

To the Permanent Delegations
of UNESCO

9 October 2026

Culture Sector
The Assistant Director-General

Ref: CLT/CEM/EOP/26/8031

Subject: **UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF): A lifeline for culture in times of crisis**

Dear Permanent Delegates,

We are pleased to invite you to visit the photo exhibition “UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF): A lifeline for culture in times of crisis,” on display until 31 October 2026 on the gates of UNESCO Headquarters. The exhibition highlights how UNESCO supports communities in safeguarding culture as a source of resilience in times of crisis.

The exhibition opens at a time when crises affecting culture are becoming more frequent and complex, from armed conflicts to natural hazards. In 2026–2027, the expected intensification of El Niño may further increase the risks of floods, drought and extreme heat, with potential consequences for heritage sites, museum collections, intangible cultural heritage, artistic creation and access to culture. Through the recently launched UNESCO x El Niño campaign, the HEF is already helping Member States in vulnerable regions strengthen preparedness for the culture sector, with an initial envelope of US\$ 150,000.

Since its establishment in 2015, the HEF has mobilized over US\$ 16 million, supporting more than 180 activities in over 100 countries, including 35 in Africa and 20 Small Island Developing States. These efforts have helped protect culture in all its diversity, from emergency stabilization of cultural property following Typhoon Yagi in Viet Nam to support for artists and artisans affected by floods in Cabo Verde.

The HEF has also provided rapid and flexible seed funding in conflict-affected contexts, including Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine, enabling UNESCO to act quickly while larger and longer-term programmes are being mobilized. These results have been made possible thanks to the generous support of HEF donors: Andorra, Canada, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Qatar Fund for Development, Serbia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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As crises continue to grow in scale and frequency, the need for rapid action is greater than ever. We therefore invite your Government to consider making a voluntary contribution to the HEF. We would also appreciate it if you could help us reach out to potential partners. Every contribution, regardless of its size, helps UNESCO deliver timely assistance, strengthen preparedness, and protect culture when it is at risk. In a context of increasing needs, we must strengthen our collective effort to make a tangible difference for communities working to safeguard their heritage, creativity and cultural identity.

We hope this exhibition will offer an opportunity to reflect on the importance of safeguarding culture in emergencies. Should your Government wish to further engage with or contribute to the HEF, Ms Krista Pikkat, Director of the Culture and Emergencies Entity at UNESCO (k.pikkat@unesco.org), would be pleased to provide additional information.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to safeguarding culture worldwide.

Yours sincerely,



Nayef Al-Fayez

cc: National Commissions for UNESCO
UNESCO Field Offices

Enc.: HEF factsheet