Committee Guide

UNESCO

Rebuilding Public Trust in Science

OLMUN 2026
25th International Session

Contents

1. Personal Introduction

Honourable and Dear Delegates,
My name is Jasper Lossin, and I am looking forward to being one of your Chairs at this year's OLMUN! I am 17 years old and currently visiting 11th grade at one of Oldenburg's High Schools, the Altes Gymnasium Oldenburg (AGO). Two years ago, I came in contact with the OLMUN and its Inner Circle for the first time. I was Delegate of the UNEP, which funnily was chaired by Anjelina, and Chief of School for the AGO. In my free time I spend my time with my friends and doing ballroom dancing. For this year's OLMUN, I hope for you all to have an experience as inspiring, social, and fun as I had!

Dear Delegates,
Welcome also from me to this year's OLMUN! My name is Anjelina and together with Jasper, I will be serving as your Chair in the UNESCO committee. I am 18 years old, coming from Oldenburg, and am currently in the 12th grade at the Altes Gymnasium Oldenburg. Over the past two years, I participated in OLMUN as a Delegate in 2024 and a Chair in 2025 at UNEP, both of which were great experiences. Besides OLMUN, I enjoy playing piano and tennis. I am also passionate about scientific topics in general, which is why I decided to chair this committee with its this year's topic. I wish you all the very best in your preparation and hope that you will gain unforgettable experiences throughout the week.

2. How to Use This Guide

This guide is meant to answer your questions about who this year's UNESCO Chairs are, what UNESCO is, and, of course, to give you insight into this year's topic: Rebuilding Public Trust in Science. We also want to suggest how to start your research and inform you about what to hand in prior to the conference.

Reading and understanding this Committee Guide is crucial; however, it is only your start of this year's OLMUN! Even though it provides you with fundamental information, you will have to conduct your own research, especially in order to understand your country's perspective.

3. Committee Introduction

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is a specialised agency of the United Nations, founded on 16 November 1945 and headquartered in Paris. It currently comprises 194 Member States, as well as a global network of 138 institutes and centres. UNESCO's main mission is to promote peace and security by fostering international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication, with a particular emphasis on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity.

The work of UNESCO spans several key areas, such as promoting access to education and reliable information, enhancing scientific cooperation, and ensuring the protection of cultural heritage, while also establishing ethical frameworks in science and technology.

Institutionally, UNESCO is led by three main bodies: the General Conference, which determines the organisation's directions and priorities; the Executive Board, which oversees the implementation of its programme; and the Secretariat, which is responsible for the organisation's day-to-day work.

As a UN agency, UNESCO operates mainly in a normative and advisory manner. It develops international conventions, recommendations, and frameworks while promoting cooperation among Member States. However, it does not possess enforcement mechanisms and relies on collaboration and voluntary participation to achieve its objectives.

4. Introduction to the Topic

4.1. The Current State of Public Trust

We are currently in a position where we have the opportunity to experience the "golden age" of science. Thanks to technological advancements, our range of knowledge and capabilities has increased dramatically. Consequently, the connection between science and other fields such as politics, economy and ecology is becoming increasingly stronger worldwide. Science is highly visible in public debate. For instance, contemporary challenges such as COVID-19, climate change, and genetic modification rely heavily on scientific advice.

Trust in science is generally defined as a certain level of confidence in scientific knowledge and expertise. As the level of trust varies significantly from one country to another, it is difficult to measure public trust in science on an international scale.
Nevertheless, it is evident that scepticism towards science is often highly visible in public, especially in modern society.

Meanwhile, trust in so-called regulatory science has declined considerably. This subcategory of science is usually conducted within governmental agencies and concerns the application of scientific knowledge to regulatory decision-making (for example, in politics). It does not, however, refer specifically to science itself conducted in academic institutions. As trust in governmental institutions declines, this trend also affects other elite communities, including scientific institutions.

Conversely, there is also a risk of excessive or blind trust among the public. This is particularly relevant given that authorities (for example, policymakers) may misuse this trust. Therefore, a healthy degree of scepticism is essential, and a balance between informed trust and informed distrust must be maintained.

4.2. Importance of the Topic

Science shapes both everyday life and global systems. In doing so, it plays a central role in our modern, knowledge-based society.

In day-to-day life, advice and findings by science influence many decisions regarding health and nutrition, overall lifestyle, or even travel. In a broader public context, for example in politics, scientific knowledge often informs decision-making in key policy areas, including public health, climate policy, and technology. These decisions are equally dependent on scientific data, results and direct expertise.

