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**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Extended forty-fourth session

**Fuzhou (China) / Online meeting
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Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda: Reports of the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies

5A: Report of the World Heritage Centre on its activities and the implementation of the World Heritage Committee's Decisions

INF.5A.2 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on World Heritage and responses by the Secretariat

SUMMARY

This document contains a report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of the World Heritage Centre and on the implementation of the World Heritage Committee's Decisions. It also provides detailed information on the World Heritage Centre's response to this crisis.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. 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 as well as on the activities of the World Heritage Centre and the implementation of the World Heritage Committee's decisions. Among them, 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. This pandemic has notably led to an aggravation of poverty. Impact on the ground of the COVID-19 crisis will be a long-lasting one, which will make some current challenges more acute and will entail additional ones.
2. Some of the challenges encountered by the World Heritage Centre for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and remedial actions taken are described below.
3. As the World Heritage Centre faced the dual challenge of implementing the Programmes and managing the inherent difficulties of teleworking during a health crisis, solutions have been found to continue delivering for the States Parties. It should however be noted that the adaptations and rescheduling of events brought a significant increase in the workload of the World Heritage Centre. This involved enhancing technological support and adapting training materials and meeting content to online formats. It has become clear that online meetings (see Annex 3 of Document WHC/21/44.COM/5A) and capacity-building modules will now form a key part of the work long after the current crisis has passed. The World Heritage Centre will continue to exchange with the other UNESCO Culture Conventions, as well as the other seven biodiversity related Convention secretariats, on how they are adapting their activities in light of the new reality, so as to benefit from each other's modalities, creativity and good practices. The World Heritage Centre's actions demonstrated that adapting modalities and working methods, if planned carefully, can point to new ways and approaches for carrying out activities under the Convention. For these reasons, the World Heritage Centre has been able to continue to function thanks to its available financial resources, by reorganizing the modalities of its results delivery and being able to meet the unforeseen additional costs of online meetings (interpretation, access to the platforms, etc.).
4. In addition, in 2020, an issue of the World Heritage Review was published with a focus on interpretation and the COVID-19 pandemic, in which, the World Heritage Centre shared its experience of dealing with the pandemic and included the voices of the site managers themselves, telling how they have coped in these exceptional circumstances (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/review/95/>).

II. ADJUSTMENTS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

A. Functioning of the Governing bodies

5. Originally scheduled to take place from 29 June to 9 July 2020 in Fuzhou, China, the **44th session of the World Heritage Committee** had to be postponed due to the developments in the world related to the COVID-19 pandemic. All States Parties to the Convention were informed by letter from the Chairperson of the Committee, H.E. Mr Tian Xuejun on 13 April 2020 (ref. CLT/WHC/PSM/20/16) and the Chairperson initiated written consultations of the World Heritage Committee Bureau members regarding the holding of the 44th session.
6. On 30 September 2020, the World Heritage Centre organized an online **information meeting** of all Permanent Delegations to UNESCO on this matter and presented a

Support Document it had issued on 22 September 2020, presenting possible options for the holding of the 44th session. This information meeting was very well received and 111 States Parties to the Convention attended it.

7. The members of the Bureau subsequently met online on 16 October 2020 at the invitation of the Chairperson and considered that the conditions for a session of the World Heritage Committee in 2020 were not met. They also suggested that the World Heritage Committee meet as soon as possible in an extraordinary session to suspend Rule 2.1 of the World Heritage Committee's Rules of Procedure, which states that "[t]he Committee shall meet at least once per year in ordinary session" (Decision **44.COM/BUR.1.3**).
8. On 2 November 2020, the World Heritage Committee held its 14th extraordinary session online and decided to hold an **extended 44th session in June/July 2021 in Fuzhou, China** (Decision **14 EXT.COM 4**). The exact dates were to be determined at a later stage by the Chairperson of the Committee in consultation with the Secretariat.
9. Subsequently, on 29 March 2021, the World Heritage Committee held its 15th extraordinary session online and decided to hold its extended 44th session on 16-31 July 2021 in an online format (Decision **15 EXT.COM 3**), an unprecedented process in the history of the World Heritage Convention.
10. The production of the **working and information documents** foreseen for the extended 44th session carried on as planned. Some delays were however encountered, as a number of Reactive Monitoring missions, for example, had to be postponed due to the health situation and have delayed parts of the state of conservation report drafting process. Alternative ways of dialogue with the States Parties have been put in place and a number of online meetings were held between the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and the national authorities concerned in order to ensure a proper monitoring of the state of conservation of threatened properties.
11. Due to the exceptional circumstances, - and strictly limited to the properties facing the most serious conservation issues for which a state of conservation report was initially planned for examination by the Committee in 2020 -, States Parties concerned were given the possibility to provide the Secretariat with updates on any significant changes to the property' state of conservation since the submission of the last State Party report, so as to provide the Committee with the most up-to-date information.
12. Similarly, and without creating a precedent, an exceptional extension of the deadlines for the completion of pending evaluation missions (concerning the nominations to be presented for examination by the Committee in 2021) was proposed, so as to allow the largest number of files, from the broadest geographical base, to be examined at its extended 44th session.
13. The coordination work between the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Regular meetings were held online rather than *in presentia* so as not to delay the process for the implementation of the Convention and for the preparation of the working documents (for further details on the work conducted by the Advisory Bodies, see Document WHC/21/44.COM/5B).

