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Introduction

A number of key policies and measures to ensure “accelerated action and transformative pathways” have been taken by the World Heritage Committee and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (as the Secretariat for the 1972 World Heritage Convention) for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in the framework of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development include protecting the world’s cultural and natural heritage in line with Goal 11.4 as well as contributing transversally across a number of other Goals and Targets.

1. The World Heritage Convention

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) has now been ratified by 194 States Parties making it among the legal treaties with the most parties. 1,121 World Heritage sites are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List providing for a global network in 167 States Parties (i.e. only 27 States Parties have no property inscribed on the World Heritage List). 179 States Parties have submitted national Tentative Lists of sites, in total 1,753 sites, that they may decide to nominate in future years.

The World Heritage Convention supports international cooperation and intergovernmental decision-making and the governance of cultural and natural heritage through its governing bodies, the World Heritage Committee and the General Assembly of States Parties who adopt strategic resolutions and decisions for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Properties inscribed on the World Heritage List that face imminent and ongoing threats are placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. With focused technical assistance from the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, and efforts by State Parties, World Heritage properties such as Belize Barrier Reef, Belize (2018), Humberstone, Santa Laura Saltpeter Works, Chile (2019), and Bethlehem, Palestine (2019) were removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Efforts are made to provide specific support for sites in post-conflict countries. Among the achievements was the submission of the Tentative List entry for Mosul, Iraq, a UNESCO flagship activity in heritage rehabilitation in post-conflict regions. 2021 also marks the 20th anniversary of the tragic destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan. UNESCO has led a three-phase project - now almost completed - to preserve the Buddha niches in Bamiyan and their wall paintings. Japan, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Germany the EU and many others have provided funding, which has also allowed for the safeguarding of the statues' fragments.

Africa is a Global Priority for UNESCO: for the first time, in 2019 a working document on the African region, World Heritage and Sustainable Development highlighted to the World Heritage Committee the alignment of activities in the region with the 2030 Agenda and the African Union "Agenda 2063 - The Africa We Want".

2. World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (2015)

The 20th General Assembly of States Parties (Resolution **20 GA 13**; UNESCO, 2015) adopted the “Policy Document for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention” that is also known as the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (WH-SDP). The WH-SDP, which can be found at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/>, has continued to be applied by States Parties and by sites.

The World Heritage Convention provides support to the States Parties, especially the most vulnerable ones, in developing relevant policies and programmes to facilitate the integration of

the sustainable development perspective in the broader framework for the management of the World Heritage properties and their Outstanding Universal Value. This has a particular focus on the engagement of communities in the life and management of World Heritage sites and their long-term aspirations for sustainable development at a time when cultural and natural heritage are increasingly exposed to a variety of threats. The World Heritage relevant SDGs are mainstreamed in the conservation and management of at least 151 World Heritage properties, including 39 in Africa and 8 SIDS in the last three years.

Sustainable development has been mainstreamed into the processes of the World Heritage Convention by integrating sustainable development related concepts, actions, and monitoring as appropriate into the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the World Heritage Policy Compendium, and the 3rd Cycle of the Periodic Reporting exercise. The Regional Action Plans currently being developed by the Arab States Region and the Africa Region of the World Heritage Centre, include strategic objectives related to sustainable development.

An analysis (draft) of the synergies and entry points has been carried out to align the WH-SDP with the UN 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, Africa 2063, the Paris Agreement, the SIDS Action Plan, UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators, and the Sendai Framework.

A draft Toolkit has been developed for a Preliminary World Heritage Site Sustainability Health-Check for World Heritage and Sustainable Development aligned with the 2030 Agenda that allows sites, Site Managers, and countries, to carry out a quick assessment on the sustainability 'profile' of their World Heritage properties that could inspire and motivate them to take policies and actions to improve their 'sustainability health'. A draft Toolkit for a World Heritage Project Sustainability Check has also been developed for a quick assessment of proposed projects and interventions in and around World Heritage properties aligned with the 2030 Agenda that allows sites, Site Managers, and countries, to carry out a quick assessment on the potential impact of proposed projects on the sustainability of their World Heritage properties. Such an early and quick assessment could permit adjustments in the design of projects and interventions to contribute more directly to sustainable development goals and targets.

Development pressures, climate change, globalization, conflicts and natural disasters represent key threats to World Heritage properties that affect, and could further impede, their ability to contribute to sustainable development, inclusiveness, and equality.

3. [Enhancing environmental resilience with an interdisciplinary approach to protection of World Heritage properties \(Goal 15 - Life On Land\):](#)

The World Heritage Convention protects the most outstanding heritage sites for their cultural and natural value including for biological diversity in the world and recognizes that nature and culture are two interconnected dimensions of our heritage. World Heritage sites cover over 360 million ha of land and sea across the globe, in all ecosystems, making a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation, and helping to safeguard the important ecosystem services and benefits these sites provide. Therefore, the sites contribute to people's wellbeing in various ways, towards environmental sustainability, resilience and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre has been encouraging and assisting the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to take appropriate measures to anticipate, avoid and minimise harm to natural and cultural heritage, consistent with their obligations under the Convention, and has also been encouraging them to mainstream the protection of World Heritage into their national policies, strategies, and processes relating to the environment, disaster reduction, and climate change. Furthermore, States Parties should ensure that

biological and cultural diversity, as well as ecosystem services and benefits for people that contribute to environmental sustainability, are protected and enhanced within World Heritage properties, their buffer zones and wider settings, including through the use of environmental, social and cultural impact assessment tools when planning and undertaking projects. World Heritage sites are the 'litmus test' for our global efforts to conserve cultural and biological diversity and address climate change with the engagement of local communities in and around them.

