

Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage Project

Target country or region	Syria
Funding source	European Union with a co-financing by the Government of Flanders
Total budget	2.750.000 EUR
Partners	ICCROM and ICOMOS
Project starting date	1 March 2014
Project completion date	28 February 2017
Responsible sector	UNESCO Office in Beirut
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage project aims to mitigate the on-going loss of cultural heritage in Syria and pave the way for post-conflict priority actions, and medium and long term actions, following the considerable damage to, and loss of, cultural heritage since March 2011, with the overall objective of contributing to restore social cohesion, stability and sustainable development in Syria.

The project's expected results are Syrian cultural heritage better monitored and assessed through updated knowledge and documentation to plan the recovery phase, the loss or destruction of Syrian cultural heritage prevented or mitigated through national and international awareness-raising efforts, and the Syrian cultural heritage better protected and safeguarded through enhanced technical assistance to and capacity of national stakeholders and beneficiaries. The project's main activities include a damage assessment and documentation database of Syrian cultural heritage, a communication and awareness campaign, and the training and capacity building for national cultural heritage stakeholders.

Through a project management unit set-up in the UNESCO Beirut Office, UNESCO involves its international institutional partners in the planned activities according to their respective mandates.

BACKGROUND

Since the start of the conflict in Syria in March 2011, damage has affected emblematic sites as the World Heritage Ancient City of Aleppo, including its Omayyad Mosque, old souks and citadel, the Crac des Chevaliers, the Sites of Palmyra and Bosra, and the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. Other very important places have been affected such as Apamea, Ebla, Mari, Doura Europos, and the Museum of Ma'arrat al Numan. Many archaeological sites are situated in strategic geographical locations and are therefore the places of armed conflict and destruction; this is the case of all historical citadels and unexplored archaeological tells. Other sites are remote and without surveillance, making them vulnerable to systematic illegal excavations. Some archaeological artefacts have been looted and are being sold on the Internet, or are found on foreign art markets. The continuity and transmission of cultural expressions and social practices are also jeopardized as a consequence of the armed conflict.

This has led in particular the World Heritage Committee, at its 37th session (June 2013) to inscribe Syria's six World Heritage sites¹ on the List of World Heritage in Danger. UNESCO, with its institutional partners will undertake missions to Syria to assess the damages directly and plan remedial actions as soon as the situation on the ground allows.

UNESCO raised its concerns for the safeguarding of cultural property, and alerted the international community to the risk of illicit export of cultural property, calling for the mobilization of all UNESCO partners to ensure the safeguarding of this heritage, and appealing for the protection of the Syrian cultural heritage in accordance with the international conventions on the protection of cultural property, in particular the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) and the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972).

To this end, in 2012, UNESCO called on INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO) and Syria's neighbouring countries to request their cooperation in the framework of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), by reinforcing the controls at borders to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

In February 2013 in Amman, Jordan, UNESCO organised a Regional training on Syrian cultural heritage addressing the issue of illicit trafficking, which gathered regional and international institutional partners, cultural heritage, police and customs experts and representatives of the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM), and produced a Plan of Action. In addition, UNESCO supported an e-learning course for Syrian cultural heritage professionals organized by ICOMOS in January 2013, in cooperation with ICCROM and the Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, to help them in protecting their cultural heritage from destruction and looting.

In light of the on-going destruction and the alarming news that reach the international community, UNESCO organised on 29 August 2013 a meeting of experts to examine the current situation and discuss an action aimed at preventing further losses and repairing damage where and when it will be possible. The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi, the European Union, the Director-General of UNESCO and senior staff, UNESCO's institutional partners (ICOMOS, ICOM, ICCROM, Interpol, WCO), and the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums took part in the meeting and endorsed an Action Plan which constitutes an operational response to halt the on-going loss of cultural heritage and prepare post-conflict priority actions, as well as medium and long term actions.

The Action Plan forms the basis of this project.

¹ World Heritage sites in Syria: 'Ancient City of Damascus', 'Ancient City of Bosra', 'Site of Palmyra', 'Ancient City of Aleppo', 'Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din', 'Ancient Villages of Northern Syria'.

BENEFICIARIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The project involves a broad range of beneficiaries and stakeholders. The main beneficiary groups are professionals and administrators concerned with the protection of cultural heritage: managers of cultural heritage sites, museum professionals and administrators, intangible cultural heritage officers, customs and border officers, national experts, professionals and crafts people.

The Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM), a technical and specialized body of the Syrian Ministry of Culture founded in 1946, is the owner and responsible for the protection, management, and conservation of cultural heritage sites and museums in Syria. As such, the DGAM has the mandate to intervene and take immediate safeguarding measures for cultural heritage protection and preservation. Moreover, the DGAM possesses all the inventories of built and movable heritage, as well as the surveys and results of all the international archaeological missions which worked in Syria.