B. Conservation and Sustainable Development

14. The **closure of properties** has had various impacts on their protection, maintenance, conservation, and monitoring. Whilst some management authorities have been able to maintain an on-ground management presence, others have been faced with capacity limitations that have adversely affected the protection and management of properties. In some properties, **management and protection activities** have been continued such as anti-poaching units, monitoring by satellite images or drones and emergency interventions, such as in the case of fires and other situations, which require rapid intervention. However, in other properties, the decline in funding notably due to the

absence of tourism activities, combined with challenges to maintain site management activities such as surveillance and anti-poaching, have resulted in a surge in poaching and logging activities. Particular measures have been implemented in selected sites with important populations of great apes (gorilla, orang-utan, chimpanzee and bonobo) as well as other risks of looting and vandalism, due to the particular vulnerability of these primates to COVID-19. For example, the closure of Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the protection of the gorilla population from COVID-19, has created concerns regarding the lack of funding from tourism income, impaired movement and impacts to the economy, which have further led to threats of increased armed violence.

15. The impact of the pandemic on the **conservation** processes of World Heritage properties was immediate, as critical Reactive Monitoring and Advisory missions to sites and for a number of field projects could not be carried out. A number of monitoring missions requested by the World Heritage Committee also had to be postponed, which means that critical assessments for the conservation of properties are missing, and the reporting to the World Heritage Committee may be impacted. The World Heritage Centre has done its best, in close consultation with the Advisory Bodies, to remedy the situation with many on-line meetings with States Parties, national authorities and site managers, which has been a very positive exercise, especially for increased exchanges and dialogue.
16. The six-yearly statutory **Periodic Reporting** exercise was also affected by the pandemic. A number of meetings foreseen for the Arab States Region, while in the middle of the analysis of all reports, had to be cancelled. Exchanges for the preparation of the regional Action Plan were therefore held online. Due to the pandemic, numerous workshops in Africa were cancelled (including for example a major workshop planned in Cameroon for all site managers of Francophone countries). Consequently, the strategy had to be adjusted through online meetings and supervision to achieve the objective of 100% completion and submission of the questionnaires for the Africa Region. To ensure the preparedness of all National Focal Points for the Third cycle of Periodic Reporting in the Asia-Pacific Region, a series of 15 online training sessions were organised by the World Heritage Centre between September 2020 and March 2021.
17. Many site managers have reported **direct economic impacts** arising from the loss of revenues from sites and visitor centres/museums, which often provide funding for both regular management and specific conservation activities, and the abrupt cessation of international and national tourism, has led to a substantive loss of income for site management authorities, local communities, their livelihoods and businesses (accommodation, restaurants, local cultural industries). National and local authorities had not anticipated biological hazards resulting in such a pandemic in their risk assessments and preparedness and have been looking at the possibilities for continuation of services. Even if the effect of such abrupt cessation of tourism was sometimes seen as positive for some overvisited sites, such as for Angkor (Cambodia) for example (<https://abcnews.go.com/International/photos-show-coronavirus-impacted-crowds-landmarks/story?id=69438690>), as technicians could work without interruption from major tourism flows, the great impact wielded by the loss of tourism income has nonetheless illustrated the over-dependence of many site management systems on the tourism economy. However, as global travel came to a halt the discussions quickly turned into a review of options geared towards future economic and tourism recovery. For example, site managers of urban properties that were threatened by excessive tourism are now looking at the ways to promote actions for local residents to reclaim urban spaces and support alternative social and economic activities. It is of vital importance that, as States Parties instigate economic stimulus and recovery programmes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deployment of resources is extended to funding

and capacity-building programmes for affected World Heritage properties (see also paragraph 69 below).

18. The Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (Uganda), home to one of the last remaining Mountain Gorilla population in the world, is heavily dependent on income from gorilla viewing tourism to maintain its anti-poaching operations. However, gorillas are also at risk from COVID-19 and an infection could easily wipe out the remaining population. Through the **Rapid Response Facility**, the World Heritage Centre was able to support the continuation of law enforcement and monitoring activities and provide the necessary protection equipment to ensure these tasks could be conducted without risk of virus transmission to the gorillas (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2125/>). IUCN has also proactively supported conservation responses to COVID-19 impacts through the provision of **emergency funding** via the IUCN Save Our Species Rapid Action Grant programme for threatened species in Africa (<https://www.saveourspecies.org/rapid-action-grants-1>), notably to ensure continued Gorilla monitoring in Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and the IUCN BIOPAMA Rapid Response Grants programme open to African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (<https://action.biopama.org/rapid-response-grant/>). In addition, the German Commission for UNESCO contributed to a **relief fund** set up by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Goethe-Institut (the #SOSAfricanHeritage Fund) to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Grants amounting to 500,000 euros have been received to help with management and conservation and to promote COVID-19 resilience. In total, 25 projects in 22 countries in Africa are supported, including seven World Heritage properties, namely Simien National Park (Ethiopia), Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests and Mount Kenya National Park/Natural Forest (Kenya), Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve and Belo sur Mer Kirindy-Mite Biosphere Reserve (Madagascar), Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve (Seychelles) and Kilimanjaro National Park (United Republic of Tanzania) (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2149/>). In addition to all the above-mentioned actions, in the framework of the **COVID-19 Action Plan of ALIPH** (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas), UNESCO has also been implementing activities aimed at strengthening the resilience of the nine World Heritage properties in Ethiopia, in Timbuktu (Mali), at Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and in the Royal Palaces of Abomey (Benin) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
19. **New technologies** have been used to review emergency situations including impacts on less accessible properties such as in Vanuatu after a category 5 cyclone: UNOSAT provided images to assess damage at the property. The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in Senegal, in collaboration with UNESCO, started a new project for the improvement of the protection and enhancement of the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary. This one-year project starts with a very first training on the use of new technologies to improve the ecological monitoring of the park. During eight days, 11 agents of the park and the National Parks Directorate were trained in piloting, collecting, processing and analyzing drone data (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2220/>). The use of new technologies such as drones will significantly improve the efficiency of asset management in terms of acquiring current, high-precision data at lower cost and in real time. This will improve a whole range of management activities, such as the regular acquisition of high-resolution aerial images.
20. On 22 May 2020, the Wildlife Institute of India - Category 2 Centre for World Natural Heritage Management and Training for Asia and the Pacific Region, under the auspices of UNESCO, in partnership with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and MAXAR, organized a webinar on the theme of "*Disaster and World Heritage with focus on Pandemics*" (see link in Annex 1 below). In addition, regarding the relationship between **biodiversity and pandemics**, the IPBES Bureau and Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) organized an online workshop on this

