affect our future and the future of coming generations.



Scientific research and the advances it brings can be a key driver of development. However, if ethical frameworks are not taken into account human right violations and discrimination between individuals and countries may occur, contributing to economic and social injustices.

Bioethics is the analysis of ethical issues raised by life-sciences, the application of technology and, medicine and health policies. It encompasses all fields of scientific development which affect human beings socially, judicially and environmentally.

Establishing and sharing global standards, regulations and practices in bioethics is crucial. This is not only so every individual can measure the impact of scientific advances on their life and community, but also so they can contribute to the development of life-sciences and health policies, and take advantage of its benefits.

Since the creation of UNESCO's Bioethics programme in 1993, the Organization has elaborated and adopted the only universal normative instruments in this field. Accordingly, the programme is committed to promoting these norms; to working cooperatively with Member States in the implementation of related national legislation, and to establishing national infrastructure for the implementation of the above-mentioned declarations.

2005

Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights

2003

International Declaration on Human Genetic Data

1998

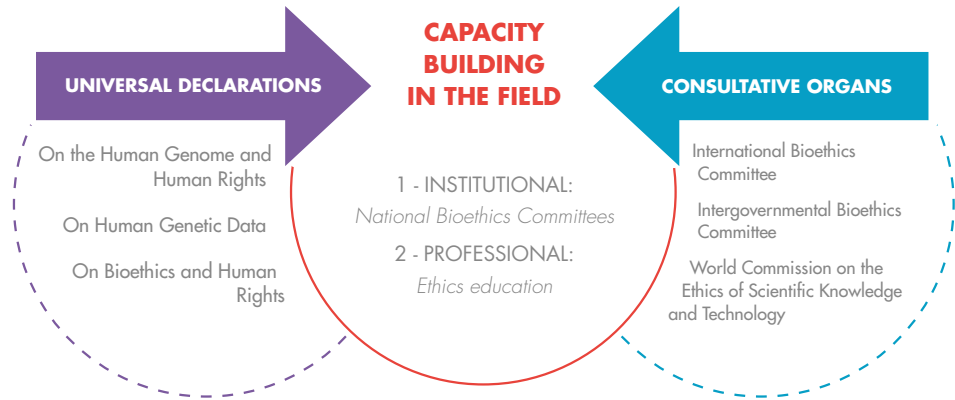
The Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee and COMEST

1997

Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights

1993

International Bioethics Committee



## CONSULTATIVE ORGANS

UNESCO acts as a forum for multidisciplinary, multicultural and pluralistic ideas on bioethics and on the ethics of science and technology, through four key mechanisms:

**The International Bioethics Committee (IBC)**, created in 1993, is a permanent committee comprising 36 independent experts appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO. Each Member is elected on the basis of equitable geographical representation for a four-year term. IBC promotes reflection on the ethical and legal issues raised by research in the life sciences and their applications to ensure respect for human dignity and freedom. It is the only global mechanism of its kind.

**The Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC)**, created in 1998, constitutes 36 Member States, elected by the General Conference of UNESCO. IGBC is convened at least once every two years to examine the advice and recommendations of the IBC, informing the IBC of its opinions and submitting their proposals and points of views.

**The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)**, is the third consultative organ. Comprising 18 specialists from different world regions, named by the Director-General of UNESCO, COMEST was established in 1998.

UNESCO also acts as the Secretariat of the **United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Bioethics** established in 2003. This committee assures coordination between intergovernmental organizations dealing with issues related to ethics.

# 1 - INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

## National Bioethics Committees

UNESCO provides assistance to Member States to establish national bioethics committees and to develop member capacity.

### a) Establishing national committees around the world

UNESCO supports the creation, strengthening and back-stopping of national bioethics committees as essential entities in the implementation of the international normative instruments within each country. As for 2015, nineteen countries have established a national committee with the support of UNESCO.

Chad	El Salvador	Guinea	Malawi
Colombia	Ecuador	Jamaica	Oman
Comoros	Gabon	Kenya	Paraguay
Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Malaysia	Togo
Dominican Rep.			