The World Heritage Centre has developed close cooperation with the Secretariats of the 7 other biodiversity-related conventions. Through the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity related Conventions, the Secretariats of the world's 8 key biodiversity conventions meet regularly to discuss synergies and a common message on the need to urgently address the global biodiversity crisis. Currently, the emphasis is on providing inputs into the preparation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which will define the mission, goals and targets of the global effort to conserve biodiversity for the next decade. The World Heritage Centre also developed a close bilateral cooperation with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) to promote ecological connectivity. With the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the development of an MoU is under discussion to further formalise the existing cooperation on sites which harbour endangered species victim of the illegal wildlife trade (such as the Vaquita, a porpoise species endemic to the Gulf of California World Heritage sites). There is also enhanced cooperation with the Ramsar Convention and UNESCO's Man and Biosphere programme and UNESCO's Global Geoparks to improve the conservation of sites with multiple designations.

The [Bern II Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-Related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework \(Bern II\)](#) was held from 18 January to 2 February 2021, with participation of the governing bodies and the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements. This was a follow-up to the first consultation workshop ([Bern I](#)) held in Bern, Switzerland in June 2019. These consultation workshops were organized following the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP [decision 14/30](#).

The World Heritage Convention recognizes, from the outset, linkages between nature and culture. Along with the "mixed sites," i.e. sites listed under both natural and cultural criteria, safeguarding of cultural landscapes has contributed significantly to enhance the well-being and resilience of communities while maintaining rich biological and cultural diversity. Defined as the combined work of nature and people, 114 properties on the World Heritage List are categorized as cultural landscapes. Furthermore, the World Heritage Centre is serving as the Secretariat of the *UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes* to reward outstanding examples of action to safeguard and enhance the world's major cultural landscapes. The Prize was awarded in November 2019 to Instituto do Património Cultural (Cabo Verde) for its outstanding contribution to the safeguarding, management and sustainable development of the Natural Park of Cova, Paul and Ribeira da Torre (next Prize Designation in Fall 2021). In addition, efforts have been made to further recognize and strengthen the linkage between people, nature and culture through a joint programme on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity between UNESCO and the CBD Secretariat since 2010, to contribute to achieve the global vision of "Living in Harmony with Nature" by 2050.

Decoupling economic growth from environmental exploitation is critical for achieving sustainable development for current and future generations. UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee's Advisory Bodies are engaged in dialogue with private sector with a view to ensuring that they refrain from exploring or extracting oil, gas and mineral resources within World Heritage properties and ensuring that operations in areas surrounding World Heritage

properties do not threaten their integrity. This is part of a wider effort by UNESCO to foster shared responsibility over the humanity's shared heritage assets, raise funding and mobilize action for the preservation of biodiversity and heritage, through stronger partnerships with the private sector, scientific cooperation, and civil society engagement. The World Heritage Centre and its partners have intensified their efforts to create greater buy in from the private sector to integrate the 'No Go policy' as part of Corporate Social responsibility policy. This had led to some significant results: Several new energy companies (including ENGIE and ENI) have subscribed to a No Go policy. With support from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the World Heritage Centre was able to secure major commitments from the financial and banking sector to integrate into their sustainability policies, provisions for ensuring that they are not financing projects that may negatively impact World Heritage properties and that the companies they are investing in subscribe to the "No-go commitment". These include the Church of England National Investing Bodies, ABN Amro, Barclays, BNP Paribas, Crédit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley, Royal Bank of Scotland, Société Générale, Standard Chartered, Swiss Re and UBS. In addition, the World Heritage Centre has engaged with the UNEP Finance Initiative Principles for Sustainable Insurance (PSI) in view of developing an insurance industry guide conservation of World Heritage properties, launched in October 2019 (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2045>). This pioneering guide provides practical guidance to insurers on how to prevent or reduce the risk of insuring and investing in companies or projects whose activities could damage World Heritage sites, particularly in relation to sectors such as oil and gas, mining, and large-scale hydropower. Other relevant sectors include logging, fishing, agriculture, plantations, and large-scale infrastructure such as pipelines, roads and mega-ports. In June of 2020, following several years of dialogue between UNESCO and BP, the energy giant announced that they will refrain from undertaking oil and gas exploration or production activities within natural, cultural, or mixed UNESCO World Heritage sites. The company has furthermore agreed to consult with UNESCO in case they consider such projects in buffer zones or other areas adjacent to World Heritage sites. BP has also committed to avoid associated activities that could impact the value or integrity of World Heritage properties.

The *Belize Barrier Reef System*, a site in a SIDS country, was removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2018 after the approval of an offshore oil exploration moratorium (or 'No-Go' zone) and improved conservation efforts for the delicate reef ecosystem.

