

Report on the State of Conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage property

Auschwitz Birkenau, German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) (Poland) (C-31)

1. Executive Summary

This report is a response to the decision of the World Heritage Committee no. 45 COM 7B.193 adopted in September 2023 at the Extended 45th session in Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). It presents the current state of conservation of the World Heritage property – Auschwitz Birkenau, German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) and its surroundings and covers the period between December 2022 (date of submission of the last SOC report to the World Heritage Centre) and the beginning of November 2024. The responses contained in the report have been formulated based on information obtained from the site manager – Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, main stakeholders – the City of Oświęcim, the Commune of Oświęcim, the Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Remembrance Museum of the Land of Oświęcim Residents, Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim, and Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector.

The State Party endeavours to ensure the effective protection of the World Heritage property Auschwitz-Birkenau, German Nazi concentration and extermination camp (1940-1945) and its historic surroundings, in cooperation with both the site manager and other stakeholders – including the local community and local government authorities and conservation services. These are multi-directional, long-term activities. Good example of such effort is the Oświęcim Strategic Government Programme, which, since its beginning in 1997, has aimed to foster understanding and dialogue, create conditions for ensuring social peace around the former Auschwitz Birkenau, and provide a dignified commemoration of the largest memorial to the mass extermination of millions of people in Europe and worldwide.

The State Party established a team responsible for monitoring the preparation of management plans for World Heritage sites in Poland and informed the WHC about this initiative. In practice, the team's actions did not lead to more effective preparation of management plans, including the management plan for the Auschwitz-Birkenau site. The issue of the management plan is still being discussed with the site managers. The State Party will consider other forms of encouraging site managers to prepare management plans.

In accordance with recommendations, in 2022 the National Institute of Cultural Heritage prepared an update of part 3 of the *Conservation Strategy for the Auschwitz Birkenau World Heritage property*

that was originally drawn up in 2013, that focus on the historic landscape in the direct vicinity of the World Heritage property in question.

The recommendation to establish a buffer zone for the property, including a silence zone and a protection zone, originally adopted when the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979, to provide greater protection for its immediate surroundings, has been reiterated for years. The fact that it has not been implemented does not result from lack of will of the State Party but rather to the complexity and intricacy of the issue.

The State Party has supported the development of educational and promotional activities concerning not only the World Heritage property but also the surroundings of the former Auschwitz Birkenau, German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) for many years. These activities are carried out by the site manager – the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, as well as by entities that manage objects located within the protective zones of the property.

The construction design of the construction of the southern ring road of Oświęcim, along with the analyses and heritage impact assessment (HIA) conducted during the investment process, was the subject of expert evaluation during an advisory mission by the World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS in 2021. The mission report expressed acceptance of the solutions outlined in the design. The State Party welcomed this conclusion regarding the construction of the southern ring road of Oświęcim, which is considered crucial for the development of the City and Municipality of Oświęcim by the site manager, local residents, and local authorities.

The State Party is making efforts to implement the recommendations of the expert group from the 2021 advisory mission, as reported in the previous SOC report. The progress in the implementation of expert recommendations is also described in this report. Implementation of some recommendations is reflected in the statutory activities of the aforementioned entities.

2. Response to the decision of the World Heritage Committee

This report is a response to the decision of the World Heritage Committee no. 45 COM 7B.193 adopted in September 2023 at the Extended 45th session in Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). It presents the current state of conservation of the World Heritage property – Auschwitz Birkenau, German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) and its surroundings and covers the period between December 2022 (date of submission of the last report to the World Heritage Centre) and the beginning of November 2024. The responses contained in the report have been formulated based on information obtained from the site manager – Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, main stakeholders: the City of Oświęcim, the Commune of Oświęcim, the Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Remembrance Museum of the Land of Oświęcim Residents, Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim, as well as Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector, which are arranged in accordance with the recommendations and questions included in the decision.

In its decision no. 45 COM 7B.193, the World Heritage Committee:

Re. 3. Welcomes the progress made by the State Party in establishing a closer dialogue between the national and local authorities, other key stakeholders and local communities, paving the way for the development of the Management Plan for the property and its subsequent adoption by all stakeholders and encourages these dialogue activities be continued;

The State Party endeavours to ensure the effective protection of the World Heritage property Auschwitz-Birkenau, German Nazi concentration and extermination camp (1940-1945) and its historic surroundings, in cooperation with both the site manager and other stakeholders – including the local community and local government authorities and conservation services. These are multi-directional, long-term activities.