### b) Training committee members in the field

UNESCO accompanies countries in the training of committee members three training sessions, in four languages, led by recognized international experts, which are given in English, French or Spanish:

#### COMPLETED

Côte d'Ivoire  
El Salvador  
Gabon  
Jamaica  
Kenya  
Togo

#### PARTIALLY COMPLETED

Chad  
Guinea  
Malawi  
Malaysia

# 1 - PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

## Ethical Education

### a) Ethics Teacher Training Courses

These courses are provided by a team of international experts with renowned experience in ethics education. The trainings, targeting young ethics teachers, focus on key disciplinary methods and teaching methodologies, as well as the development of evaluation and teaching skills. The courses have been delivered in the following countries:

Azerbaijan (Baku)	Namibia (Windhoek)
Belarus (Minsk)	Oman (Muscat)
Croatia (Dubrovnik)	Romania (Bucharest)
Jordan (Amman)	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh)
Kenya (University of Egerton)	Serbia (Belgrade)
Lebanon (Beirut)	Slovakia (Bratislava)
Lithuania (Vilnius)	

### b) Core Curriculum on Bioethics

Due to the enormous heterogeneity of the ethics education, it is important to not only maintain their quality, but also to establish criteria for application in any university in the world. Accordingly, the "Core Curriculum on Bioethics" draws on the international principles contained in the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, privileging its adaptability on a national scale. The curriculum can be integrated in university syllabi through the signature of a memorandum of understanding. Below is a list of partner countries:

Argentina	Dominican Republic	Malaysia
Armenia	India	Peru
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Republic of Korea
Belarus	Israel	Russian Federation
Brazil	Japan	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Kyrgyzstan	

### c) Cooperation of UNESCO Chairs in Bioethics

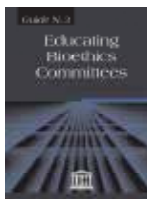
The establishment of UNESCO chairs in bioethics across the world is proof of the great potential of cooperation:

Argentina (National University of Buenos Aires)
Brazil (University of Brasilia)
Côte d'Ivoire (University of Bouake)
Italy (European University of Rome and Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum)
Israel (University of Haifa)
Kenya (University of Egerton)
Mexico (University of Monterrey)
Portugal (Catholic Portuguese University)
Slovakia (University of Presov)
Spain (University of Barcelona)

# KEY PUBLICATIONS

Documents and basic practices are published regularly and available in open access on the UNESCO website. Below are some examples:

## GUIDES FOR COMMITTEES ON BIOETHICS



Five handbooks destined for governments, scientists, lawyers and health professionals have been published with the aim

of supporting the creation and development of national bioethics committees.

*They are available in Chinese, English, French, Spanish, and in some cases, in Arabic.*

## REPORTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE (IBC)



The IBC has been engaged in the exploration of the ethical implication of many of the principles contained in the Universal Declaration on Bioethics. Presenting the outcomes of broad consultations, each report is directed mainly to specialists, ethics committees and policy-makers.

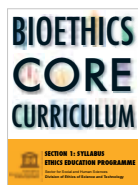
## REPORTS OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON THE ETHICS OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY (COMEST)



Experts periodically provide reports on important principles and themes relating to the impact of science and technology. The reports contain clear information for experts and policy-makers, such as Precautionary Principle, Climate Change, Information Society, Social Responsibility of Researchers etc.

*Available in English, French, and Spanish.*

## CORE CURRICULUM ON BIOETHICS



The first part of the course provides the content and objectives of each module, the course plan, and teacher guidelines.

The second part gathers the study documents proposed for each of the modules.

*Available in Arabic, English, French, and Russian.*

## CASEBOOK SERIES



These collections deal with ethical dilemmas in the health sector and have precedence in different countries. The series can be used alongside the Core Curriculum on Bioethics, or independently.

*Some of them are available in English and French.*



## ETHICS COLLECTIONS

The last book on the main analytical issues of bioethics *Global Bioethics: what for?* Was published to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNESCO programme.

*The book is available in English, French and Spanish.*

## GEObs:

### A GLOBAL ETHICS OBSERVATORY ON THE INTERNET

GEObs offers free access to six databases, in six languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). The Observatory collects information from:

- 1690 experts
- 557 institutions
- 235 education programmes
- 797 legal or regulatory instruments
- 151 codes of conduct
- 416 resources in bioethics and applied ethics in science and technology

To consult GEObs: :  
<http://www.unesco.org/shs/ethics/geobs>

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