



European Union



*Background note -*

# “Restoring Livelihoods Through Culture in Yemen”

*26 - 27 May 2021,  
international conference*

**This note sets out the background to a two-day international conference that will discuss the experience of an innovative cultural heritage and livelihood programme in Yemen and consider lessons to be learned for the future.**

The damage to Yemen’s rich and diverse cultural heritage has been [severe](#). It is damning in terms of the loss of cultural value, but also complicates the prospects for reconciliation and peacebuilding. Cultural heritage is a key identity marker enabling pluralism and tolerance, particularly in the context of Yemen with its distinct regional identities and strong communal links.

Conflict-related factors, in addition to environmental degradation, have exacerbated a lack of maintenance and local resources to safeguard the country’s heritage.

Within this context, UNESCO has stepped up its efforts to protect cultural heritage and promote pluralism. **‘Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen’** was launched in 2018 together with the Social Fund for Development in Yemen and the European Union. It is part of [UNESCO’s work](#) of protecting cultural heritage and aims to strengthen the culture-peacebuilding connection.

**With an EU contribution of € 10M the three-year project is a major component of the strategic partnership between the EU and UNESCO that has developed over the past decade.** The EU is the largest funding partner of UNESCO on culture, with as key objective the promotion of culture as a driver for social cohesion and peace in conflict and crises.

Cultural heritage is taking a larger role within EU policy-making, including [an evolving international pillar](#). The November 2020 [EEAS conference on protecting cultural heritage in crises](#) announced the adoption of an EU concept on the matter. The protection of cultural heritage lends itself particularly well to the integrated approach to external conflict, as evidenced by the collaboration between the EEAS and DGs INTPA, EAC, NEAR and ECHO.

International assistance remains necessary to protect cultural heritage from armed conflict, political instability and climate-related degradation, yet experience has shown that equally important is **the need to empower local ownership for sustainable and resilient outcomes.**

The Cash for Work project adopted this approach as it set out to create 500,000 cash-for-work working days for 4,000 young women and men to rehabilitate urban heritage environments in the cities of Sana’a, Shibam, Zabid and Aden. Cultural programming is the second main component with a focus on boosting the cultural and creative industries (CCI).



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Amidst a growing realisation that implementation of sustainable heritage protection and preservation policies requires a strong focus on employment and livelihoods, action is geared towards greater involvement of Yemeni civil society along with a more explicit link to development.

The ongoing conflict has hit Yemen's large youth demographic particularly hard (youth unemployment stood at 24% in 2019 according to the ILO). The project is thus targeted at youth employability and enhancing livelihoods, also with a view to the future survival of heritage practices and crafts.

By means of a grant-based scheme, the project **promotes a holistic view on heritage** that comprises tangible and intangible heritage (e.g. manuscript preservation, handicrafts, poetry), as well as creative cultural expressions (e.g. music, film-making, graphic design, painting). The programme's focus on boosting local CCI aligns with a similar EU approach to cultural heritage, both internally (e.g. Creative Europe) as well as in external action.

This approach follows **an evolution in international heritage protection intervention**, moving away from a focus on 'monumentality' by prioritising urban architecture. It intervenes along the humanitarianism-development continuum through skills enhancement in the local CCI, fostering youth entrepreneurship and employability.

Adopting a broader understanding of cultural heritage as a key to the resilience of communities is innovative. The project has developed partnerships with the EU and other partners to encourage ownership in cultural heritage among the youth, in part inspired by the experience of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage.

The project's next edition aims to build on monitoring and evaluation data to expand its scope to target rural areas where economic hardships are even more severe. While measuring the medium- to long-term impact of the programme has been beyond the remit of the project's duration, this can be part of an extended cycle. The project was implemented under difficult circumstances related to the security situation as well as climate-related damage to built heritage.

This two-day international conference aims to present findings and experiences that hold a wealth of lessons for the elaboration and implementation of sustainable heritage protection and preservation in (post)conflict situations. Through presentations by a wide variety of speakers, as well as exchanges with artists and creative professionals, the conference will explore identified lessons, obstacles and good practices. It will set out the way forward to protecting Yemen's universal heritage and to building a more resilient future. Find out more on the [conference page](#).

– *culture Solutions*, May 2021

