

MUSEUMS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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WHAT IS UNESCO'S MUSEUMS PROGRAMME?

Museums lie at the heart of UNESCO's mission to promote peace and understanding through international cooperation in the field of culture. Through its Museums Programme, UNESCO works to safeguard and rehabilitate museums in times of crisis, recognizing their necessity as a source of identity, resilience and recovery for local communities. UNESCO also carries out capacity building programmes for museum specialists in the areas of collection conservation, inventorying, documentation and digitization, and works with museum professionals to fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

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WHY MUSEUMS?

Museums are not only places where our shared heritage is preserved – they are key spaces of education, inspiration and dialogue. They play an essential role in fostering social cohesion and a sense of collective memory. They hold up a mirror to society, introduce visitors to alternative points of view and foster creativity, respect for diversity and a culture of peace. As magnets for tourism, museums are also key drivers of sustainable economic development. Yet museums are facing new challenges. Today in Iraq, Syria, Libya and elsewhere, museums are on the front lines of combat, looting and deliberate destruction – targeted by extremists for the heritage they contain and the values they represent. UNESCO supports museums as a way to preserve our common heritage and reinforce the fundamental principles of dignity, tolerance, and respect for history.

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HOW DOES UNESCO PROTECT AND PROMOTE MUSEUMS?

- i. **A new global Recommendation.** UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society offers museum professionals and policymakers a series of guidelines for unlocking the full cultural, social, economic and educational potential of museums.
- ii. **The High Level Forum on Museums.** UNESCO created the High Level Forum on Museums to serve as an advisory body to the Director-General on museums and to promote the implementation of the 2015 Recommendation. Its first meeting took place in Shenzhen, China, in November 2016, and gathered a wide variety of heritage experts, policy makers and museum directors.
- iii. **Emergency support.** Following the devastating earthquakes in Nepal in 2015, UNESCO worked to salvage, inventory and ensure the safe storage of artefacts from several affected sites and museums, many of which have now reopened to the public. UNESCO also supported efforts to reconstruct and reopen the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo following attacks on that institution by violent extremists in 2014.
- iv. **Fostering the sharing of heritage.** In June 2018, UNESCO brought together world leaders, ministers, and museum directors for a high-level conference on the "Circulation of Cultural Property and Shared Heritage: What New Perspectives", at a time of growing public debate on the sharing of cultural property preserved in museums and sites located outside of the countries or communities where those goods were created.
- v. **Capacity building at World Heritage sites.** UNESCO supports museums located in cities or sites recognized as World Heritage through projects such as the one carried out in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam between 2011 and 2015, which developed the professional skills of World Heritage site museum staff, while strengthening the regional network of site museums and professionals.
- vi. **Awareness raising.** As part of its #Unite4Heritage campaign, UNESCO has sought to raise awareness about growing attacks against museums in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen through events such as International Museums Day (18 May) and #MuseumsWeek.

MUSEUMS

KEY MESSAGES

-  **Museums are not just repositories of objects and artefacts** – they are centres of knowledge exchange and social connection. Through the soft power of cultural diplomacy, museums foster an awareness of our shared history and transmit common values. They hold up a mirror to society, introduce visitors to alternative points of view and foster creativity, imagination and respect for diversity.
-  **Museums are key drivers of tourism and sustainable economic development.** Since 1975, the number of museums around the world has more than doubled to 55,000. 1.1 billion people attended the 20 largest museums in the world in 2014.
-  **Today museums are on the front lines** of combat, looting and deliberate destruction – targeted by extremists for the heritage they contain and the values they represent. In response to the growing threats facing museums, UNESCO supports the rehabilitation of museums and sites, and works to strengthen their capacities, build their inventories, protect their collections and relocate them to safe places when necessary.
-  **As the number of museums around the world has grown dramatically,** inequalities in terms of financial, human and institutional resources have grown as well, and the issue of museum accessibility and their relations with the source communities represented in their collections remains a challenge.
-  **Solutions to the challenges facing museums** can be found in UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society, which highlights museums as important spaces for promoting intercultural dialogue, and offers both museum professionals and policymakers guidelines for unlocking their full social potential.

For more information, visit: <http://en.unesco.org/themes/museums>