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## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING CULTURE TODAY?

Cultural heritage and diversity are facing a growing number of threats and pressures as a result of emergencies, both natural and man-made. Cultural heritage continues to be caught in the crossfire of conflict, as well as the target of deliberate attacks. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic also puts culture – from tangible to intangible cultural heritage, cultural institutions and artists and cultural professionals – in peril, and makes culture more vulnerable to looting and illicit trafficking. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is also increasingly at risk from disasters caused by natural and human-made hazards, as well as the effects of climate change.

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## WHY DOES CULTURE MATTER IN EMERGENCIES?

Heritage and creativity, as expressions of identity and repositories of memory and knowledge, are an essential source of support for communities in crisis – whether in times of conflict, disaster or emergency. Promoting respect for cultural diversity is fundamental to preventing violent extremism, while the significance of culture in the lives of communities makes its continuity essential for recovery and resilience in the wake of disasters. As a visible expression of common ground between communities, culture can also foster reconciliation and social cohesion in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. By protecting cultural heritage and promoting cultural pluralism in emergencies, UNESCO works to protect human rights, prevent conflicts and foster sustainable recovery.

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## HOW DOES UNESCO PROTECT AND PROMOTE CULTURE IN EMERGENCIES?

- i. **Global strategies.** In 2015, UNESCO adopted a Strategy for the reinforcement of the Organization’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict, which aims to strengthen the ability of Member States to prevent and mitigate the loss of cultural heritage as a result of conflict and natural disasters, and to incorporate the protection of culture into humanitarian action, security strategies and peacebuilding processes.
- ii. **Reconstruction, resilience and recovery.** Following the 4 August 2020 explosions in Beirut, UNESCO launched the Li Beirut (“For Beirut”) initiative, which aims to reconstruct and recover Beirut’s cultural heritage and cultural life. UNESCO’s ResiliArt movement works to sound the alarm on the impact of COVID-19 on artists and cultural professionals. UNESCO’s flagship initiative to “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” seeks to restore and reconstruct Mosul’s cultural and educational institutions. UNESCO supported the reconstruction of 14 of the mausoleums of Timbuktu, destroyed by extremists in 2012, ensuring the continuity of the city’s ancient traditions and restoring a sense of community identity and pride.
- iii. **Cross-sector partnerships.** Working with the World Bank, UNESCO has launched a Position Paper on “Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery”, which provides guidelines for integrating culture into post-crisis city reconstruction. Under the 1970 Convention on the illicit trafficking of cultural property, which celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 and 2021, UNESCO is partnering with organizations such as INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, ICOM and the art market and law enforcement agencies to halt the looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- iv. **Emergency Funding.** UNESCO’s Heritage Emergency Fund is a multi-donor, non-earmarked funding mechanism that enables the Organization to respond quickly and effectively to crises, from conflict to natural disasters, impacting culture. UNESCO’s Rapid Response Facility supports natural World Heritage sites impacted by crisis, while the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund provides emergency support for living heritage at risk.

# CULTURE IN EMERGENCIES

## KEY MESSAGES



Culture is increasingly on the front lines of emergencies across the globe – from conflicts, to natural disasters, the impact of climate change and global pandemics and socio-economic crisis. UNESCO works to protect culture in emergency situations, but also to promote culture as a powerful tool for peacebuilding, reconciliation, resilience and recovery. Ensuring the protection and promotion of culture is at the heart of UNESCO's mandate. Culture is the foundation on which communities can rebuild their lives.



One of UNESCO's most important activities for the promotion of peace and sustainable development in recent years has been to safeguard and reconstruct cultural heritage in the wake of conflicts. In 2018, UNESCO launched its largest reconstruction effort in recent years in Mosul, Iraq, where an estimated 90% of the Old City was destroyed. The "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative aims to put people at the heart of Mosul's recovery by directly involving them in the reconstruction of their cultural and educational institutions.



UNESCO's ResiliArt movement for artists and cultural professionals aims to sound the alarm on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their livelihoods and to support their recovery and socio-economic rights.



Following the devastating explosions in Beirut on 4 August 2020, UNESCO launched the Li Beirut initiative, which aims to support the reconstruction and recovery of Beirut's cultural heritage and cultural life.



UNESCO is working to ensure that culture is fully integrated into reconstruction and recovery efforts in post-crisis situations across the globe. That is why – in partnership with the World Bank – we recently launched guidelines for integrating culture into post-crisis city reconstruction. These practical guidelines aim to give local authorities and stakeholders a framework by which to assess local needs – including those related to culture – and promote recovery that is sustainable, inclusive and long lasting.



Through our Heritage Emergency Fund, UNESCO also supports emergency preparedness, response and outreach efforts in the wake of disasters of all kinds – from the devastating explosions in Beirut, the fire at the National Museum of Brazil, earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal, to massive flooding in Yemen and Peru.

**For more information, visit:** <http://en.unesco.org/themes/culture-risk-0>