matter on 27-31 July 2020. The resulting IPBES #PandemicsReport is one of the most scientifically robust examinations of the evidence and knowledge about links between pandemic risk and nature since the COVID-19 pandemic began (<https://ipbes.net/pandemics>). This IPBES #PandemicsReport is of particular interest to World Heritage, as the natural and mixed World Heritage properties represent places of global ecological and biological importance, and are an important subset of the global protected area network, and protect nearly 360 million hectares of land and sea in all the world's major ecosystems.

21. It should be recalled that COVID-19, like Ebola, SARS and MERS, is a **zoonotic disease**, whereby a virus jumped the species barrier from a wild host species to the human population. Scientists consider that widespread environmental degradation, in particular the destruction of wildlife habitat as well as the bush meat trade, and climate change are facilitating increased vulnerability to zoonotic diseases. The widespread global impacts of COVID-19, including on World Heritage, further highlight the important interconnectivity between healthy, intact, functioning natural ecosystems and human health and wellbeing. In a special COVID-19 editorial published in June 2020, the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) highlighted the relationship between zoonotic disease pandemics and unsustainable exploitation of wild species and wild places, deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensification of farming, and infrastructure development. Effectively and equitably managed systems of protected and conserved areas can be part of a response to the pandemic that both lessens the chance of a recurrence of similar events and builds a more sustainable future for people and nature. Better conservation of large, intact natural areas, including natural World Heritage properties, and urgent measures to address the illegal wildlife trade are considered important to limit the emergence of new zoonotic diseases in the future. A strengthened level of global solidarity towards ensuring the protection and integrity of the world's natural systems is required to address the underlying drivers of risks to World Heritage such as pandemics, in order to effectively avoid, prepare and manage for such threats in the future.
22. Reflections are ongoing among the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre focused on support to properties being impacted by COVID-19, and the post-crisis recovery, including promotion of sustainable models, and emphasizing the importance of sustainable development approaches in line with the 2015 *Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention* (<https://whc.unesco.org/document/139747>).

C. Tentative Lists and Nominations

23. Regarding the Nominations process and the evaluation missions, a high number of missions were organized despite the pandemic, thanks to the efforts of the States Parties and the relevant experts. The organisation of evaluation missions, which took place in times of COVID-19, were very challenging and not comparable to pre-COVID-19 times as they involved high levels of risk and utmost flexibility of all stakeholders involved. Additional costs were incurred ranging from COVID-19 tests and health measures to last-minute modifications/cancellations. The postponement of the 44th session of the Committee and the constantly changing situation relating to restrictions on travels between countries also represented major challenges.
24. Numerous meetings and exchanges dealing with specific cases were held between the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and IUCN, and with the concerned States Parties. Whilst respecting all the health precautions to the utmost extent, the implementation of Decision **14 EXT.COM 4** was ensured, notably relating to the exceptional extension of deadlines to undertake missions to the nominated sites.

25. It should be noted that despite the difficulties faced by States Parties during the COVID-19 pandemic, an exceptionally high number of draft nominations was received by 30 September 2020, including from under-represented countries, in particular from Africa, which is encouraging.