It is worth recalling the government financing instrument, the Oświęcim Strategic Government Programme (OSPR), which, since its beginning in 1997, has aimed to foster understanding and dialogue, create conditions for ensuring social peace around the former Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp, and provide a dignified commemoration of the largest memorial to the mass extermination of millions of people in Europe and worldwide. The joint efforts of the government and the local and regional authorities of the Oświęcim region bring us closer to realising a vision of harmonious coexistence between the memorial site and the dynamically developing City of Oświęcim and its surrounding municipalities.

Stage VI of the OSPR is being carried out from 2021 to 2025, with planned tasks totalling 92,013,000 PLN (about 21 098 581 Euro). This amount is funded by 61,600,000 PLN (about 14 124 880 Euro) from the state budget, with a contribution of 30,413,000 PLN (about 6 973 701 Euro) from beneficiaries. Stage VI of the OSPR will include road investments to improve access to Oświęcim and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, along with other projects such as land development and the construction of an underground car park in the centre of Old Town of Oświęcim, the establishment of a school and kindergarten complex, construction of a sanitary sewage system in Brzezinka, and the revitalisation of the public park in Brzeszcze.

Re. 4. *Further welcomes the establishment of a team to monitor the preparation of Management Plans for World Heritage properties in Poland, urges the State Party to develop a comprehensive Management Plan for the property, including a comprehensive tourism management and interpretation Plan for the whole property and its setting, as a matter of priority, in line with the recommendations of the 2021 Advisory mission and the 2013 Expert Group, and requests the State Party to submit the final draft of the Management Plan to the World Heritage Centre for its revision and comments by the Advisory Bodies, prior to its adoption; also encourages the State Party to finalise the update of the Conservation Strategy for the property;*

During the World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Advisory mission in October 2021, a representative of the Monument Protection Department of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage announced that a team would be established (with the said representative acting in the capacity of its leader) to monitor the preparation of management plans for World Heritage sites located in Poland, including the Auschwitz Birkenau property.

In practice, the team's action has not influenced the more effective preparation of management plans. The issue of a management plan is still under discussion with the Site Manager. The State Party will consider other measures to encourage managers to prepare management plans.

In 2022, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage prepared an update of part 3 of the *Conservation Strategy for the Auschwitz Birkenau World Heritage property* that was originally drawn up in 2013, that focus on the historic landscape in the direct vicinity of the World Heritage property in question. This document was submitted to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, with the indication that it may be used by the site manager – the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector, and the local governments, particularly for planning decisions, as well as by other identified stakeholders and experts from the aforementioned team in the future preparation of the Management Plan.

Re. 5. *Invites the State Party to establish a buffer zone for the property, encompassing both the silence zone and the wider protection zone, or to develop appropriate spatial planning policies to provide greater protection to the immediate setting of the property;*

The recommendation to establish a buffer zone for the property, including a silence zone and a protection zone, originally adopted when the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979, to provide greater protection for its immediate surroundings, has been reiterated for years. The fact that it has not been implemented does not result from lack of will of the State Party but rather to the complexity and intricacy of the issue.

In the 2021 report from the World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS advisory mission, experts noted that one of the main challenges is to obtain acceptance of establishing a buffer zone from local government authorities and the local community.

In their responses to the World Heritage Committee's recommendation, the local authorities of the City of Oświęcim and the Commune of Oświęcim, responsible for creating local spatial policy, indicated that establishing a buffer zone for the World Heritage property, which would include both a silence zone and a broader protective zone, has no direct legal basis in the generally applicable national law. The only legally binding zone in this area is the protective zone established under the Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of 27 May 1999, which defines the boundaries of the Holocaust Memorial and its protective zone. The above zone, along with its resulting restrictions, has been incorporated into the applicable planning documents for the City of Oświęcim and the Oświęcim Commune. The proposed expansion of this protection zone has not been accepted by local authorities or residents.

In this long-standing situation where it is impossible to formally establish a buffer zone, local spatial development plans, which are acts of local law, serve as a tool for regulating and indirectly protecting the surroundings of the World Heritage property. Each plan is consulted with the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, as the site manager, regularly submits remarks on new planning documents developed by local authorities for areas surrounding the memorial site, offering feedback regarding protection of landscape or historical objects preserved beyond the Museum's boundaries.

The Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector supports the creation of a buffer zone for the World Heritage property, but is aware that this requires changing planning documents, which is the responsibility of local governments.

The update of part 3 of the *Conservation Strategy for the Auschwitz Birkenau World Heritage property*, prepared in 2022, aimed, among others, to assess the current state (as of 2022) of the historical landscape surrounding the World Heritage property, to evaluate it, and to provide conservation guidelines for shaping the historical landscape. This document was developed as substantive support for the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector, and local governments, among others, in making planning decisions.

Re. 6. Notes with satisfaction the efforts made by the State Party in progressively enriching and supporting educational and social awareness-raising activities linked to the historical structures within the property and in the protection zone, and further encourages the State Party to pursue these efforts;

The State Party has supported the development of educational and promotional activities concerning not only the World Heritage property but also the surroundings of the former Auschwitz Birkenau, German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945) for many years. These activities are carried out by the site manager – the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – as well as by entities that manage objects located within the protective zones of the property: Remembrance Museum of the Land of Oświęcim Residents, Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau and Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim.

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Education has been one of the main tasks of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum since its establishment and has been highlighted in successive SOC reports submitted to the World Heritage Centre and during expert missions.

The latest initiatives undertaken by the Museum are detailed in the Polish-English Reports summarising the years 2022 and 2023 at the Auschwitz Museum and Memorial Site. They may be found at: <https://www.auschwitz.org/muzeum/sprawozdania-roczne/>.

Remembrance Museum of the Land of Oświęcim Residents

Educational activity is one of the priority tasks of the Museum. It encompasses a wide range of initiatives, including collecting family stories from local residents, organising lessons and thematic workshops, lectures, popular science conferences, educational sessions, and temporary exhibitions, as well as creating and publishing educational materials. This variety of educational forms, alongside the presentation of the Museum's permanent exhibition, provides an effective way to learn about the difficult history of the Oświęcim region and its residents, burdened by the tragedy of World War II.

The offer is directed at everyone – children, school youth, adults, including persons with special needs, seniors, and other groups visiting the Museum.

Information about the educational activities of the Museum can primarily be found on the educational portal <https://edukacja.muzeumpamieci.pl/>, as well as on the website <https://www.muzeumpamieci.pl> and the Museum's social media platforms.

Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau

Since 2013, the Foundation has focused on preserving objects and artifacts related to the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz Birkenau and its sub-camps that are in the possession of private individuals. The educational activities – such as exhibitions, study tours, field lessons, training sessions, seminars, conferences, thematic publications, and film materials about memorial sites – are based on the objects and artifacts collected by the Foundation, which narrate the history of the sub-camps operating within KL Auschwitz Birkenau.

An important complement to these educational activities is commemoration. The Foundation organises commemorations of significant events related to the functioning of the Auschwitz sub-camps at facilities under its care (e.g., KL Auschwitz Bor/Budy – Penal Company of Women, KL Auschwitz-Jawischowitz sub-camp). The Foundation's offer is directed to all interested parties, both from Poland and visitors from around the world.

More information about the Foundation's activities can be found at <https://auschwitz-podobozy.org/koncepcja-programowa/>.

Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim

The University, which occupies, among others, three historical buildings connected with the history of the former Auschwitz I Concentration Camp, makes every effort to commemorate and properly treat the survivors of this difficult history. Within the framework of its mission, the motto *Memory-Modernity-Modernism* has been adopted to guide the concept of the management of the University, which on the one hand is an open, modern unit with a rich didactic offer, and on the other hand is an institution that upholds the shaping of memory by developing appropriate attitudes among students in relation to the tragic events of the World War II, during which the Auschwitz Birkenau concentration and extermination camp was established.

In the building of the Collegium Inventorum, two staircases are preserved in their original condition from the World War II – by design not in use, preserved as relics of the past. Next to the building, fragments of a railway siding and archaeological relics of elements of the retaining wall are on display, showing its history but also as a monument of industrial culture.

