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Safeguarding Heritage through Law Enforcement

Good Practices in Combating
Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property

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Introduction

The illicit trafficking of cultural property remains one of the most serious threats to cultural heritage worldwide. Beyond the irreversible loss of artifacts and historical knowledge, it weakens cultural identity, undermines community resilience, and fuels transnational organized crime. Addressing this complex challenge requires strong legal frameworks, sustained international cooperation, and, above all, effective and well-coordinated law enforcement.

Across East Asia, Member States have taken important steps to strengthen institutional responses to cultural property crime. Among which, Mongolia's establishment of a specialized Heritage Police Unit marks a significant milestone, reflecting a growing recognition of the central role of law enforcement not only in investigation and seizure, but also in prevention, public awareness, and cooperation with cultural authorities and international partners.

This document was developed within the framework of UNESCO's technical assistance to support the operationalization of Mongolia's Heritage Police Unit. It provides practical guidance by highlighting global good practices, examining institutional and operational approaches, and presenting a self-assessment tool to inform capacity development and strategic planning. While grounded in Mongolia's national context, the lessons and recommendations offered here are relevant to many countries across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture, and the National Police Agency for co-hosting the workshop "*Safeguarding Heritage through Law Enforcement: International Good Practices and Regional Cooperation*" in Ulaanbaatar on 27–28 November 2025, which provided a valuable platform to present and refine this document. UNESCO also thanks the national and international participants, including representatives from China, Germany, France, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, INTERPOL, UNODC, and UNIDROIT, for their valuable contributions.

The first component, Indicative Baseline and Capacity Overview, draws on data from the 2023 Periodic Reporting exercise for the 1970 Convention, as well as UNESCO's consultations and field experience. It maps institutional capacities, coordination mechanisms, and training needs across regions, offering an evidence-based picture of where gaps and opportunities lie.

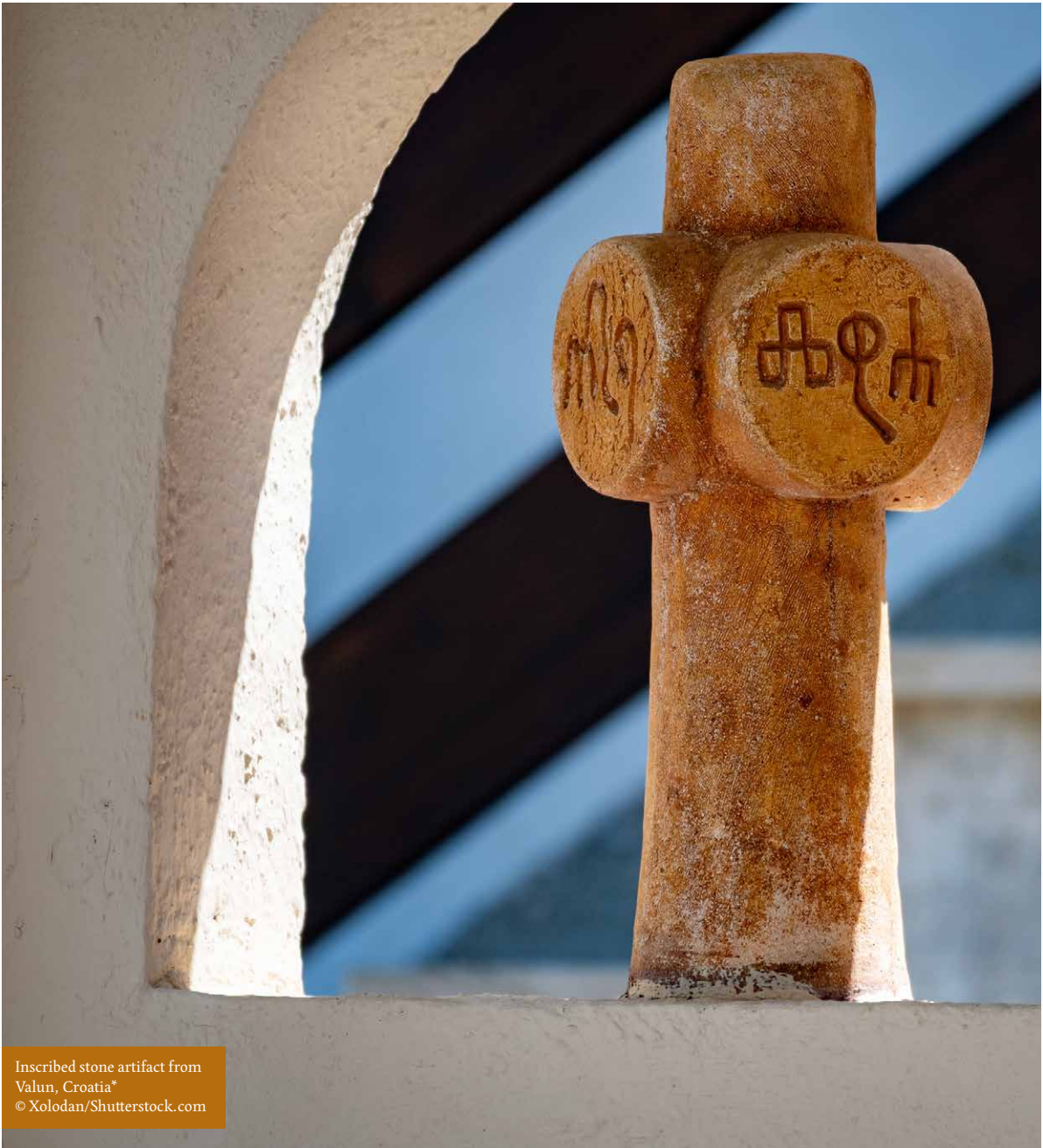
The second component, Good Practices of Law Enforcement against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property, is based on desk research and analysis of existing literature and institutional reports. It identifies promising approaches and innovative models developed by police, customs, and cultural authorities to prevent and combat illicit trafficking of cultural property.