Consequently, trust in science strongly influences public acceptance of policies. Low trust in science can lead to resistance, non-compliance and political polarisation, whereas high levels of trust enable smoother policy implementation.

Moreover, trust in science is closely linked to the legitimacy of institutions. It not only connects scientists in laboratories, universities, and research institutions with governments, but also makes their work more accessible to the public. A disconnection between science, governments, and the public can lead to social tensions and may, for example, negatively impact a state's economy or climate protection goals.

4.3. Causes

There are crucial factors that contribute to science becoming increasingly distrusted among societies:

One particularly salient aspect is that scientific concepts are oftentimes based on complex research, which is difficult to explain, especially to people who are not specialised in these topics. Education problems foster this issue, leaving societies not properly informed about important knowledge. This can result in misunderstandings and confusion, making science appear untrustworthy. Studies show that trust in science is, on average, higher among people with a certain degree of scientific knowledge in the respective area than among those without any prior knowledge.

Misinformation is another factor that promotes mistrust in science, including conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific claims. Social media, in particular, can provide incentives for spreading false information. Because algorithms are directly presented on media platforms, more and more people use social media as an information source. At the same time, there is the issue of information overload, the so-called infodemic, due to a greater chance of encountering scientific news. Users are also less likely to notice misinformation, as it is harder to distinguish between scientists and laypeople online. For example, followers who are in a paradoxical or pseudo-relationship with their role models on media platforms are less likely to spot misconceptions in scientific or medical information that their role models are sharing. Related to this, it is easy to find groups of users that align with one's own beliefs. Consequently, people are more likely to maintain a particular identity structure and have difficulties accepting and adapting to others. The invention of AI additionally increases the amount of misinformation on the internet.

The state of trust is also impacted by societal factors. Distrust in institutions can be explained by politicisation and polarisation of societies, where social groups have adopted certain beliefs. As a result, science has to compete with other beliefs and epistemologies, especially when they contradict each other. In certain states, ideologically and culturally polarised societies (e.g. conservative and religious people) express a lower level of trust on average. Mistrust in science is also prevalent among marginalised groups (e.g. women, Indigenous people, people of colour) because they are excluded from science due to untransparent science communication and unfamiliar education models.

Additionally, the validity of scientific information and, therefore, its level of trust are vastly impaired by the research publishing system. The Impact-Factor logic is one of these systemic factors, where journals prioritise spectacular over truthful results. As many journals have

specific page limitations regarding the number of articles they publish every year, rejection rates are high (70-90% in the social and behavioural sciences). Consequently, most publications in scientific disciplines are automatically focused on releasing mainly positive results, while neglecting null and negative results. Another obstacle concerning research is called “publish or perish“, where researchers’ careers are dependent on publication numbers. To clarify, publication strongly influences hiring, salary, promotion, and major decisions in general.
Therefore, it is the aim of most researchers to have as many articles as possible accepted and published in the most prestigious journals. Because of this competitive job market, researchers are more prone to publish a large quantity of research papers, with their quality decreasing. Meanwhile, scientific research is in a reproduction crisis, with less than 40% of psychological and medical studies being replicable. One reason is that replication studies are not as newsworthy to publish as positive results (Impact-Factor logic). There are also peer-reviewing difficulties, as most peer reviewers are volunteers without any monetary compensation or reward, which impairs the quality of peer review. Thus, an imbalance between promoting more successful ideas and dismissing null, negative, and replication studies is created, leading to an increased chance of distorting data and producing low-powered studies in research. Its legitimacy can thereby be questioned by the public.

Finally, systemic factors are also among the main causes of unstable trust in communities. For instance, scientific institutions can be politicised by other non-scientific organisations and thus pursue specific, subjective conflicts of interest. This often goes hand in hand with the problem of missing transparency. When the public perceives scientists or scientific institutions as directly influenced by governments, businesses, ideological groups, or even private individuals, this heavily damages trust in any sort of science. Both influenced science and a lack of clarification regarding the independence of other scientific institutions are problematic.

5. Solutions

5.1. Possible Solutions

Our goal is to maintain and rebuild a certain degree of healthy (meaning not blind, but sceptical) trust among the public. However, this cannot be achieved by simply providing more scientific knowledge to the public. To promote public trust in science, science itself needs to be more inclusive, comparative and systematic.

Improving communication can be an efficient option to foster relationships between scientific expertise and the public. This can be achieved through a clearer explanation of the research process and the use of proper language without scientific jargon. Any sense of uncertainty among the public should also be immediately addressed and tackled in a transparent way. Some public engagement initiatives can be helpful.