D. Capacity-building

26. Among the unexpected impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in capacity building activities by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies.
27. For example, the Africa Unit of the World Heritage Centre and ICCROM experts met online to develop a project that will contribute to capacity-building in disaster risk management (DRM) and protection systems for World Heritage properties in Africa. The project will be implemented in two phases: a series of online webinars, followed by a visit to an African World Heritage property. Lasting one year, this project will target in its first phase six pilot sites and contribute to the development of a DRM plan, adapted to the constraints of each property. The final objective of this initiative is to enable site managers to respond effectively to current and future disasters, provide pilot sites with an operational DRM plan, and potentially produce a publication on DRM and protection systems in Africa.
28. Considering the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) in collaboration with the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, training institutions in the Africa Region and various stakeholders, successfully developed online training to support African countries in their effort to develop Nomination dossiers. In order to implement the Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List, following the World Heritage Nomination Programme for Africa, two workshops enhanced capacity of the national experts responsible for the development of their dossiers in line with a new Upstream Support Initiative (2018-2022), as part of a strategy for the World Heritage Capacity Building Programme (WHCBP).
29. As one of the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee, ICCROM has set up a special webpage dedicated to **Heritage in times of COVID-19** providing tips and resources, features stories and relevant links (<https://www.iccrom.org/heritage-times-covid>), as well as through dedicated webinars on the pandemic and its impacts on cultural heritage, but also on new possibilities for heritage conservation and management. For the Advisory Bodies' activities and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, see also Document WHC/21/44.COM/5B.
30. Due to this unprecedented situation, the 2021 **World Heritage Site Managers' Forum** and **World Heritage Young Professional Forum**, to be held in conjunction with the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee, will take place in an online format. They will be organized in a way that will facilitate by all means the active participation of site managers of World Heritage properties and young professionals from across the globe.
31. A number of **webinars** relevant to World Heritage have been organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and its partners, including with the Advisory Bodies. Further details on those webinars can be found in Annex 1 of this Document.
32. For further details on the capacity building activities, see Documents WHC/21/44.COM/5B and WHC/21/44.COM/6.

E. Education and World Heritage

33. Heritage sites, information centres and museums are important educational spaces – for local communities as much as for visitors. At a time of school closures and absence of normal school activities in many places due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visiting **heritage**

sites and museums offers the possibility for local children and youth to learn about the heritage and history of the places they live in or are nearby. Keeping heritage sites open also enables training activities for building crafts and conservation work to continue. Nowhere is this more evident than at World Heritage properties, which moved quickly to provide online content, virtual tours, lectures and performances during the lockdown periods. In recent months, World Heritage properties have reopened demonstrating robust consumer demand albeit under strict sanitary regimes and low visitor numbers due to social distancing protocols (also see the Museum and COVID-19 publication at <https://en.unesco.org/news/launch-unesco-report-museums-around-world-face-covid-19>).

34. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several activities of the **World Heritage Education Programme**, such as volunteering campaigns and youth fora, have been postponed. As gatherings were no longer possible and projects could no longer be implemented in the field, alternative initiatives were designed and implemented, to continue the engagement of youth towards World Heritage.
35. A series of **webinars** was initiated to support and build the capacities of the implementing organizations of the **World Heritage Volunteers (WHV)** Initiative. The webinars aimed to provide knowledge and tools for better preparation and implementation of the WHV projects, create a channel for peer-to-peer dialogue, and foster the exchange of good practices for WHV, among the organizations and across the regions. The webinars addressed various subjects pertinent to WHV, including the World Heritage Convention, International Voluntary Service, and Communication Tools for WHV organization, along with project presentations from different WHV organizations. The publication on the 10 years of the WHV Initiative in 2020 has been uploaded at <https://whc.unesco.org/document/182024>.
36. A global call was launched in 2020 for the **Little Artists Exhibition**, inviting children from around the world to share drawings of their favourite World Heritage sites. Nearly 600 artworks were received from enthusiastic young artists from 55 countries around the world (see also section III.A below for further details).
37. An **online follow-up of the regional Arab Youth Forum** (implemented at the end of 2019) was initiated in August 2020, taking into account the interest of the participants in continuing their efforts towards heritage and peacebuilding in their communities. The follow-up was an opportunity for the participants to build on what they learned during the Forum and cascade the gained knowledge within their communities. The participants were encouraged to focus on reducing the social interaction in their projects and propose online projects. Five projects, ranging from online edit-a-thons to photography contests, geodatabases, and heritage related publications, websites and online games were received and have been implemented successfully within the region.

F. World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme

38. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on global tourism, with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reporting a 74% drop in international arrivals in 2020. Destinations worldwide welcomed 1 billion fewer international arrivals in 2020 than in the previous year, due to an exceptional fall in demand and widespread travel restrictions. Millions of jobs have been lost and the drop in tourism revenue has been devastating for many communities. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly at risk, where the tourism sector accounts for almost 30% of the gross domestic product (GDP). This downturn in tourism deeply affected financially has had a deep financial impact on heritage sites, thereby weakening their conservation and preservation. Therefore, assisting States Parties in the reactivation of a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive tourism in the long-term will be a priority. This will include working on-site with local communities and sites managers to reflect on and

design new ways of preserving sites, the promotion of sustainable tourism models, and emphasizing the importance of sustainable development approaches in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (2015).