The Collegium sub Horologio building exhibits the site of an unusual World War II find discovered during renovation work – It was a bottle that had been concreted into the wall of an air raid shelter located in the basement. The bottle contained a piece of paper (probably a fragment of a paper cement sack) on which the names of seven prisoners of Auschwitz I (6 of Polish nationality, 1 of French nationality, aged 18-20) were written in pencil. These prisoners, in the autumn of 1944, were building this shelter. At present, the site of the find is on display for students and visitors to the University. In addition, a permanent exhibition of works by Mieczysław Kościelniak, an Auschwitz inmate, member of the camp resistance movement, painter and graphic artist, was unveiled in 2021. The Collegium Primum building houses a permanent exhibition dedicated to the first transport of prisoners to Auschwitz I.

In the courtyard between the buildings, a statue of the University's patron, former Auschwitz inmate Witold Pilecki, was unveiled in 2018. Every year, the University celebrates its holiday on the day of the death of the Polish national hero – 25 May.

The history of the buildings belonging to the university is also presented on its website at <https://uczelniaoswiecim.edu.pl/uczelnia/o-uczelni/historia/>.

Re. 7. Also notes the efforts of the State Party to put on hold the construction of the Oświęcim southern ring road until it had considered the recommendations of the 2021 Advisory mission to the property;

The construction design of the investment in question, along with the analyses and heritage impact assessment (HIA) conducted during the investment process, was the subject of expert evaluation during an advisory mission by the World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS in 2021. The mission report expressed acceptance of the solutions outlined in the design.

The State Party welcomed this conclusion regarding the construction of the southern ring road of Oświęcim, which is considered crucial for the development of the City and Municipality of Oświęcim by the site manager, local residents, and local authorities. This ring road will help reduce transit traffic in the area surrounding the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum while also improving access for visitors to the Museum and other entities that present the history of this region. The investment is currently in progress, with construction of the ring road already well advanced.

Re. 8. Recommends to the State Party to implement the recommendations of the 2021 Advisory mission to the property;

The State Party is making efforts to implement the recommendations of the expert group from the 2021 advisory mission, as reported in the previous SOC report. The progress in the implementation of expert recommendations is also described above in this report.

Implementation of some recommendations is reflected in the statutory activities of the aforementioned entities.

In addition to these responses, the State Party provides information on the state of conservation of the World Heritage property and the conservation work conducted there, as submitted by the site manager – the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This includes information on the preservation status of objects located within the property's protective zones, managed by stakeholders – the Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau and the State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim.

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

From November 2022 to 2024, the Museum continued its efforts to preserve, secure, and enhance accessibility to the site. As part of its statutory activities, the Museum conducts ongoing initiatives aimed at maintaining the grounds and objects of the memorial site. Additionally, the Museum implements conservation projects funded by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.

During this period, numerous activities were undertaken to ensure the buildings remain in good technical condition, including preventive conservation measures. Currently, the renovation of the roof of the building with inventory number A-45 is underway, alongside conservation work and the renovation of the ceiling in the former Sauna building at Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Regular maintenance of the greenery is also conducted, which includes expertise, maintenance, and greenery revalorisation projects.

As part of the project activities, comprehensive conservation efforts were undertaken, on an ongoing basis, in the brick barracks in the BI area of the former KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Currently, following the completion of works in six brick barracks, conservation efforts are ongoing in five historical buildings within this section, including the former bathhouse in the BIb section, residential barracks, and the former sanitary facility. Thanks to the completed works, more buildings have been opened to visitors, notably the former camp kitchen, which has recently been made accessible following conservation.

Additionally, the conservation project for another wooden barrack in the former quarantine section (BIla) has been completed. This project involved desalination works on historical elements of the building affected by chemical corrosion. Conservation and construction works are still in progress to secure the ruins of the gas chambers and crematories. The most significant scope of work was carried out in facilities no. II and III, while preventive measures were initiated in the ruins of facilities no. IV and V. Projects addressing the paint layers preserved in the interiors of the blocks at the former Auschwitz I concentration camp have also been initiated. Additionally, projects related to the documentation and preservation of historical greenery have been implemented.

All conservation and preservation works concerning the historical facilities of the Auschwitz concentration camp are meticulously documented. The Museum continues to expand its range of activities and documentation tools. Work is ongoing on the documentation of facilities in BIM (Building Information Modelling) technology for the collection and analysis of facility information and the planning of works. A database of historical facilities is also under development. All works are carried out by a qualified interdisciplinary team of museum employees, primarily comprising conservators.

In 2023, the construction of a new Visitor Services Centre was completed. This investment involved the creation of modern infrastructure necessary for serving visitors to the Memorial. A significant aspect of this project was the adaptation of the former camp slaughterhouse and dairy building, which was repurposed to meet the new requirements. Also a hostel for volunteers was opened.