Further, transparency is key to maintaining a high level of trust in science, including available access to research. A viable solution can be the concept of open science, which provides open access to scientific publications. Usually, researchers are expected to complete a preregistration or a prepublication, meaning the public is involved in their scientific process from the beginning of their research. In this way, the public can review their research and confirm, critique, or extend the scientific findings. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood of finding and correcting errors, thus improving results. Scientists can even address their uncertainty in parts of their scientific process. Consequently, an authentic, open, and transparent research process involving both researchers and the public is created, which can significantly increase credibility in scientific experts. Moreover, living labs are also a way of integrating research into real community settings. There, both lay and expert engagement are strengthened through a collaborative design of research methodology. These can stem from grassroots initiatives and are often supported by national funding.

Education also plays a major role in science. Critical thinking is one part of it, including thorough engagement, reflection on news, and eventually identifying manipulation techniques. There are many ways to foster this skill, such as conducting media literacy programmes at public facilities or using media literacy games (e.g. Bad Vax, Bad News Game, Harmony Square). Another part is increasing the scientific literacy of citizens for a better understanding of scientific methods. Lastly, promoting the use of different types of information sources among the public is also crucial. This does not only include using traditional sources and media in general, but also offline connections. For instance, this can be done by exchanging different beliefs with other groups of people. For greater tolerance of scientific discoveries, people should focus on developing diverse identities. The public can also become more connected with institutions. Especially in local communities, meeting scientists and eventually collaborating with them not only enhances understanding of scientific processes, but also provides the opportunity to meet scientists personally.

In addition, institutions could introduce regulations to become as independent as possible in order to increase public trust in science as an objective field. This means becoming free from commercial or political interests. Appropriate ethical standards can also be adopted by establishing ethics commissions that exclude selection and participant bias. Peer review is

another important factor to consider and should receive more incentives. However, current obstacles in research, such as the reproduction crisis or the small proportion of null and negative results, should be addressed.

International cooperation further promotes knowledge sharing in many ways. To communicate sustainable knowledge to as many groups of people as possible, the research approach needs to become more sensitive to the histories and epistemic needs of different social groups. For example, some groups require more evidence. Equality should also be strengthened among both researchers and consumers by encouraging multilingualism in academic communication. The more connected knowledge sharing becomes, the higher the quality of research will be, which results in increasing public acceptance. Meanwhile, long-term strategic investment in scientific research also plays a crucial role, especially financial support for impoverished countries from wealthier countries. It includes financial (e.g. materials, infrastructure, technology) as well as human (scientists, peer reviewers) resources. Furthermore, it can be governed and owned by communities and funded by governments and public institutions.

Experts themselves can be a contributing factor to the legitimacy of science. They can either be assessed through their competence, past success, and continuous learning. The public can evaluate how credible research is by applying techniques such as lateral reading. However, the researcher's explanation of their judgements is a more relevant factor. They should have strong enough evidence, and their research should capture the concerns of the public. It is also beneficial if scientists originate from diverse communities and represent them.
The understanding of and trust in science can, moreover, be enhanced through other areas of life, such as culture and the arts. By combining science with culture in public places such as museums, galleries, and science centres, science is communicated in a more engaging way. It also provides the chance to integrate minority groups.

Not to forget, medical faculties significantly impact public trust in science. According to statistics, doctors and nurses are among the most trusted institutions globally. In 2020, 45% of people trusted them a lot, whereas 43% trusted scientists a lot. Therefore, the way doctors and staff work in clinical settings has an effect on the perception of scientific institutions in general. Both the time and quality of clinical consultation are highly important in contributing to a stable and trusting society. On the contrary, when little or no access to healthcare settings is provided, patients tend to use other unproven sources such as social media.

5.2. Previous UN Measures

There are some previous UN measures concerning the debate about public trust in science:

- The “UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science” (2021), which aimed to promote open access to science while encouraging knowledge sharing, transparency, collaboration, and inclusion;

- The “UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers” (2017), which promotes scientific integrity and sets ethical guidelines for research;

- The “WHO Infodemic Management” (COVID-19), which promoted infodemic management training platforms and collaboration with online platforms and media in order to tackle misinformation during health crisis like COVID-19;

- And many international cooperation initiatives.

5.3. Points to Consider

As a Delegate of this year’s UNESCO committee, you will be discussing how and to what extent to rebuild public trust in science. Seeing that the topic of public trust in science is a broad one and comprises many different areas, we have specified the areas of debate for the conference. The main focus should therefore be on health science, which may include relevant topics such as public health communication, medical research transparency, trust in healthcare professionals, inequality and inclusion, and crisis management. Additionally, the relationship between the government, scientific institutions and the public may also be one of the crucial points to consider (regulatory science).