Long-standing cooperation with the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme on the joint [Community Management of Protected Areas for Conservation \(COMPACT\)](#) initiative continues, directed by the World Heritage policy on sustainable development. Grant-making programmes that address conservation and sustainable development needs for communities are ongoing in "[Maloti-Drakensberg Park](#)" (Lesotho/South Africa) and "[Okavango Delta](#)" (Botswana) with the support of the governments of Flanders, Norway and the Netherlands. With the [support of the Government of Norway](#), UNESCO promotes sustainable use of natural resources in and around natural World Heritage sites in Africa, while addressing the socio-economic needs of local communities. Supporting conflict mitigation in "[Okapi Wildlife Reserve](#)" (Democratic Republic of the Congo), legal mining zones are identified outside the reserve to create positive incentives to artisanal miners from the reserve and a cooperative is established for widows of eco-guards killed on duty and other women's groups. In "[Lake Malawi National Park](#)", communities are empowered to co-manage the lake's fisheries sustainably by enforcing by-laws on fishing, with a positive impact on lake's biodiversity and local livelihoods.

The protection of world's forests is crucial for achieving the SDGs (in particular SDG 15) and is considered as one of the most cost-effective forms of climate action. The World Heritage Centre has been particularly active in the Congo Basin's forests through the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative (CAWHFI). Between 2016 and 2020, funding from the European Union enabled CAWHFI to strengthen surveillance of a transboundary area of more than 225,000 km² which includes three World Heritage sites ([Dja Faunal Reserve](#) in

Cameroon, [Ecosystem and Relict Cultural Landscape of Lopé-Okanda](#) in Gabon and the [Sangha Tri-national](#)) by the multiplication of anti-poaching patrol efforts (more than 3,500 patrols and 300,000 km travelled), use of innovative technologies (SMART, trap cameras, drones and remote sensing, etc.) and training of more than 350 eco-guards. The support provided by CAWHFI has also improved site management through the rehabilitation of infrastructure, the promotion of eco-tourism, the involvement and training of local communities (more than 1000 people) and updating/production of wildlife inventories (e.g. elephants, gorillas and chimpanzees). In addition, CAWHFI provided technical support to the Congolese and Gabonese authorities for the preparation of nomination files for the [Odzala-Kokoua](#) and [Ivindo national parks](#), respectively.

4. Addressing the impacts of Climate Change and furthering Climate Action with World Heritage (Goal 13 - Climate Action)

On 21 February 2020, on the eve of the 52nd session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), experts from across the globe came together at UNESCO Headquarters to highlight the crucial role of culture in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Noting that climate change represents one of the greatest threats facing culture today, with increasing fires, floods, droughts, desertification and ocean acidification impacting on both cultural and natural heritage, the experts also stressed that there is another side to this story – namely the role of culture as a resource for climate change mitigation and adaptation. They noted indeed that intangible cultural heritage practices, including traditional land and water management practices, traditional food security strategies, and the use of traditional architecture and building materials, can help communities mitigate and adapt to a changing climate.

An international Technical Advisory Group of experts has worked throughout 2020 to provide guidance in the updating of the *2007 Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties* that will offer States Parties to the World Heritage Convention tangible solutions for integrating cultural and natural heritage into their national climate change policies and responses. It also aims at providing high-level guidance on enhancing the protection and conservation of heritage through comprehensive climate action measures, including adaptation, mitigation, resilience building, innovation and research, and in so doing, to take advantage of synergies between the objectives and processes of the World Heritage Convention and those of the Paris Agreement and related multilateral agreements, processes and instruments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The updated Policy Document will be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its forthcoming 44th session in June/July 2021. In the UN Secretary General's report of the September 2019 Climate Action Summit, UNESCO was assigned as the Lead Agency for an *Initiative on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage from Climate Change*. Building on its 2018-2021 Strategy for Climate Action and its 2017 Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change, as well as its conventions in the field of culture, UNESCO has long been working to safeguard our heritage from the effects of climate change, as well as promote its power as a tool for mitigation and adaptation, and source of resilience. In addition, UNESCO, the IPCC and ICOMOS, one of the World Heritage Committee's Advisory Bodies, have joined forces to co-sponsor an International Expert Meeting on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change in 2021 to ensure that culture is fully acknowledged and integrated in the international climate agenda.

Indeed, natural and cultural World Heritage should be regarded as both shared assets that need to be safeguarded from the effects of climate change, such as biodiversity (World Heritage sites cover over 360 million ha of land and sea across the globe, in all ecosystems), and as transversal resources for climate mitigation and adaptation. World Heritage sites can serve as laboratories to pilot effective pathways towards climate change adaptation, using multidisciplinary approaches, including the knowledge and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities living in and around World Heritage sites.

The [Resilient Reefs Initiative](#) was launched in 2018 and is implemented through a global, private-public consortium of partners including the UNESCO World Heritage Marine Programme. Across five pilot World Heritage-Listed coral reefs in Belize, France, Palau and Australia, the Initiative puts people at the heart of conservation and aims to create sustained resilience for both the reefs and the communities who depend on them. The project aligns the requirements for conserving and managing the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage properties with broader sustainable development objectives.

A report of the Marine World Heritage Programme, *Custodians of the Globes Blue Carbon Assets*, was launched in March 2021. Marine World Heritage carbon stores are equivalent to about 10% of the world's annual greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, safely keeping billions of tons of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. Published at the start of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the assessment also points to ways to preserve these invaluable sites.