39. In the framework of the **World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme**, the Secretariat has adopted a two-pronged approach to culture, tourism, recovery and resilience. In this framework and in the short-term, operational measures and good practices will be shared to facilitate networking and support governments in responding effectively to the crisis and managing the recovery process. This will include measures to support communities and safeguard livelihoods in the transition towards more versatile and resilient systems, examples of approaches to reopening World Heritage properties and cultural institutions, and the sharing of global trends. In the mid-term, coordinated policy guidance at the international and national levels on the future of cultural tourism will be developed - in consultation with key stakeholders - building on shared normative tools, including UNESCO's Culture Conventions and the Historic Urban Landscape approach.
40. The **UNESCO Task Force on Culture and Resilient Tourism** has been established with the Advisory Bodies and is leading a global dialogue addressing key issues relating to tourism and heritage management during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. The process will result in a roadmap that outlines a strategic approach for tourism that harnesses heritage values to rejuvenate communities, protects nature and contributes to sustainable development. Within the framework of this new Task Force, a global online debate '*Culture, Tourism and COVID-19: Recovery, Resiliency and Rejuvenation*' was organized by UNESCO, IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM on 28 September 2020. The webinar focused on new models of sustainable tourism development for strengthening heritage resiliency and managing the COVID-19 crisis (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2171>). The panel of experts called for a shift towards tourism that regenerates destinations and provides economic, social and environmental benefits, while not losing sight of global challenges such as climate change.
41. In terms of **Policy advocacy** and to strengthen collaboration between the tourism and culture sectors and support sustainable tourism recovery, UNESCO and UNWTO continued working together during the COVID-19 crisis, notably on the *UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide – Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19, Issue 2: Cultural Tourism* publication (2021). The publication outlines recommendations for supporting cultural tourism recovery including governance, cultural development, community and cultural practitioner engagement and the digital transition. The publication included inputs from UNESCO's Living Heritage Entity and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The guide was published within the context of the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development in 2021.
42. The **UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Pledge** (<https://unescosustainable.travel/>) 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 for a more sustainable tourism recovery. Following the successful pilot initiative in Thailand, the Pledge is expanding globally to nearly 100 countries in 2021. A new global platform will be launched which will include an information hub providing tools and resources for sustainable tourism development.
43. Supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), a new 2-million euro project '**Promoting sustainable tourism and private sector engagement for inclusive community development**' in response to the COVID-19 crisis has been launched in 2021 to expand the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Pledge through capacity building in World Heritage destinations in 7 countries

(Kenya, Namibia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia). In addition to expanding the Pledge, the project will support small scale 'cash for work' schemes, and the training of heritage and tourism stakeholders. The project is designed holistically to ensure tourism emerges stronger from the crisis and contributes to sustainable development with the broadest possible impact.

44. To support capacity building to build back stronger from the COVID-19 crisis the secretariat has further developed the **Visitor Management Assessment and Strategy Tool (VMAST)**. The tool is being made available online in 2021 and will enable World Heritage site managers to rapidly and efficiently assess how tourism is being managed according to a set of sustainability indicators. By helping site managers establish a tourism management baseline, the tool supports proactive management to develop and implement tourism strategies and other appropriate planning and management frameworks. It is designed to help protect heritage values by engaging a broad set of stakeholders, empowering and providing benefits to local communities.
45. A new co-publication with the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) entitled '**Visitors Count**' (2021) provides a standardized approach for measuring economic impacts of tourism in protected areas. This guidance document aims to build awareness, knowledge, and capacity internationally on how to best undertake economic evaluations of tourism in protected areas, and thereby contribute towards a globally acknowledged standard methodology. It serves as a key resource for protected area managers, site managers and their respective natural and cultural heritage agencies, practitioners, academia and consultancies, as well as international stakeholders and donor agencies. It was developed with support from BfN and the European Commission Joint Research Centre's BIOPAMA project (financed by the European Union's 11th European Development Fund).

G. World Heritage Cities Programme

46. The ongoing global health crisis due to the 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. World Heritage Cities serve as practical and valuable laboratories to engage with, debate, invent, and reflect collectively on the issues and challenges facing World Heritage Cities. A high-level webinar was organized on 17 June 2020, in conjunction with the World Heritage City Lab (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1526/>, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2130/>). This webinar was designed as an innovation laboratory to analyse, assess, and explore strategies for the protection and management of World Heritage properties in the urban context. Bringing together a range of international experts, the City Lab aims at enabling reflection on the practical problems and challenges of World Heritage properties in the framework of the policies and processes of the World Heritage Convention, as well as the UNESCO 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Recommendation.
47. In addition, over the last months, as a response to the pandemic, the World Heritage Centre has held several online Dialogues across the different regions with a view to engage directly with site managers of the properties in the World Heritage Cities Programme and strengthen this community in such trying times. The initiative has received a very positive response with rich exchanges between the participants. Site managers and focal points were invited to keep the World Heritage Centre updated with current contact details, and to share specific topics and ideas they would like to discuss during the next Dialogues. Furthermore, a monthly, multimedia e-newsletter, *Urban Notebooks*, was launched in May 2020 as a platform to share and exchange challenges, innovations, good practices, and opportunities from around the world where several of

the issues focused on the impacts of COVID-19 and efforts towards recovery and 'building back better' particularly in light of the loss of tourism. For more details see:

- <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>.

