

Protecting, preserving and promoting access to the world's documentary heritage and raising awareness of its relevance to sustainable development

| Key challenges

Documentary heritage – from preserving documents in libraries, archives and museums to the software that is driving the digital transformation – is an essential part of humanity's collective memory. It is a key resource that helps us learn from the past; whether it be contributing to building more equitable, inclusive and sustainable societies or helping us tackle current crises with information on past responses.

Many original and unaltered items and collections are today endangered because of looting and dispersal, illegal trading, deliberate destruction, inadequate storage and a lack of funding.

Moreover, these risks are heightened during times of crisis such as conflicts and natural disasters.

New strategies are thus needed to support and update documentary heritage preservation tools and techniques, and digital preservation should be included as a component in disaster risk reduction strategies. This should also include strengthening the capacities of memory and research institutions to improve their resilience in the face of emergency and crisis situations.

With your support, UNESCO will...

- Raise awareness about the importance of preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage for sustainable development and peace through increasing visibility of the Memory of the World Programme and reinforcing its role as a global mechanism.
- Strengthen local, regional and international networks and partnerships to support the identification, preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage.
- Support capacity building among policy makers and memory institutions to implement UNESCO's Recommendation on the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage.
- Support preservation and digital access to ancient manuscripts in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa through the development of an online platform to digitally preserve and showcase these archives.
- Foster the resilience and emergency preparedness of memory institutions, especially in Africa and Small Island Developing States, by leading workshops on disaster risk reduction strategies and how to protect documentary heritage in conflict zones.
- Enhance collaboration with educational institutions through leveraging online solutions to promote the value of documentary heritage among persons of all ages.
- Promote dialogue and joint action for the digital preservation of documentary heritage through initiatives such as PERSIST, a project under the Memory of the World Programme that aims to build stakeholder capacities on digitization to support long-term preservation and access to digital documentary heritage.
- Promote the role of women and marginalized groups in documentary heritage processes and projects and support relevant research and monitoring initiatives.

UNESCO established the Memory of the World Programme in 1992, in view of the parlous state of preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage in various parts of the world. War and social upheaval, as well as severe lack of resources, have worsened problems which have existed for centuries. The Memory of the World Programme aims to ensure that the world's documentary heritage is fully preserved and protected, and accessible to all without hindrance.



Recent UNESCO achievements include...

- Highlighting the role of memory institutions in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and how documentary heritage can be harnessed to learn from past crises and emergency response.
- Bridging policy gaps in digital preservation by organizing, in October 2020, a dedicated online Policy Dialogue on Documentary Heritage at Risk, involving more than 830 participants from across the world from the public and private sector, memory institutions and academia.
- Mobilizing stakeholders from across the world to protect and promote preservation and access to documentary heritage, facilitating knowledge sharing and international cooperation. An example of this was the second Inter-regional Conference for the Memory of the World in November 2019, which gathered over 100 delegates and speakers from 28 countries to discuss best practice strategies and state-of-the-art policies.
- Fostering global discussions on disaster risk reduction as a strategic framework for the sustainable preservation of documentary heritage. The first Global Policy Forum on Preservation of Documentary Heritage for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management was organized by UNESCO in 2018.
- Organizing in 2020 an international consultation in Mali on the safeguarding, accessibility and promotion of ancient manuscripts in the Sahel, which led to the production of national policy recommendations on the issue.
- Developing, with the French Institute for Research in Computer Science and Automation, an online software heritage archive enabling full access to the source code of more than 134 million software projects.
- Producing a Gender Equality Baseline Study of the Memory of the World in the Asia-Pacific region, identifying gender gaps in documentary heritage processes.
- Launching the project "Women in History – Telling HERstory through Memory of the World" to identify collections in the region that have gender-related stories or portray significant achievements by women throughout history.

Since 2005, the UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize has been awarded to individuals and institutions in recognition of their significant contributions to the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage.



Partner with UNESCO

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More information: [Memory of the World Programme](#), [UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize](#), [PERSIST Project](#), [Software Heritage](#)