Ningaloo Coast (Australia) was the first site to hire a Chief Resilience Officer and design a climate adaptation strategy. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have shown how important it is for UNESCO marine World Heritage sites not to be dependent on only one industry. Diversification of income streams is essential to make local communities more resilient while at the same time reduce pressures on the OUV. For Ningaloo Coast, where a 2020 economic valuation study showed that the World Heritage region generates more than 1000 jobs for its local community, this might mean investing in other forms of tourism or innovation on incubators. The other sites in Palau, Belize and France are undertaking similar efforts. Lessons learned in planning for sustainable development in which both nature and people thrive are being exchanged with managers across the 50 marine World Heritage sites through a Digital Knowledge Platform established in 2020.

The Urban Heritage Climate Observatory (UHCO) was launched in 2020 as a joint initiative of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Global Earth Observatory (GEO) and GEO Greece. The UHCO aims to engage earth observation tools to identify and follow the impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage cities globally with a view to promoting and supporting actions for mitigation and adaptation as well as to enhance the resilience of World Heritage cities to climate change related disasters. A 3-year Community Activity involving more than 80 members of the GEO community globally has been initiated.

5. [Bolstering Local Action for sustainable and people-centred cities and settlements integrating heritage conservation with sustainable development \(Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities\)](#)

The World Heritage Cities Programme (WH Cities Programme) was adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 25th session (Helsinki, 2001) to develop a theoretical framework for urban heritage conservation and provide technical assistance to States Parties for the implementation of new approaches and methodologies to that end. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL Recommendation) adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in November 2011 is an important tool to strengthen UNESCO's action in the field of urban heritage conservation, within and beyond the World Heritage context. The 40th General Conference of UNESCO also reaffirmed the importance of the HUL Recommendation in the context of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda. Policy advocacy and stakeholder awareness of urban heritage, and the integration of sustainable development with heritage conservation at the local level, has been a major objective of the WH Cities Programme. Activities to engage Site Managers have been initiated in the 313 World Heritage properties identified to be part of the WH Cities Programme. The *World Heritage City Dialogues* has been established as a virtual platform for Site Managers and local authorities to meet, exchange, and share across their region (Summary outcomes are available online at <https://whc.unesco.org/document/185920>). The *World Heritage City Lab*

has been developed as an innovative global and collaborative and intensive workshop for developing strategies and solutions to the challenges of managing WH Cities with the HUL Recommendation. This event was conducted online in June 2020 involving 74 experts and specialists from 35 countries, a comprehensive report is available online at <https://whc.unesco.org/document/185919>. *Urban Notebooks* has been developed as a monthly e-newsletter for Site Managers (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/cities/>). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic both the World Heritage City Lab and the *Urban Notebooks* focussed on the impacts of the pandemic on World Heritage cities including with the loss of tourism and livelihoods, and possible ways forward for recovery and 'building back better.' During the global crisis due to COVID-19 and the accompanying shutdown, a number of Site Managers of WH Cities shared videos of their experiences, challenges, possible solutions and opportunities for action. A platform of good practices has also been developed to recognize efforts to integrate heritage conservation with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The World Heritage Centre has developed several tools and guidance materials. These include the Expert Workshop on 'Heritage in Urban Contexts' that took place in Fukuoka, Japan in January 2020. The workshop was carried out by the Government of Japan and Kyushu University in close collaboration with the World Heritage Centre. The workshop outcomes include a set of key recommendations for management of urban heritage including urban attributes that contribute to the authenticity and integrity of the properties; and a broad methodology for implementing the HUL Recommendation in World Heritage properties (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1516/>). Another expert workshop was organized in November 2020 with the City of Kyiv, Ukraine focused on identifying good practices for integrating urban heritage conservation with sustainable urban development. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies along with the Category 2 Centres and the Field Offices have provided technical assistance for the conservation and management of especially challenging issues around urban heritage including for the preparation of Management Plans. The World Heritage Fund has also supported the preparation of Management Plans and other urban conservation efforts.

The UNESCO Cities Platform that brings together more than 6 different programmes on cities across the different sectors, including the World Heritage Cities, has undertaken some initiatives specifically to raise awareness of UNESCO's multidisciplinary approach to sustainable development in cities.

Partnerships with regional and international organizations: The World Heritage Centre has undertaken upstream engagement to align sustainable development policies and priorities with World Heritage, including urban regeneration. This includes the European Commission's efforts to redirect their initiatives and priorities on the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage as well as with the Union for the Mediterranean in integrating urban heritage management in urban regeneration policies and actions. The principles of the HUL Recommendation are echoed in the Davos Declaration: Towards a high-quality *Baukultur* for Europe (2018), adopted at the Conference of Ministers of Culture organized by Switzerland (20-22 January 2018). The 10th World Urban Forum in February 2020 held in Abu Dhabi, was focused on "Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation". The World Heritage Centre provided the keynote address for the high-level session on Urban Planning and Heritage Preservation in addition to a session on the UNESCO Cities Platform. UNESCO also provided the keynote address for the Congress of the Organization of World Heritage Cities in Krakow, Poland in 2019. The Annual Meeting of the ICOMOS Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages (CVVIH) in Tunisia focused on the Theory and Practice of the HUL Recommendation and on the SDGs in relation to historic towns.