H. World Heritage Programme for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Programme

48. The COVID-19 pandemic added another shock to the multiple challenges that SIDS already face in day-to-day life. It has the potential to create a devastating social, economic and environmental crisis. The threat of COVID-19 to overwhelm health care capacities has led the majority of small islands to put in place strict measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Many have closed their borders and banned international and domestic travel, with significant economic implications for the many island nations that are highly dependent on tourism, which is a vital source of revenue for community livelihoods, disaster recovery, biodiversity and cultural heritage preservation.
49. The World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the University of the West Indies and the UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean in Kingston, launched an online capacity-building workshop on Safeguarding Heritage in the Caribbean through Developing a Sustainable Tourism Strategy. This online national workshop for Barbados was held in October 2020, with a special session on the impact of COVID-19. This activity was organized with the support of the Barbados Ministries of Tourism and International Transport and Creative Economy, Culture and Sport and the Japan Funds in Trust (JFIT). The World Heritage Programme for SIDS works closely in cooperation with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism programme in line with the policy and approaches being developed by UNESCO to respond the COVID-19 pandemic.
50. SIDS are also affected by climate change impacts and must address these while they simultaneously respond to the health situation. The pandemic highlights several extreme events may occur in sequence and overwhelm capacities to respond. Category 5 Cyclone Harold, which devastated four Pacific Island nations in April 2020, exposed the extreme vulnerability of these economies, as pandemic-induced quarantines and lockdowns impeded the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance. In 2021, this was also the case in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines where the humanitarian response to a volcanic eruption was rendered more complicated due to the pandemic.
51. In the Solomon Islands, Cyclone Harold caused severe damage to taro (staple food crop) gardens and fruit trees in and around the communities in East Rennell. Furthermore, the subsequent prolonged rainy season and increased isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about additional pressures to the food and livelihood security of the communities. After consultation with the national stakeholders and local communities, the "Developing sustainable livelihoods in East Rennell, the only natural World Heritage site in the Pacific on the List of World Heritage in Danger" project (supported by the Netherlands FiT) which aims to support the communities through sustainable tourism activities, has been adjusted taking account of the current travel restrictions and utmost needs. One of the potential activities proposed is to explore more resilient agriculture using traditional knowledge to strengthen the food and livelihood security of the communities, in view of recent damages caused by a series of natural disasters and increased impact of climate change.

I. World Heritage Marine Programme

52. The COVID-19 pandemic has also caused unprecedented challenges for the 50 marine World Heritage properties. The dramatic drop in tourism revenues left sites struggling to

keep rangers on the payroll, prevent rising illegal activity, continue crucial scientific monitoring or secure food for local communities. On 10 September 2020, marine World Heritage site managers held an online meeting to share insights on how they were dealing with the impacts of COVID-19. The meeting also provided a platform to highlight the challenges and solutions that were being developed at the sites, and shared initial lessons learned by sites which had already reopened.

53. Every two months, the World Heritage Centre's Marine Programme has been providing an exclusive online platform where managers of marine World Heritage properties connect and share ideas around key conservation challenges. Because of their high profile and status as flagship marine protected areas, these properties are uniquely positioned to drive change and innovation, set new global standards in conservation excellence, and serve as beacons of hope in a changing ocean. These online meetings are made possible thanks to the support of the French Biodiversity Agency and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. More info: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/marine-managers/>

J. Synergies with other Conventions and Programmes

54. On 3 December 2020, an online meeting of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) took place. Part of the discussion was on how the BLG members had been coping with COVID-19. Since the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) COP 13 convened in India in February 2020, all the governing body meetings of BLG Conventions scheduled for 2020 have been postponed to 2021 to be held *in presentia*, except the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).
55. BLG members then shared their experience in the difficulties faced in planning and convening online meetings of the Conventions bodies, including intergovernmental and technical aspects (platforms available, interpretation etc.). Some of the technical challenges shared by all BLG members for online meetings related to the accessibility restrictions of the platforms, time differences, lack of "corridor discussions" to find solutions to contentious issues and the drafting of decisions (drafting groups). As a new working method, some Conventions adopted certain Agenda items by email prior to online meetings to save time (International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture-ITPGRFA, Ramsar Convention on wetlands of international importance).
56. Online meetings have been convened for each Convention. While some decisions have been made through online meetings and by emails, Parties are generally not in favour of making decisions online for those involving negotiations. In particular, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) expressed concerns following the special online session for SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3 in September 2020. The postponement of SBSTTA-24/SBI-3 and 3rd Open-ended Working Group for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (OEWG3) affected the organization of COP 15, now rescheduled to take place from 11-24 October 2021 in Kunming, China. CBD foresees that the formal meeting of SBSTTA-24/SBI-3 will take place in May 2021, and the OEWG3 in July 2021.
57. In terms of financial implications, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has observed impact of the COVID-19 on its financial situation, which is also affecting its operations as members in arrears do not have right to vote. Other Conventions have not (yet) seen major financial impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
58. The World Heritage Convention and the Ramsar Convention have both been affected by pending missions to monitor sites.
59. For further details on synergies with other Conventions and Programmes, see Document WHC/21/44.COM/5A.

III. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CULTURE SECTOR AND UNESCO-WIDE EFFORT