At the end of 2023, additional investment projects commenced, including the “New Polish Exhibition” and the “New Main Exhibition” in blocks No. A-15, A-8, and A-9. For more information about the Museum’s activities, please see the annual reports available online at <https://www.auschwitz.org/muzeum/sprawozdania-roczne/>. 2022 and 2023 reports are attached hereto as Appendices 1 and 2, respectively.

Foundation of Memory Sites Near Auschwitz-Birkenau

The Building of the former SS Kitchen/Canteen

Since 2021, thanks to grants obtained from the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and the Marshal of the Małopolskie Voivodeship, the Foundation has initiated and continued several research, conservation, and protection works in the building. Work was conducted to secure part of the foundations, alongside conservation efforts that included the conservation of the section of the building dismantled in 2018, specifically a fragment of the south wing (conservation of internal boards). This was followed by the conservation of part of the wall formwork from the outside of the dismantled south wing, as well as the conservation of part of the formwork – roof sheathing boards of the dismantled south wing. In addition, renovation of part of the historic railway track located on the eastern side, directly adjacent to the building’s ramp, is underway.

Preparations are being made for an application to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for the continuation of conservation work in 2025, which will include the conservation of the external wall formwork and part of the roof formwork of the demolished southern wing.

Furthermore, alongside the focus on the building of the SS Kitchen/Canteen, the Foundation has begun exploring opportunities to secure funding for the revitalisation of the surrounding area.

Educational activities are also being undertaken in the former SS Kitchen/Canteen; two large educational exhibitions are being prepared as well.

Food warehouses – Potato and sauerkraut warehouses

As part of the grants obtained from the National Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Foundation organised cleaning works for 9 out of the 10 halls of the potato warehouse and the entire sauerkraut warehouse from 2021 to 2024. These cleaning works were designed to uncover, secure, preserve, and consolidate as much of the original historical fabric of both buildings as possible, without interfering with their historical substance. This approach was motivated by the exceptional historical and cognitive value of the buildings, which relate to the martyrdom of prisoners at the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz Birkenau. The works involved the participation of many volunteers from Poland and abroad.

With further grants from the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector and the Marshal of the Małopolskie Voivodeship, conservation and repair work on the foundations of the potato warehouse has also begun.

Additionally, with the significant commitment and support of the Oświęcim Commune, the Foundation secured funds for the maintenance and repair of another section of the potato warehouse foundations, as well as for the entire foundations of the sauerkraut warehouse.

The cleaning up of these buildings has also enabled their use for cultural and educational purposes. In the first hall of the potato warehouse, an outdoor educational and historical board exhibition has been installed, focusing on the establishment and operation of the potato and sauerkraut warehouses, along with the work of the prisoners. Furthermore, a permanent exhibition is being prepared on the operation of the so-called Judenrampe side track, which is located directly next to the potato warehouse.

Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki State University of Małopolska in Oświęcim

One of the University's priorities is the protection of historic buildings. All construction, renovation and adaptation works carried out in them were conducted under the supervision of the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector.

In 2023, building III – Collegium Inventorum (former warehouse and administrative facility SS-Unterkunftsgebäude, the largest building from the former State Tobacco Monopoly complex from 1918-1931) was put into use, which houses 3 institutes, an engineering center, a medical center, workshops and laboratories, teaching rooms, offices, a library and an auditorium. As mentioned, the building has two staircases preserved in their original condition from the period of World War II – by design unused. During work on this building in 2020, artifacts related to the track and railway siding were discovered. After consultation with the Małopolska Regional Monuments Inspector, in 2021 the University commissioned preparing of a conservation program covering fragments of the railway siding and archaeological relics of elements of the retaining wall, which was fully implemented.

- 3. Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party (State Parties) which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.**

Not identified.

- 4. In accordance with the provisions of section 172 of the Operational Guidelines, please describe any potential substantial renovation works, modifications and/or construction works planned within the property, the buffer zone (buffer zones) and/or corridors or other areas, if such changes may have an impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including its authenticity and integrity.**

Not identified.

- 5. Public access to the Report on the state of conservation.**

The State Party hereby consents to the publication of the full version of the report on the World Heritage Centre website.

- 6. Signature of the authority**