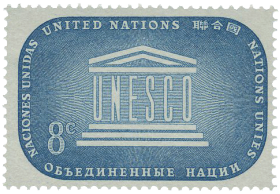
This Day in History… November 16, 1945

Founding of UNESCO





Stamps issued for the 10th anniversary of UNESCO.

On November 16, 1945, representatives from 44 governments adopted the constitution that established UNESCO. The new agency would use education, science, and culture to support peace, a mission shaped by the experience of two world wars.

UNESCO grew from earlier efforts to build international understanding. After World War I, the League of Nations created the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation in 1922. Its work included promoting exchanges among scholars and educators. A related International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation opened in Paris in 1926. World War II disrupted much of this work. Yet in 1942, Allied ministers of education began meeting in London to plan a postwar organization devoted to education and culture.

The United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, provided for a specialized agency in education and culture. Delegates from 44 governments met in London from November 1 to 16 to establish it. They adopted UNESCO's constitution on November 16. The constitution did not take effect immediately. It entered into force on November 4, 1946, after 20 countries ratified it. UNESCO's first General Conference met in Paris later that year, and the city became its headquarters. UNESCO's mission was to contribute to peace and security by encouraging international cooperation through education, science, and culture, while advancing respect for justice, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

Education became one of UNESCO's first major areas of work. In 1947, it launched a pilot project in Haiti's Marbial Valley to provide what it called "fundamental education." The effort linked literacy and schooling with practical knowledge for community life. UNESCO also began working with Afghanistan after the country joined the organization in 1948. A 1949 survey identified teacher training as a key need.





Italy has the most World Heritage sites.

In 2000, governments meeting at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, renewed the Education for All commitment and set goals for 2015. The Dakar Framework covered early childhood education, universal primary schooling, adult literacy, gender equality, and education quality. Those targets were not fully met. In 2015, the international community adopted Sustainable Development Goal 4, carrying forward the effort with a 2030 target for inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

UNESCO's cultural work gained worldwide attention in 1960, when construction of Egypt's Aswan High Dam threatened ancient monuments along the Nile. UNESCO launched an international campaign to save them from flooding. From 1960 to 1980, teams moved 22 monuments and complexes, including the temples at Abu Simbel and Philae. Workers cut the Abu Simbel temples into more than a thousand numbered blocks, then reassembled them on higher ground.

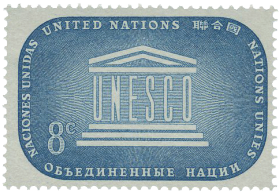
In 1972, UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention to encourage the protection of cultural and natural places considered to have outstanding universal value. The World Heritage Committee evaluates nominations and inscribes properties on the World Heritage List. Countries agree to protect the sites they nominate. A listing can also make a site eligible to request international conservation assistance. The United Nations Postal Administration has issued stamps featuring World Heritage places. As of 2026, the list includes 1,273 properties in 173 countries, including 27 in the United States.

UNESCO now has 194 member states and 12 associate members. Its five main program areas are education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information. Its work includes teacher training, literacy projects, scientific cooperation, cultural preservation, support for independent media, and efforts to expand access to digital technology. These programs continue the organization's founding aim: to strengthen international cooperation and contribute to peace.

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