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## United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

*Topic 1: Addressing the increasing distrust towards the scientific community*  
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### 1. Key Terms

**Distrust:** The lack of trust and confidence towards a certain person, a group of people or the authorities being caused by a lack of reliability.

**Scientific Community:** Network of scientists and researchers who interact although working in different scientific fields. Scientific communities all over the world aim at scientific improvement and innovation.



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**WHO:** The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations. which brings together doctors and medical experts from all over the world and takes care of health issues.

**Pandemic:** The outbreak of a disease which will be spread consistently in either a country or worldwide.

**Virus:** Harmful substance which causes diseases. It is a particle which attacks eukaryotic cells, both animal and plant cells, and it is mainly made up of proteins and DNA. To live, viruses must attack other cells changing their DNA and affecting the generation of new cells.

**Vaccine:** The injection of a dead or weakened bacteria or virus in a body with the purpose of creating immunity towards diseases.

**Lockdown:** The isolation and restriction to ordinary actions used as a security measure. Country's leaders may decide to activate lockdowns during situations of emergencies in order to get back to social or sanitary order.

**Nomask:** People who refuse to wear masks as an opposition to the government's guidelines or those of the scientific community. These people do not believe in the effectiveness of masks.

**Antivax:** Individuals or groups of people who oppose getting vaccinated for a variety of diseases due to a distrust in science and the scientific community.

**COVID-19:** Appeared in China at the end of 2019, the COVID-19 is a virus which causes respiratory deficits. It has caused a health emergency all over the world since March 2020, including lockdowns and changes to people's ordinary life.



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**Misinformation:** Knowing or diffusing inaccurate and false information. Lack of understanding.

## 2. Introduction

Since the invention of the first vaccines people have been sceptic about their effectiveness and opposed to them. This happened because there was a lack of trust towards the scientific community as people were not used to it, hence did not believe in medicine.

Nowadays, distrust towards the scientific community has been exponentially increasing since the COVID-19 outbreak. With many countries now experiencing the second or third lockdown, people are organizing revolts through social media, aiming at obtaining fewer restrictions.

These protesters often oppose wearing masks and taking the covid-19 vaccine, resulting in being a risk for the society.

Each country has its own guidelines regarding the treatment of opposers to the scientific community and safety rules breakers, but the United Nations must take action in order to ensure that basic COVID-19 guidelines, such as wearing masks, are followed everywhere.

The WHO has been working on ensuring development in science and health care in all the UN Member States, but is still thriving to be globally recognized as reliable, avoiding distrusts towards science and medicine.



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### 3. Background Information

Distrust has always been felt by groups of individuals towards the scientific community, even in the 1700s-1800s. At the time, the first vaccines for smallpox were invented, but people were uninformed and they did not know how vaccinations worked, so groups of protesters started to arise.

In 1853, the Anti-Vaccination League was founded in Great Britain, where a Vaccination Act had just been approved by the government. This can be considered as the first case of certified action of distrust towards the scientific community, and it was followed by many other movements and associations. Their number started spreading all around the world claiming that:

- The vaccines do not work
- The vaccines contain harmful chemicals and therefore make people sick
- Compulsory vaccinations are considered despotism by the scientific community

Moreover, at the time, many were the ones who could not afford medical care, and home-medicine was widely spread, as well as herbalism and homeopathy, practices aimed at curing diseases in alternative ways which do not include traditional medicines, but often use plant-based remedies.

These kinds of treatments were widely spread also because they were mostly accepted by religions, which found many followers during the XIX century. In fact, many religious beliefs were against vaccines because they implied the injection of the virus (dead or weakened) in the body.

In the 1900s, many other vaccines were introduced and distrust towards scientists did not stop. At this point, media coverage played a big role too in diffusing misinformation, indeed many programmes were made public and



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Genoa Model United Nations Affiliated with these featured celebrities and false experts who discussed medical topics on mass media channels.

The disinformation caused by those shows had negative effects on society, indeed many more were those who believed that medicine would cause other diseases or syndromes.

Nowadays, in the 21st century, opposers to medicine and anti vax movements are still present and they incremented with the outbreak of Coronavirus, claiming that the vaccine is unsafe and stating that no one knows about its true content and that too little time has been spent on its production.

