

# MUSEUMS

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

# Q & A

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### WHAT IS UNESCO'S MUSEUMS PROGRAMME?

Museums lie at the heart of UNESCO's mission to promote dialogue, peace and sustainable development through culture. Through its Museums Programme, UNESCO works to support the social, educational and cultural role of museums, in line with its 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections. It also 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. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, museums were magnets for tourism and job creation, making them key drivers of sustainable economic development. A flagship report by UNESCO, "[Museums Around the World in the Face of COVID-19](#)", found that the number of museums has increased by almost 60% since 2012 to around 95,000 museum institutions today. Yet important disparities persist between museums. While 90% of museums had to temporarily close their doors due to COVID-19, only those institutions that had previously made investments in digitalization were able to remain connected with their audiences. UNESCO found that In Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), only 5% of museums have developed online content for their audiences. Addressing these inequalities and building the capacity of museums in the Global South forms a key part of UNESCO's work in this field.

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### HOW DOES UNESCO PROTECT AND PROMOTE MUSEUMS?

- i. **Recommendations and policy guidance.** 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. UNESCO launched the first [report](#) on the implementation of the 2015 Recommendation in 2019.
- ii. **Emergency support.** As part of its [Li Beirut](#) initiative, UNESCO organized a ResiliArt Lebanon [debate](#) on the impact of the explosions on Beirut's museums and galleries. Days after the devastating fire at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, which destroyed an estimated 80-90% of the museum's 20 million-piece collection, UNESCO sent an [emergency mission](#) to the site to support the preparation of an Action Plan for the museum's recovery.
- iii. **Capacity building.** In December 2019 UNESCO organized a five-day training with the staff of the Barthélémy Boganda National Museum in the Central African Republic on the digitization of museum collections. The goal is to create a digital inventory of the 3,500 objects in the museum that are currently in storage and, ultimately, to reopen the museum.
- iv. **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 2016, and gathered a wide variety of heritage experts, policy makers and museum directors.

# MUSEUMS

## KEY MESSAGES



Museums are not just repositories of objects and artefacts – they are centres of knowledge exchange and social connection. 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.



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, museums were key drivers of tourism and sustainable economic development. The number of museums has increased by almost 60% since 2012 to around 95,000 museum institutions today. Yet important disparities persist between museums. While 90% of museums had to temporarily close their doors due to COVID-19, only those institutions that had previously made investments in digitalization were able to remain connected with their audiences. In Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), only 5% of museums have developed online content for their audiences.



As the number of museums around the world has grown dramatically, inequalities in terms of financial, human and institutional resources have grown as well. The issue of museum accessibility and their relations with the source communities represented in their collections remains a challenge.



In order to restore and strengthen their social and economic role in the post-COVID-19 era, museums must form a key part of COVID-19 recovery plans and strategies, particularly with regards to the tourism sector.



In response to the growing threats facing museums as a result of crises, conflicts and disasters, UNESCO supports the rehabilitation of museums and sites, and works to strengthen their capacities, build and digitize their inventories, protect their collections and relocate them to safe places when necessary.



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>