Since the start of the conflict in Syria, through a dedicated unit, the DGAM officers and experts have been very active in documenting damages to cultural heritage including through GIS mapping, mitigating damages where possible, and securing museums and archives in Syria, despite the difficult working conditions and with a clear focus on heritage protection. Part of those efforts was a campaign to raise the awareness of the Syrian population on the importance of cultural heritage for all Syrians regardless of political considerations.

The Syrian border police and customs officers' involvement in training activities to fight illicit trafficking of cultural property is crucial in view of the growing and organised looting of Syrian movable heritage.

Concerning the management of Intangible Heritage, the Directorate of Popular Heritage at the Ministry of Culture is the main entity responsible in Syria. Its specialized staff is responsible for planning and implementing safeguarding measures concerning the living heritage in the country such as inventories, safeguarding plans and activities or awareness raising campaigns. It is also responsible for the preparation of the periodic reports on the implementation of the 2003 Convention. Its Officers and experts support the work of the popular heritage sub-committees present in the 14 Governorates of the country, that include representatives of non-governmental organizations and local associations. They hold the tasks of supervising, collecting, registering and documenting living heritage at the local level.

In addition, the civil society and non-governmental organisations such as the Order of Syrian Engineers and Architects (OSEA), the Archaeological Society, more recently established NGOs and entities such as Heritage for Peace, APSA, Shirin, the foreign archaeological missions, foreign research and or cultural institutes, universities, community leaders are involved in the project and some are also beneficiaries of the project with the aim of promoting participation, inclusion, and representation, and reinforcing their role in achieving the project objectives, thus contributing to social recovery and to the effectiveness of the undertaken activities.

Beneficiaries will also include national stakeholders in charge of cultural heritage.

Other beneficiaries will include Syrian universities and schools (professors, educators, students, and pupils), Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

UNESCO specialized capacity building trainings and technical assistance under this project are directed to those professionals, researchers, NGOs, entities or communities directly involved in the safeguarding and management of cultural heritage whose actions can be effective on the ground under the current conflict.

Moreover, under the UNESCO regular programme and budget , with the support of UNESCO staff and external consultants, and in the framework of UNESCO's work on the Culture Conventions, namely the 1972 World Heritage convention, 1954 Hague Convention (cultural heritage under armed conflict) and 1970 Convention (combatting illicit traffic), UNESCO undertakes activities for the protection of Syrian heritage

In addition, UNESCO is active in establishing partnerships with all actors working on Syrian cultural heritage to ensure global coordination, avoid duplication, and contribute to aid effectiveness.

OVERALL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this project is to contribute to restoring social cohesion, stability and sustainable development through the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage.

In view of the growing destruction and loss of cultural heritage and the extremely alarming news that reach the international community day after day, the project is a first step to monitor the on-going destruction and loss of cultural heritage, mitigate its destruction and loss, and prepare the post-conflict priority actions, as well as the medium and long term actions, as a means to restore normalcy and social cohesion.

Recent conflicts have evidenced the growing and irreversible threats to cultural heritage in times of unrest. However, some measures can substantially contribute to slowing the effects of those threats and sometimes reversing them. This is possible through strong awareness-raising campaigns, improved knowledge of the current situation, reinforced technical capacities of cultural heritage professionals, customs officers, and knowledge bearers, as well as coordinated international and national efforts.

Consequently, the specific objectives of the project are to:

- Monitor and assess the Syrian cultural heritage situation through updated and continued knowledge and documentation
- Mitigate the destruction and loss of Syrian cultural heritage through national and international awareness-raising efforts
- Protect and safeguard Syrian cultural heritage through enhanced technical assistance to and capacity-building of national stakeholders and beneficiaries

EXPECTED RESULTS

The expected results of the project are:

1. Syrian cultural heritage better monitored and assessed through updated knowledge and documentation
2. Loss or destruction of Syrian cultural heritage prevented or mitigated through national and international awareness-raising efforts

3. Syrian cultural heritage better protected and safeguarded through enhanced technical assistance to and capacity of national stakeholders and beneficiaries

Although achieving sound results in times of conflict is a high-risk challenge, the proposed concrete actions in this project can impact the status of Syrian cultural heritage on the short and medium terms by contributing to limit the looting of artefacts, securing museums and collections, mitigating the complete destruction of heritage damaged by the conflict, securing built and movable heritage archives, documenting threatened intangible heritage and contributing to the post-conflict healing process.