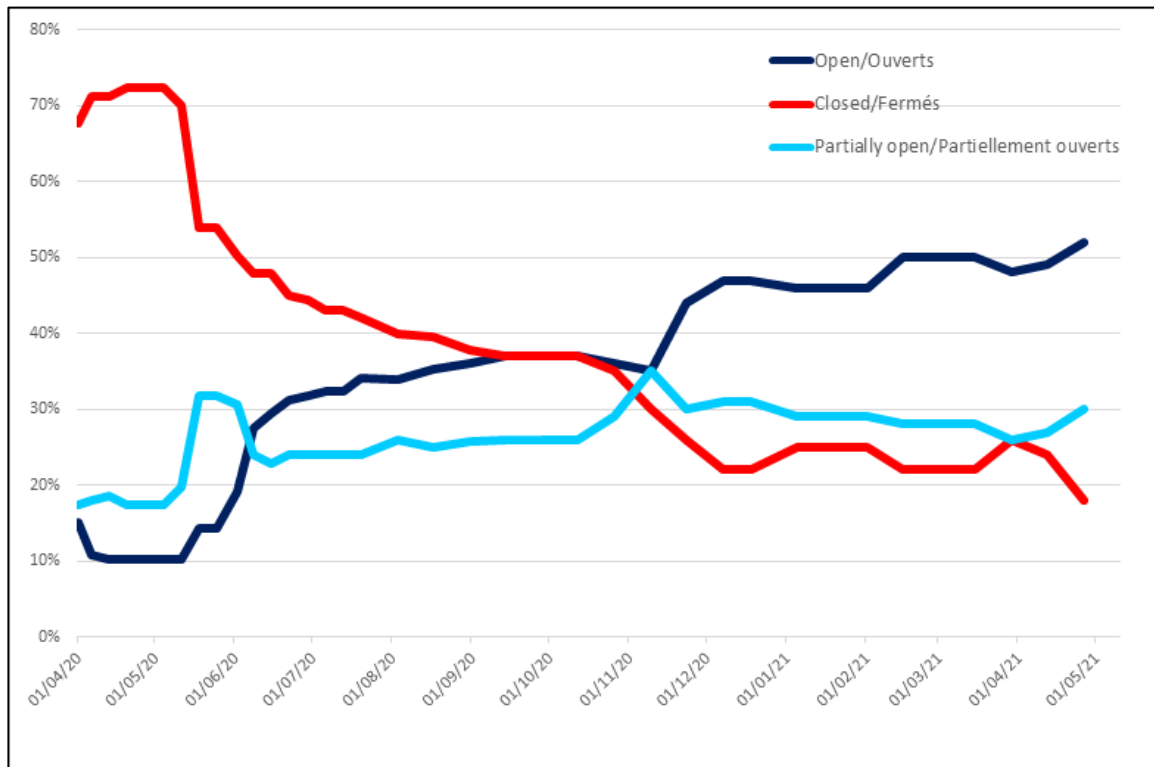
A. Promoting access to Culture and Heritage

60. The World Heritage Centre has contributed to the response of the UNESCO Culture Sector to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak by actively participating in UNESCO's **#ShareOurHeritage** and **#ShareCulture** campaigns to promote access to culture and World Heritage properties.
61. In this regard, with the support of Google Arts & Culture, an interactive **online exhibition** featuring dozens of World Heritage properties from across the globe has been launched (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/cultureresponse/exploring-world-heritage-from-home-with-unesco>), allowing an exploration of World Heritage properties from home.
62. COVID-19 has presented a host of new challenges for parents and guardians of **young children**, the majority of whom are out of school. Yet confinement can also be an opportunity – for learning, creativity and discovery. With the aim to encourage children's creativity and their awareness of heritage during the COVID-19 lock-down period, the Little Artists Exhibition campaign was launched online in 2020. This campaign invited children between ages 6 and 12 to draw artworks inspired by World Heritage properties that matter to them, either in their own community, a memory from a recent family vacation, or a place they saw in a book, movie or TV show, and publish them on Instagram using #ShareOurHeritage. To learn more about the stories behind each World Heritage property, children were invited to explore the World Heritage List on the UNESCO website. An overwhelming response of 572 entries, from 55 countries, representing 154 World Heritage properties, was received. A selection of these drawings, chosen for their artistry, originality and diversity, has been posted on the UNESCO website at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2115/>.
63. To address the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic will have on the culture sector, UNESCO has launched a weekly "**Culture & COVID-19: Impact and Response Tracker**" to provide an overview of the rapidly evolving situation. It explores both the immediate impact of the health crisis, including on World Heritage properties, and examples of how countries around the world are adapting to the situation (<https://en.unesco.org/news/culture-covid-19-impact-and-response-tracker>).
64. On 18 April 2020, the ICOMOS International Day of Monuments and Sites, also known as **World Heritage Day** in some countries, has been an occasion to further reflect upon how heritage sites are important. The theme "Shared Cultures, Shared Heritage, Shared Responsibility" aimed at expressing the global unity in the face of the ongoing worldwide health crisis. On 18 April 2021, the theme of this Day was "Complex Pasts: Diverse Futures", with a special collaboration with Google Arts & Culture (see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2274>).

B. Monitoring the closure of World Heritage properties

65. On 22 April 2020, more than **130 Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Culture** joined an online meeting convened by UNESCO to discuss actions to bolster the culture sector, which is facing unprecedented disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2106>). A large majority cited the closure of their World Heritage properties and cultural institutions and the ripple effect these had (and are still having) within their countries. A number of ministers also paid tribute to their employees in the cultural sector, including heritage site managers, for their role in ensuring access to culture during the lockdown period, as well as their commitment to raising awareness about the pandemic through their activities.

66. 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. At the time of preparing this document, World Heritage properties were still totally or partially closed in 51% of the countries.