The United Nations are therefore working on making scientific improvements, especially through the World Health Organization and are launching campaigns aimed at informing people and raising awareness on the importance of trusting science.

## Protect yourself and loved ones from coronavirus.

**Wash** your hands regularly with **soap** and **water**.



**Cover** your mouth and nose while **sneezing** or **coughing**.



**Avoid close contact** with anyone who has a cold or flu-like symptoms.



If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, **seek medical care early**.





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#### 4. Major Parties Involved

### **World Health Organization**

Founded on April 7th 1948, the World Health Organization is a UN Specialized Agency which operates in all the member states to provide health care. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland, and it has more than 150 offices in all the regions of the world.

The World Health Organization is involved in ensuring medical progress and it strives to combat diseases. It also takes care of raising awareness and educating people on the risks of diseases and viruses, fighting against disinformation and distrust.

#### **Russia:**

The Russian Federation has been afflicted by 3.7M cases of covid and about 70 thousand deaths. Many citizens oppose science and do not trust COVID guidelines, including the vaccine.

#### **United Kingdom:**

The United Kingdom, with 3.7M cases and more than 100 thousand deaths, has been experiencing many protests by anti-lockdown and anti vax groups. These protests started at the beginning of 2020 and haven't stopped yet although many protesters got arrested.

#### **United States:**



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With over 26M cases and almost 500 thousand deaths, the United States is the country mostly affected by COVID in the world.

The US is dealing with a multitude of anti-science groups who protest both online and in person against lockdowns and safety measures taken by the government. Due to COVID-19 these groups faced an increase.

## 5. Timeline of Events

- 1800s - First antivax movements
- 1853 - Vaccination Act in Great Britain
- 1853 - First Anti Vaccination League is founded
- 1900s - Distrust in science is spread through mass media
- December 2019 - Chinese government reports pneumonia cases in the Wuhan province
- January 2020 - WHO reports the Wuhan pneumonia on social media, first cases of Coronavirus
- March 2020 - Most countries start taking restrictive measures to tackle the novel coronavirus
- March 2020 - First COVID-19 protests
- November 2020 - 73<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly,
- December 2020 - First vaccines against COVID

## 6. UN Involvement

The United Nations General Assembly has passed various resolutions regarding the topic of trust in the scientific community. Most of them are



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considered in the **72nd GA Resolution on Science, technology and innovation for development**, and they include:

- Resolution 58/200
- Resolution 59/220
- Resolution 60/205
- Resolution 62/201
- Resolution 64/212
- Resolution 66/211
- Resolution 68/220
- Resolution 70/213

Moreover, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has passed resolutions on the topic too, for instance:

- Resolution 2005/52
- Resolution 2019/25

Lastly, the UN has included a body in ECOSOC to take care of the issue, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD).

## 7. Official Documents and Treaties about the Issue

Different branches of the UN have worked towards the information about science to fight against distrust, here are some documents passed by the UN:

- Agreement on the establishment of the International Vaccine Institute
- Declaration on Science and the Use of Scientific Knowledge and the Science Agenda: Framework for Action



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## 8. Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations have taken action towards the spread of scientific knowledge and well-being of the citizens in the Member States in many ways, such as:

- The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
- Advice on the use of masks for children in the community in the context of COVID-19
- Mass vaccination and COVID-19
- Global scientific community unites to track progress on COVID-19 R&D, identifies new research priorities and critical gaps
- Healthier, fairer, safer: the global health journey 2007–2017

## 9. Useful Links

- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- [www.allianceforscience.cornell.edu](http://www.allianceforscience.cornell.edu)
- <https://aeon.co/ideas/what-makes-people-distrust-science-surprisingly-not-politics>
- <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6518/745>
- <https://datascience.harvard.edu/special-rfp-covid-19-trust-science-proposal>



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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests\\_over\\_responses\\_to\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic#:~:text=Since%20the%20month%20of%20March,imposed%20by%20the%20Italian%20government.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests_over_responses_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic#:~:text=Since%20the%20month%20of%20March,imposed%20by%20the%20Italian%20government.)
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UN Documents and Treaties:

- [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/A\\_res\\_72\\_228\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/A_res_72_228_en.pdf)
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- <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/health/>