Furthermore, the project management team plays a leading role in coordinating national and international efforts to document and safeguard Syria's heritage, avoid duplications and ensure the highest scientific and deontological standards are followed by all actors. Last but not least, it shall foster the participation of all key institutional partners listed in the project, and whose contributions according to their respective mandates are crucial to achieving effective results on the ground.

Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage Project

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN UNTIL 10 NOVEMBER 2015

Financed by the European Union with the support of the Government of Flanders, the **Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage** project aims to provide an operational response to halt the on-going loss of cultural heritage and prepare post-conflict priority actions in Syria. In partnership with ICCROM and ICOMOS, UNESCO is implementing a three-pronged approach to monitor and assess the cultural heritage situation in Syria through updated and continued **knowledge and documentation**; mitigate the destruction and loss of Syrian cultural heritage through national and international **communication and awareness-raising efforts**; and protect and safeguard Syrian cultural heritage through enhanced **technical assistance and capacity-building** for national stakeholders and beneficiaries.

1. Knowledge and documentation (damage assessment, mapping and inventories)

- On 26-28 May 2014, UNESCO organized, with funding from the Flemish government, an international experts meeting to help rally the International Community to safeguard Syria's cultural heritage, coordinate action and refine the Action Plan that would form the basis of the Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage EU-funded project. 120 international and Syrian experts from 22 countries and UNESCO's partners participated.
- The Observatory is an online platform established within the framework of the EU-project where national and international actors share the most precise information targeted at fellow experts and the public. This includes information on damaged structures, looted artefacts and endangered intangible heritage in diverse forms (maps, pictures, videos, reports, etc.). The Observatory monitors and assesses the situation of cultural heritage in Syria since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011. The Observatory collects information on the damage, destruction and looting incurred by built and movable and intangible heritage in order to support international and national efforts in mitigating the threats to cultural heritage and developing methodological actions and assisting in post-conflict recovery efforts. The Observatory also sheds light on all national and international initiatives to relay information regarding UNESCO's and its partners' on-going projects and activities to protect and safeguard Syria's cultural heritage.
- The Roster of Experts and Information Sharing Network form a register of heritage professionals and institutions to assist in the post-conflict recovery phase with their specific knowledge and expertise, and to identify existing documentation on Syria's cultural heritage. The platforms include the curriculum vitae of the experts and a list of existing documents and projects related to Syria's cultural heritage. The Roster is accessible through a UNESCO online platform with restricted access. Experts and entities with in-depth knowledge and/or who have worked on the documentation and conservation of Syrian cultural heritage are invited to register on this platform, to share information and elaborate on the contents of the documents at their disposal. The UNESCO Roster of Experts and Information Sharing Network were successfully launched last September 2014. Experts are on a regular basis invited to join the Network, and to upload their profiles to the Roster. Up today 140 Syrian and international experts and institutions have responded to this initiative.
- From 16 to 18 February 2015, UNESCO organized a meeting to discuss the state of the art in documentation and inventory systems of built, tangible and intangible heritage in Syria and

the way to improve them in order to empower the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) with this important tool in the current crisis situation. The meeting aimed at creating new synergies of collaboration among the participating entities and ensuring operational and accurate post-recovery planning. More than 20 Syrian and international experts specialised in heritage inventories and documentation attended this meeting.

- 30 July 2015, UNESCO, the DGAM and the German Archaeological Institute met in Berlin to discuss the inventory systems for Syrian built heritage and looted objects database. The DGAM colleagues worked closely with the German Archaeological Institute to develop a tool and method to transfer data from organisations worldwide. Contacts were established with the IT expert of the Carabinieri and Interpol to ensure that the new data base is compatible with their systems as well.
- From 20 to 21 August 2015, UNESCO, in collaboration with the DGAM and Free University of Berlin, held a meeting in Berlin on the museum inventory of the National Museum of Deir ez-Zor. During the meeting, the DGAM, the German Archaeological Institute and the Free University of Berlin reached an agreement regarding the transfer of 5000 inventory cards from the Deir ez-Zor Museum to the DGAM.

2. Communication and awareness-raising efforts

- A poster featuring the 8th-century Great Mosque of the Umayyads in the Ancient City of Damascus (a WH site) has been produced to support the #UNITE4HERITAGE campaign. 100 copies of the poster will be sent to the DGAM and hung in public spaces, cultural and educational institutions and heritage sites across Syria.
- The #UNITE4HERITAGE logo was printed on 6 large foam boards (84x118cm) and 60 cardboards (29x42cm) in English and Arabic and sent to the DGAM. The signs were distributed to heritage sites across Syria to produce photos for the campaign. The DGAM expressed commitment to spread the campaign as far as possible, especially in critical zones such as Bosra and Idlib.
- An infographic pamphlet illustrating the results of the first year of the Project was produced in May 2015. The user-friendly pamphlet shows that actions are possible during crises, which is likely to encourage other entities, organisations and governments to support UNESCO's efforts in safeguarding the Syrian cultural heritage.