Graph 1: Evolution of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opening/closing of World Heritage properties worldwide

67. First-hand accounts from **World Heritage site managers** affected by the COVID-19 pandemic have also been shared through a series of videos (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2101>), in which site managers reported how they were coping with the crisis.
68. In cases where direct access to sites has not been possible, site managers and local authorities have established or improved **digital access to World Heritage**. This included virtual visits of properties (for example, live streaming of Ngorongoro Conservation Area) and site museums as well as overflights by drones to feature sites without any visitors (such as the Deutsche Welle (DW) programme for all World Heritage sites in Germany).
69. On 5 February 2021, the Secretariat launched an online survey to all World Heritage site managers, with the intent to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the site-level between 2019 and 2020. This UNESCO report forms part of a series of reports carried out by the Culture Sector on the impact of COVID-19 on World Heritage, living heritage, museums and the cultural and creative industries. These reports look at issues of conservation, transmission, access, financing, employment, and threats, with a view to further inform and build a holistic response to this exceptional crisis. The thorough and detailed analysis of this survey, which received responses from 388

different World Heritage Site Managers, is accessible at the following web address:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377667>

Non-exhaustive list of webinars organized and co-organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and its partners, including with the Advisory Bodies

- AIVP Webinar: Protecting Cultural Heritage as a Resource for Sustainable Development of Port Cities (<https://app.livestorm.co/p/79d4059e-95d0-4331-a8b7-fa03ccb6a775>)
- Ceremony of Historic Centre of San Gimignano 30th Anniversary inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2228/>)
- Culture/Nature Journey (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x16gES3m40c&list=PLb5I4s3ZSa2lvZpkChnsHx9EA845yjk4s&index=4&t=0s>)
- Dialogue on “Applying resilience thinking to heritage places: from theory to practice” (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/dialogue-applying-resilience-thinking-heritage-places-theory-practice>)
- Disaster and World Heritage with Focus on Pandemics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN2V9Mt3GoE>)
- DomusForum 2020: the future of cities (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2199>)
- Euro-Mediterranean Cities in the Post-Pandemic Era (<https://ufmsecretariat.org/webinar-ufm-unesco-euro-mediterranean-cities-in-the-post-pandemic-era/>)
- Heritage and Climate Change (<https://www.facebook.com/ICOMOSinternational/videos/583311939235199/>)
- Heritage and Pandemics: Accessing heritage during a pandemic (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-pandemics-accessing-heritage-during-pandemic>)
- Heritage and Pandemics: analysing an unfolding crisis (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-pandemics-analysing-unfolding-crisis>)
- Heritage and Pandemics: Psycho-social support during a crisis (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-pandemics-psycho-social-support-during-crisis>)
- Heritage and Pandemics: Reopening and Adapting Heritage Places During a Pandemic (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-pandemics-reopening-and-adapting-heritage-places-during-pandemic>)
- Heritage and Pandemics: Traditional Knowledge for Building Resilience (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-pandemics-traditional-knowledge-building-resilience>)
- Heritage and Resilience: Building a symbiotic relationship (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-resilience-building-symbiotic-relationship>)
- Heritage and Sustainability in Post COVID-19 World - Building Back Better (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-and-sustainability-post-covid-19-world-building-back-better>)

- Heritage Conservation Learning in the COVID World - Challenges and Opportunities (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/heritage-conservation-learning-covid-world-challenges-and-opportunities>)
- Impact Assessment for World Heritage I - what are the main things you need to know (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/impact-assessment-world-heritage-i-what-are-main-things-you-need-know>)
- Impact Assessment for World Heritage II - steps and processes (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/impact-assessment-world-heritage-ii-steps-and-processes>)
- Integrating Heritage into the SDGs - 'Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Cities' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wgXsqivSs>)
- International Scientific and Practical Online Conference "World Heritage Sites: Sustainable Development Practices for Urban Heritage" (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2231/>)
- International scientific meeting on the "Heritage impact assessment: a tool for the protection and safeguarding of World Heritage" (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2221/>)
- IUCN World Heritage Outlook 3 (<https://www.iucn.org/news/world-heritage/202011/webinar-iucn-world-heritage-outlook-3>)
- Leveraging Digital Innovation in Promoting Tourism Development in World Heritage Cities (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TqQVLOVWoY&list=UUK7uxD52clCDs-0saLhj4jq>)
- PANORAMA, Nature-Culture thematic community - sharing practices and learning from heritage places (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/panorama-nature-culture-thematic-community-sharing-practices-and-learning-heritage-places>)
- Protecting People and their Heritage in Times of COVID (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/protecting-people-and-their-heritage-times-covid>)
- Resilience of Historic Cities in times of COVID-19 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_s2A9Yv1E4&list=PLb5l4s3ZSa2lvZpkChnsHx9EA845yjk4s&index=3&t=0s)
- Tourism and digitization (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2eCAKpnUjc>)
- 'Toward a Better Urban Future': UIA Webinar, World Architecture Day 2020 (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2190>)
- Towards Integrated Management of Historic Cities: Challenges and Opportunities (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/towards-integrated-management-historic-cities-challenges-and-opportunities>)
- Urban Economy Forum 2020 (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2194/>)
- Urban Solutions: Learning from Cities' Responses to COVID-19 - UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting (<https://en.unesco.org/urban-solutions-Learning-from-cities-responses-to-COVID19>) (special session on sustainable tourism)
- World Cities Day 2020: "Community-centred urban development: A paradigm of inclusive growth" (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1566/>)
- World Heritage City High-level Webinar: Re-thinking Urban Heritage for Resilience and Recovery (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1526/>)
- World Heritage City Lab (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2130/>)

- World Heritage Leadership - who are we connecting and how can you be a part? (<https://www.iccrom.org/lecture/world-heritage-leadership-who-are-we-connecting-and-how-can-you-be-part>)
- WHITRAP online seminar: The Historic Urban Landscape approach - Integrating urban heritage conservation with urban development in planning processes in Asia (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1548/>)
- Capacity Building on Sustainable Tourism Strategies for “the Industrial Heritage of Barbados: The Story of Sugar and Rum” (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1554/>)