The UNESCO Cities platform, which includes the World Heritage Cities Programme adopted by the World Heritage Committee, allows for a strategic comprehensive vision through coordinated action, and reinforces the linkages between all areas of action of UNESCO

6. Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive livelihoods with World Heritage conservation (Goal 1 - No Poverty, Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production)

The conservation and wise management of cultural and natural heritage has tremendous potential to address many of the key sustainable development challenges facing the poorest and more vulnerable, including by providing shelter, access to food, water and other means of livelihood as well as stable and decent employment. In addition, well-preserved heritage is an essential component to the dignity and resilience of disadvantaged communities, notably in disasters situations and other complex emergencies. It may also contribute directly to alleviating poverty and inequalities. The impact achieved for SIDS by World Heritage was mainly through technical and financial support for the sites danger, e.g., East Rennell, Solomon Islands, Nan Madol, Federated States of Micronesia, including for improvement of sustainable livelihoods of communities and building capacity of site management. Initiatives have helped revitalise income-generating handicrafts and building techniques linked to the conservation of heritage sites among local communities in Pakistan (Makli, Lahore), Bangladesh (Paharpur), and Sri Lanka (Kandy, Anuradhapura).

Promoting World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism

World Heritage properties are important assets for economic and regional tourism development. In this regard, the contribution of sustainable tourism to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the positive impact it can have on local communities and the protection of World Heritage properties is recognized. However, negative effects of inadequate visitor management and tourism infrastructure development should be avoided.

Adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2012, the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme provides an international framework for the planning and sustainable management of tourism at World Heritage properties by fostering the awareness, the capacity and equal participation of local stakeholders (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/>).

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread travel restrictions and the closure of major tourism destinations around the world. The World Tourism Organization's recent figures show that international arrivals dropped by 74% in 2020, representing an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues - more than 11 times the loss recorded during the 2009 global economic crisis. The impact of this decrease in tourism has been particularly hard on port cities, which have lost important revenue for the conservation of their cultural heritage and local communities. The Cruise Line International Association estimates that more than 200,000 European jobs have been lost due to the suspension of cruise operations alone.

In response, UNESCO has convened a *Task Force on Culture and Resilient Tourism* with the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee (IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM). The Task Force is leading a global dialogue to explore how the current pause in global travel can be used to develop new inclusive models and approaches to ensure a resilient and sustainable tourism recovery that rejuvenates communities, creates jobs, promotes culture, and protects heritage and its transmission. A roadmap addressing key issues will be developed.

This builds on other ongoing sustainable tourism initiatives including our long-standing partnership with Seabourn small ship cruise line. Since 2014, UNESCO has worked with Seabourn to support tourism development that delivers benefits for the conservation of the sites, sustainable development of local communities as well as a quality experience for visitors.

The UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Pledge, in partnership with Expedia Group, focuses on promoting sustainable tourism and heritage conservation. It is the first collaboration between UNESCO and a global online travel agency. The pledge takes an industry-first approach to environmental and cultural protection, requiring hotel operators to introduce firm measures to

eliminate single-use plastics and promote local culture. Starting in Thailand where over 500 hotels have made a commitment, and as a more environmentally and socially conscious global travel market emerges in the COVID-19 context, the Pledge is expanding globally in 2021. The initiative is a key pillar of UNESCO's strategy in response to the COVID-19 crisis that addresses the immediate socio-economic impacts on tourism and heritage, accelerating the recovery to protect livelihoods and safeguard heritage (www.unescosustainable.travel).

7. Promoting Social inclusion and empowering local communities, including youth, women, and indigenous peoples in and through the conservation of World Heritage properties

Experience gained by UNESCO over many years has shown how cultural and natural heritage have played a critical role in empowering the poorest and more vulnerable in developing countries as well as ensuring inclusiveness and equality. Key lessons learned include the inherent ability of heritage to ensure ownership and participation in development processes, as well as to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse groups within society. Numerous activities in the framework of World Heritage management worldwide have successfully contributed to the involvement of local communities in several properties' management and their long-term aspirations for sustainable development. They further demonstrated the essential link between communities and their heritage and showcased how the involvement of local communities in the upkeep and restoration of sites can bring about not only significant material benefits, but also a sense of purpose and ownership. At times of crisis, for example, access to and care for heritage may help vulnerable people recover a sense of identity, continuity, dignity and empowerment. In conflict and post-conflict situations, in particular, the acknowledgment and conservation of heritage, based on shared values and interests, may foster mutual recognition, tolerance and respect among different communities, which is a precondition for a society's peaceful development.

The World Heritage Volunteer Programme (WHV) involves national and international volunteers, who work together with the local communities to preserve our common cultural and natural heritage, through concrete hands-on and awareness-raising activities. A series of Webinars was initiated (May- July 2020) to support and build the capacities of the Volunteers, many of them youth, implementing during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the postponement of the 2020 Campaign to 2021. The joint WHV 2020-2021 campaign is currently ongoing and will carry out over 50 WHV projects at 50 sites.

The World Heritage Young Professionals Fora serve as platforms for intercultural learning and exchange, by bringing together young people, educators and heritage experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities in World Heritage conservation. The Arab World Heritage Young Professionals Forum (December 2019, Tunis, Tunisia, 32 participants), for example, engaged the participants towards peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) through the protection, preservation, and promotion of World Heritage. Following the Forum, 5 youth-led projects were implemented by 5 participants of the Forum to involve the youth and local communities in the Arab States region, towards peacebuilding and heritage. However, during 2020, these activities were impeded by the pandemic and ensuing restrictions on travel.