How to find an answer and what arguments to present is up to you, but these are some questions you might want to ask yourself beforehand:

- How important is the transparency of a scientific process?
- How big of a role does the accessibility of knowledge play?
- What do the media and digital platforms change?
- How important is a scientific institution’s independence?
- Should there be a cooperation of governments and scientists?
- Should there be public participation in science discussions?

Also, keep these general points in mind:

- What has been done in the past?
- What has my country done in the past?
- To what extent is my country affected by the problems?
- What is my country's position on the status quo?
- What kind of resolution is in my country's interest?
- Which countries might have similar views and policies?

5.4. Further Advice

We want you to have an awesome time during OLMUN week, but also during the preparation period. In order to achieve this, you should start your research and preparation as soon as possible.

Prior to the OLMUN, you will have to write and hand in a policy statement and a draft resolution. If you want to, you can also give an opening speech, which can be presented at the opening ceremony. If you want to do so, please contact us (unesco@olmun.org) or the President (president@olmun.org) by 31st of May. The other two papers are mandatory!

A policy statement briefly declares your country's position on the topic and its policy so far. It is meant to give other Delegates an impression of your country's view, so that you can find partners for collaboration more easily during the lobbying phase. We want to encourage you to read out your policy statement at the first committee session! Even though this is not mandatory, it is definitely a good way to get started with delivering speeches and presenting your opinion.

To pass a (or multiple) resolution(s) is the main goal of the week. A resolution is the formal statement of a decision in the United Nations, stating the problems and presenting solutions, and will be discussed during OLMUN. Prior to the OLMUN, you must write a draft resolution. Yours should include 2-3 preambulatory clauses and 4-5 operative clauses.

Please hand in both papers by 29th of May. For more information you can have a look at the last years' passed resolutions or the OLMUN Handbook. The handbook will also give you information about OLMUN in general (for example, the structure of the UN or more practical things such as the dress code). To be well prepared for OLMUN, we also encourage you to read through and understand the Rules of Procedure. You can find all of these on the official OLMUN website.

Lastly, we once more want to encourage you to participate actively. If you are coming back to OLMUN or MUN, please enjoy your time in our committee and contribute with speeches, by voicing your opinion, and by helping other, less experienced Delegates. For the first-time Delegates: don't be scared! It is everyone's first MUN once, and nobody will judge you for anything! Neither your policy statement nor your (draft) resolutions or speeches during committee session need to be perfect. Your Chairs are just human as well; we will be as excited as you are and will try to do our best, just as you will. For both of us, the most important part is fun. If there is no fun and joy behind what you are doing, there will be no learning effect.

If you have any questions regarding anything, please contact us at unesco@olmun.org! There are no dumb questions, and we want to relive you of any pressure or concerns.

5.5. On the Topic of AI Usage

Obviously, the use of artificial intelligence cannot be ignored in this year's OLMUN. However, as the conference is meant to be engaging and educational for everybody, it is important to us that all Delegates can participate under equal conditions and can develop their own ideas. The process of researching, forming a fact-based opinion, and formulating arguments independently is an important part of any Model United Nations.

Therefore, Delegates are welcome to use AI tools as part of their research. Artificial intelligence is often helpful for gaining an initial overview or for approaching complex topics more easily. However, all information provided by AI needs to be independently verified by checking sources and comparing them with other sources.

All written submissions, meaning policy statements and draft resolutions (and possibly opening speeches), as well as speeches delivered during the conference, must be the delegates' own work.

6. Helpful Links and Research

6.1. Helpful Links

For your research, you are encouraged to use different sources, such as written UN documents and international news, but also scholarly materials, podcasts, YouTube videos, etc. Also consider what sources from your country, e.g. national information websites, bulletins

from a ministry, etc. This can help in determining what the opinion of your delegation could be.

Remember: You represent a country‘s view, not your own, so only argue for what your delegation would consider right, independently of your own beliefs.
These are some of the sources we used for our own research and would like to suggest for your use:

The official UNESCO website provides information relevant to our topic:

https://www.unesco.org/en

https://www.unesco.org/en/open-science

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381148/PDF/381148eng.pdf.multi.page=4

https://community.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/s/workstream-trust-in-science

And other sources such as:

https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/01/250120113810.htm

https://wellcome.org/insights/articles/public-trust-scientists-rose-during-covid-19-pandemic-0

https://www.pewresearch.org/search/trust+in+science

https://arxiv.org/

6.2. References

Please also have a look at:

OLMUN 2026 Handbook

OLMUN Rules of Procedure


OLMUN 2026
25th International
Session