3. Technical assistance and capacity building

- First Aid support meetings for the preservation of the Syrian cultural heritage provide technical assistance addressing imminent threats and their mitigation measures. Technical support was made available to Syrian stakeholders in Paris about the Old City of Damascus in December 2013 and the Crac des Chevaliers in May 2014, both WH sites.
- A First Aid support meeting dedicated to the Aleppo Museums was held in Paris on 29 October 2014. The meeting was attended by Syrian Stakeholders such as representatives of the DGAM, the Heritage Task Force and the Syrian NGO Heritage for Peace, UNESCO specialized staff, the institutional project partners: ICOMOS and ICCROM, and UNESCO institutional partners such as ICOM, International Committee of the Blue Shield, and the Louvre Museum.

- UNESCO-Beirut convened a meeting about the creation and updating of the Syrian police database of looted artefacts on 6 and 7 November 2014, with participants from the Interpol, the Italian Police Command for the Protection of Cultural heritage, as well as Syrian Police officials, representatives from the DGAM and Syrian legislative experts.
 - UNESCO-Beirut organized a training activity on fighting the illicit traffic addressed to 25 police and customs officers from Syria and neighbouring countries (Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey) from 10 to 14 of November 2014. Trainers were experts of the UNESCO 1970 Illicit Traffic Convention, UNIDROIT Convention, World Custom Organisation, Interpol, Geneva Call, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
 - The training course on “First Aid to Cultural Built Heritage in Syria” took place at UNESCO Office in Beirut from 24 November 2014 until 6 December 2014. The aim of this initiative was to build the capacities of Syrian professionals to secure their endangered built cultural heritage and to prepare for the post conflict recovery phase. The training was offered to 23 conservation architects, engineers, archaeologists, etc. from the DGAM, from regions such as Damascus, Daraa, Homs and Aleppo. The curriculum of the course was developed in close collaboration with the DGAM and adapted to the needs of its staff.
 - UNESCO-Beirut organized a workshop for 30 national stakeholders to protect movable heritage during and after the conflict, and protect the museums from looting from 26 to 30 January 2015, in collaboration with INTERPOL, ICOM and Blue Shield. The workshop involved curators, architects, conservators, managers, engineers, archaeologists, young professionals and focused on a brief legal training ,museum disaster risk management and objects, archives and manuscripts basic conservation interventions in emergency situation.
 - UNESCO-Beirut organized a training on the 2003 Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage from 9 to 13 February. This activity included an initial training of trainers for 22 Syrians involved in the safeguarding of living heritage in Syria and offered a platform where participants could reflect collectively on experiences and challenges in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage according to the current situation in Syria.
 - In June 2015, UNESCO, ICCROM-ATHAR, and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) organized a follow-up course on “First Aid to Built Cultural Heritage in Syria” with the aim to establish national teams capable of undertaking emergency response interventions to secure endangered built cultural heritage, as well as training other teams within the country.
 - UNESCO organized in Beirut a training activity on fight against illicit traffic of Syrian cultural heritage, in particular about restitution of properties. It was addressed to 15 police and customs officers from Syria and neighbouring countries (Lebanon and Jordan) from 30 November to 2 December 2015. Trainers were experts of the UNESCO 1970 Illicit Traffic Convention, UNIDROIT Convention, World Custom Organisation, Interpol and police, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and from the academic field. The new proposal for amendments in the Syrian legislation for the protection of cultural heritage was presented as well as case studies such as the Raqqa museum and the situation of illegal excavations on the Syrian territories.
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Outputs generated:

- 120 international experts taking part in the International Experts Meeting for the Preservation of the Syrian Cultural Heritage
- One Internet platform created, accessible on-line and regularly updated
- 640 contact details of experts gathered
- Representatives of 98 entities joined the Roster of Experts and Information Sharing Network
- 39 archive documents uploaded on the Information Sharing Network
- 6 specialised reports in conformity with UNESCO technical standards assessing the updated situation of the Syrian cultural heritage
- 139 participants to the training capacity building activities carried out during the implementation of the project
- 18 safeguarding initiatives in the field of Syrian cultural heritage undertaken that reflect the principles and objectives of the UNESCO Conventions and the broadest participation of communities
- 24 visibility initiatives undertaken at local and international level that effectively disseminate information on Syrian cultural heritage and promote awareness of its importance
- An average of 852 visits per month to the on-line platform focused on the protection, safeguarding and restoration of cultural property in Syria, including general background and follow-up of on-going projects