Sustainable development was a cross cutting theme when WHITRAP launched a set of activities throughout China to stimulate the participation and innovation skills of young people in heritage protection and social innovation. In August 2020, WHITRAP Shanghai launched a two-year original picture book - Pingyao Story project focusing on the driving force of "culture", the integration of modern science and technology and art aesthetics display and dissemination means.

The World Heritage Convention's Operational Guidelines were updated in 2019 to considerably strengthen it with regard to the application of the free, prior and informed consent in World Heritage processes. It explicitly recognizes Indigenous Peoples as stakeholders and rights-holders in the identification, nomination, management, protection and presentation of

World Heritage, in line with a human rights-based approach. The promotion of sustainable and inclusive economic benefits for indigenous peoples is encouraged by the *Operational Guidelines* for educational and capacity-building programmes that recognize local material and resource use and local cultural and creative industries including the safeguarding of intangible heritage associated with World Heritage properties (paragraph 214bis). Furthermore, traditional and Indigenous Knowledge held by Indigenous Peoples are now described in the *Operational Guidelines* as possible contribution to the conservation and management of World Heritage properties, their buffer zones and wider setting including sustainable development, subject to all necessary consent (paragraph 215). Finally, requests for International Assistance shall be of inclusive nature and include the involvement of local communities and Indigenous Peoples (paragraph 239 j).

The World Heritage Centre is presently contributing, in the framework of an intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach, to the *Global Action Plan of the International Decade for Indigenous Languages (2022-2023)*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2019. Regular consultations with the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage (IIFPFWH) have taken place during the period concerned, on conservation and management matters, the impact and challenges related to Covid 19 crisis, as well as on the possible ways to better monitor the presence and involvement of Indigenous peoples in World heritage properties.

During the 43rd session of the World Heritage Convention, the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape (Australia) was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Located in the traditional country of the Gunditjmara people in south-eastern Australia, this property features a complex system of channels, weirs and dams developed by the Gunditjmara people. At this same Committee session, the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi site (Canada) was also inscribed on the World Heritage List. This property is sacred to the Blackfoot people; their centuries-old traditions are perpetuated through ceremonies and in enduring respect for the places.

Following the update of the Operational Guidelines of the Convention by the World Heritage Committee at its 43rd session (Baku, 2019), a number of provisions have been introduced to enhance gender equality within the diverse processes of the World Heritage Convention. Paragraph 12 of the Operational Guidelines points out that States Parties “are encouraged to adopt a human-rights based approach, and ensure gender-balanced participation of a wide variety of stakeholders and rights-holders [...] in the identification, nomination, management and protection processes of World Heritage properties”. Paragraph 15 d) indicates that States Parties have the responsibility to contribute to comply with the sustainable development objectives, including gender equality, in the World Heritage processes and in their heritage conservation and management systems. Gender balanced participation within the properties' management is prescribed by paragraph 111, which refers to “respect for diversity, equity, gender equality and human rights and the use of inclusive and participatory planning and stakeholder consultation processes”. The Operational Guidelines encourage (para 155) the use of gender-neutral language in the preparation of Statements of Outstanding Universal Value, as well as gender-balanced representation of professionals and specialists at all levels is encouraged (para 214). Finally, paragraph 239 states that the inclusive nature of the activity, in particular as concerns gender equality [...] is also a criterion for the examination of International Assistance requests. Direct involvement of women in World Heritage conservation is growing gradually, whether as site managers (24% of them being women), custodians, rangers or heads of heritage offices. In Makli World Heritage property in Pakistan, for example, a traditional tile-making atelier was set up and served as a training centre for women from the surrounding villages, bringing local women a sense of pride in addition to socio-economic benefits.

8. International cooperation and global partnerships (Goal 17 - Partnerships to achieve the Goal)

The implementation of the World Heritage Convention builds on international cooperation and global partnerships to address global inequalities and enhance protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage. Three key vectors for international cooperation include World Heritage International Assistance, transboundary projects, and technical assistance provided through UNESCO Funds-in-Trust supported by donor countries.

International Assistance under the World Heritage Convention provides financial assistance to States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in order to help them protect the cultural and natural heritage sites inscribed on the World Heritage List or on the List of World Heritage in Danger. States Parties may request International Assistance for Conservation and Management of their World Heritage properties, Emergency Assistance to address threats facing a property, or Preparatory Assistance with a view to developing their Tentative Lists or nomination dossiers. States Parties submitted 130 International Assistance requests for funding from the World Heritage Fund in 2018-2020 of which 66 were approved, including 57% from the Africa region and 7% from SIDS. In all regions, most of the funded projects concern management activities or conservation works. In parallel, 8 Emergency Assistance requests were approved in 2018-2020: 3 for conservation works at Mexican World Heritage sites in the aftermath of the September 2017 earthquake; one for a recovery plan for Bosra in Syria; two for fire-fighting, at Simien Mountains, Ethiopia, and Kasubi Tombs, Uganda, respectively; one for minimizing the impacts of an invasive ant at Vallée de Mai, Seychelles; and one for the reconstruction of management infrastructure destroyed by floods and landslides at Rwenzori Mountains, Uganda.

With regard to supporting and promoting transboundary and transnational cooperation, the World Heritage Convention has proven to be a powerful tool to strengthen international cooperation on shared heritage resources and promoting sustainable development by combining a global standard framework with the development of operational projects and concrete collaboration.

Improving transboundary cooperation and biodiversity conservation in Central Africa through the Central African World Heritage Forest Initiative: Support provided to States Parties in Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic and Republic of Congo) through the Central African World Heritage Forest Initiative (CAWHFI) has reinforced on-ground surveillance in an area of 225 000 km² (approximately the area of the United Kingdom) includes three World Heritage sites (Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon, Lopé-Okanda in Gabon, and Sangha Trinational in Central African Republic, Cameroon and Republic of Congo). The support provided has also enabled to improve site management in the area through the rehabilitation of infrastructure, the promotion of eco-tourism, training and inclusive involvement of local communities (more than 1000 people) and the update/production of inventories of biological resources (e.g. large mammals). Such inventories have highlighted a remarkable stability in wildlife density and deforestation linked to development activities.

After over 10 years of cooperation between Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and since the inscription in 2014 of the *Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System*, a serial transboundary cultural itinerary, these six States Parties have consolidated the participatory management structure for this complex and innovative property. With the continued guidance of the World Heritage Centre, between 2017 and 2020, these 6 countries have established joint conservation and monitoring strategies, defined a plan for safeguarding intangible aspects, developed a methodological approach to identify risk preparedness and disaster management strategies and created a framework for the elaboration of Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) with the aim of preventing any negative impact to the OUV caused by potential developments in and around the property. The property's management structure is

based fundamentally on community participation and opportunities for local development, including of indigenous peoples, and the social appropriation of heritage.

Strengthening the Governance of the Shared Transboundary Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Lake Ohrid region (Albania/North Macedonia) strengthening management and governance systems by raising national awareness and building institutional capacity for managing cultural and natural heritage. The project generated positive results in relation to building local capacities and skills and promoting cooperation between key actors in Albania and North Macedonia. Some of the more remarkable achievements and long-term results of the project include the successful inscription of the Albanian part of the site on the World Heritage List in 2019, the World Heritage Supplement to the Management Plan for Pogradec Protected Landscape 2017-2027 and the highly visible waste awareness campaign set up by the project, endorsed by Government of Albania.

With regard to technical assistance through UNESCO Funds-in-Trust, for example, thanks to the support of the Government of Norway, various projects aimed at supporting the conservation of natural and cultural World Heritage sites in the Africa region have been launched for the improvement of the state of conservation including for reinforcing institutional and legal frameworks for heritage protection and management, and the promotion of Sustainable Development with the increased participation of civil society, women and youth.

Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Niger and Nigeria/ BIOSphere and Heritage of Lake Chad (BIOPALT) jointly implemented with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and funded by the African Development Bank. The outcomes included elaboration of the development of the Transboundary Management Plan for Lake Chad Cultural Landscape (Niger, Nigeria, Cameroun and Chad); training session on the Convention for the Heritage national experts of the four countries; the nomination file was submitted to the Secretariat in January 2020. The project also updated and improved knowledge of the biological, cultural and hydrological resources of Lake Chad through six field studies, which were carried out in each country. Finally, the other important contribution of the project is the construction of a common vision of cross-border cooperation and the application of models of biosphere reserves and World Heritage sites in the Lake Chad region(<https://en.unesco.org/biopalt>).

9. Measuring and Monitoring Culture's contribution to the 2030 Agenda

Investing in data and statistics for measuring Culture in the SDGs and strengthening statistical capacities to address gaps in data on the Sustainable Development Goals in order to allow countries to provide high-quality, timely, reliable, disaggregated data and statistics and to fully integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in monitoring and reporting systems. In this regard, UNESCO has developed the *Culture|2030 Indicators, Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda*, to measure the role and contribution of Culture to the 2030 Agenda including the role and contribution of cultural and natural heritage at the national and local levels. Culture|2030 Indicators as an innovative methodology was launched during the UNESCO Forum of the Ministers of Culture in November 2019. An international online expert workshop was held in June 2020 to provide an introduction and orientation to the implementation of the Culture|2030 Indicators methodology, as well as reflect on potential challenges and propose strategies in contexts where capacities and data availability may be inadequate. Forty-five experts from 27 countries participated, the six UNESCO electoral regions were represented. The experts were introduced to the Culture|2030 Indicators methodology and given guidance on data collection as well as implementation on the national and local levels. Following the workshop an Expert Facility was established from the pool of experts who attended the workshop. The pilot implementation of the Culture|2030 Indicators has been launched with 14 countries and 14 cities expected to carry out the pilot implementation. The pilots will test and refine the Culture|2030 Indicators framework, and directly serve the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at both the national and local levels and will support directly the national mechanisms of implementation of the 2030

Agenda by Member States. All these actions have helped to fill critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda within the area of responsibility of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

SDG Target 11.4 calls on countries to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage.” The SDG [Indicator 11.4.1](#), developed by the UIS, is defined as the, ‘*Total expenditure per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by source of funding (public, private), type of heritage (cultural, natural) and level of government (national, regional and local/municipal).*’ This indicator is part of global efforts to gauge the overall magnitude of investment in heritage. In December 2019, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators ([IAEG-SDGs](#)) upgraded indicator 11.4.1 to Tier 2 status, confirming that the indicator is conceptually sound and has an internationally established methodology as standards are in place to clearly guide its measurement. Following the upgrade, the UIS launched in June 2020 the first-ever global survey to capture how governments and private contributors invest in preserving the rich history that has helped shape us as individuals as well as our communities.

UNESCO has participated in the UN-Habitat’s Urban Monitoring Framework Expert Group to contribute to the development of indicators for monitoring the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as well as Goal 11, particularly with a view to integrating heritage in cities.

10. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on World Heritage properties

The unprecedented crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has had, and continues to have, major impacts on World Heritage properties globally. The closure of World Heritage properties has resulted in socio-economic impacts, disruption of community life in and around properties, loss of livelihoods, reduced maintenance, lack of protection and management and increased illegal activities, and serious issues related to the monitoring of the state of conservation. Notably, this pandemic has led to an aggravation of poverty. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis will be far-reaching and long-lasting. A complete synthesis of information and activities, still under preparation for the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee, can be found on <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2099>. Site managers were also invited, starting in March/April 2020, to share their experience dealing with the virus by sharing short video messages: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2101>

The monitoring and analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on World Heritage properties has also been made possible through the production, regular publication and updating by the World Heritage Centre of a **global map on the closure of World Heritage properties** due to COVID-19, hence providing regular snapshots of the situation in 167 countries (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/cultureresponse/monitoring-world-heritage-site-closures>). As of 11 April 2020, it illustrated that properties were wholly or partially closed in 90% of the countries. Since that time, 34 updated maps have subsequently been released showing the weekly or biweekly evolution of the situation worldwide. In 2020, an issue of the *World Heritage Review* was published on ‘Interpretation and the COVID-19 pandemic’, sharing the immediate impact of the crisis and early activities of the UNESCO Culture Sector in response to the pandemic and its effects. The issue describes the impact of site closures and includes the voices of the site managers themselves, telling how they have coped in these exceptional circumstances (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/review/95/>). In addition, to better understand the COVID-19-related changes that have occurred at the site-level between 2019 and 2020, and to help in building an appropriate response to this exceptional crisis, the World Heritage Centre has launched a survey in February 2021, aimed at all World Heritage Site managers. The analysis of this survey is on-going and results will be published shortly on the World Heritage Centre’s webpage (<https://whc.unesco.org>).

The crisis due to COVID-19 has brought sharply into focus **the fragility of cities**. In the midst of the global pandemic, livelihoods have been severely impacted everywhere. Most countries and cities continue to be in lockdown restrictions. Cities and towns have been at the epicentre of this unprecedented health crisis. Webinars, the World Heritage City Lab

(<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1526/>; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2130/>) and the newsletter, *Urban Notebooks* (<https://whc.unesco.org/archive/websites/mail-20200504/index-en.html>, <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/websites/mail-20200608/index-en.html>, <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/websites/mail-20200817/index-en.html>, <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/websites/mail-20200918/index-en.html>) brought experts together to work toward solutions.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, tourism was a major economic sector, employing 1 in 10 people around the world. 1.5 billion people crossed international borders in 2019, providing a key source of income for many of the world's developing countries. In the first half of 2020, international tourist arrivals dropped by 65% due to the COVID-19 crisis, representing a loss of about US\$ 460 billion in export revenues, according to UNWTO. The drop in tourism revenue has cut off important income streams for the conservation and maintenance of World Heritage properties. Expert meetings organized with partners address the challenge of how tourism can evolve going forward <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2177>

Many online meetings and conferences have been held since the beginning of the pandemic, for capacity building or gathering experts to explore issues, such as 'Disaster and World Heritage with a Focus on Pandemics'; held on 22 May 2020 with the Wildlife Institute of India - Category 2 Centre (WII-C2C) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN2V9Mt3GoE>). For a complete list of webinars, please see the documents for 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/44com>).

11. Policy recommendations for the HLPF on ways to achieving SDGs and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic with heritage

- a. A key area where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required is the integration of strategies for cultural and natural heritage within sustainable development policies and plans at national and local levels taking into account the explicit reference in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to the need to enhance the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage;
- b. Bolstering local action including to more effectively integrate cultural and natural heritage and resources in the implementation of the SDGs to engage in effective, evidence-based and inclusive participatory management of cultural and natural heritage;
- c. Assessing World Heritage and Climate Change both in terms of the impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage properties and also solutions for monitoring, adaptation and Climate Action that World Heritage properties offer;
- d. Promoting the implementation of the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy in alignment with the 2030 Agenda as a policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the Convention that was adopted by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in 2015. This policy revolves around the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely environmental sustainability, inclusive social development and inclusive economic development, complemented by the fostering of peace and security. In the context of inclusive social development, the policy invites notably states parties to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls with a view for attaining sustainable development.
- e. As the epicentre of the global COVID-19 health crisis has been in cities, WH Cities could also promote community well-being in the context of recovery and rebuilding. The integrative approach of the HUL Recommendation enables cities to enhance social and economic inclusiveness, as well as resilience to disasters and conflicts.
- f. Urban recovery and 'building back better' in response to the ongoing pandemic needs to be people centred putting the well-being of local communities at the centre of the efforts, integrate green spaces and food production, focus on local economic recovery, rethink transport and infrastructure to maximize space for people, and build on digital technologies to inform and network.

- g. Countries should be encouraged, within the framework of the Conventions' conceptual tools and mechanisms to assess their contribution to the 2030 Agenda, implementing *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators*. The outcomes implementing the *Culture|2030 Indicators* will inform national and local reporting to the UN High Level Political Forum on the SDGs in New York through their Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) as well as inform national and local policies and actions. This would be a valuable tool going forward to support also Goal 11 on Cities as well as the New Urban Agenda.