The third component, Self-Assessment and Capacity Development Checklist, translates analytical findings and good practices into guiding questions and recommended actions. Designed as a practical tool, it aims to support national authorities in reflecting on existing systems, identifying gaps, and planning concrete measures to strengthen institutional effectiveness.

By combining these three perspectives, the document seeks to inform future capacity-building efforts, guide inter-agency and international cooperation, and inspire policy innovation. Above all, it aims to reaffirm that safeguarding cultural heritage through law enforcement is not only a matter of security and crime prevention, but also a shared responsibility essential to the preservation of humanity's cultural diversity and collective memory.

How to Use This Tool

As a key result of the UNESCO international workshop "*Safeguarding Heritage through Law Enforcement: International Good Practices and Regional Cooperation*" (November 2025, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), this document is designed as a practical capacity development tool to support continuous reflection, institutional learning, and operational improvement among law enforcement and partner institutions engaged in the fight against illicit trafficking and return and restitution of cultural property. It is intended to support the design, conduct and implementation of training activities, as well as for routine institutional self-assessment and planning.



Inscribed stone artifact from
Valun, Croatia*
© Xolodan/Shutterstock.com

Indicative Baseline and Capacity Overview

Institutional capacities, coordination mechanisms, and access to adequate tools and training are essential for effective law enforcement in protecting cultural heritage. To better understand the global situation, the baseline assessment draws on data from the 2023 Periodic Reporting Cycle for the 1970 Convention, as well as insights generated through operations and complementary consultations.

A total of 91 countries¹ submitted national reports, providing a representative picture of institutional arrangements, operational tools, and capacity-building needs across all regions.

Institutional setup and coordination

Specialized police units dedicated to cultural property exist in 59% of reporting countries, and customs units in 49%. Where dedicated units are absent, cultural property is usually handled ad hoc by general police or customs services. Institutionalization remains strong in Europe and Latin America, where long-standing units such as Italy's Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (1969) and Argentina's Federal Police Cultural Heritage Department (2002) operate within established frameworks. Newer structures have also emerged, notably in Africa and the Asia Pacific region, including Mongolia's Police Cultural Property Crime Unit and Zimbabwe's Heritage Crime Unit (both founded in 2022).

Formal inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms exist in many countries – including China, Peru, Belgium, Argentina, Poland, and Italy – enabling regular case discussions, cross-trainings, and policy adjustments. Good practices include China's



Argentina bolsters anti-trafficking training.*
© Policia Federal Argentina

Inter-Ministerial Joint Meeting System, Argentina's National Committee for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (since 2003), and Belgium's Federal-Regional Platform (since 2009), all of which provide structured frameworks for dialogue between police, customs, and cultural institutions. In other contexts, coordination mechanism exists, but remains ad hoc and limited to case-specific exchanges.

Operational tools and databases

A total of 43 States has established national databases of stolen or missing objects, while 39 rely on INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art database (25 use it directly; 14 link their national systems to it). Notable examples include the Leonardo Database managed by the Carabinieri TPC of Italy (over 8 million records), France's Database TREIMA operated by OCBC (Office central de lutte contre le trafic des biens culturels), Belgium's ARTIST system, Argentina's national database, and China's Stolen Cultural Relics Information Platform.

Several innovations stand out, such as Switzerland's 2009 MoU with eBay to block illicit sales online, and Türkiye's police monitoring of e-commerce and social media for cultural property trafficking.

However, many countries still rely solely on INTERPOL database or manual registries, illustrating on the one hand the indispensable role of such international tools, but on the other hand the digital divide that limits rapid verification and information sharing.

¹ The countries include 18 from Western Europe and Northern America, 20 from Eastern Europe, 17 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 from Asia and the Pacific, 15 from Africa, and 11 from the Arab region.

Education and training

While most countries report some form of training activities targeted towards law enforcement, capacity development on the flight against illicit trafficking of cultural property remains irregular and unsystematic. Very few countries have integrated this subject into police academy curricular. Between 2019 and 2022, 61% of reporting countries participated in UNESCO or partner capacity-building initiatives, demonstrating the important role played by UNESCO and its technical partners in strengthening national capacities in this field.

Gaps and priorities needs

The baseline assessment highlights limited awareness of cultural property crime within many police forces, from senior officers to frontline personnel. The most frequently cited challenges include:

- Limited operational and financial capacity of specialized units;
- Lack of regular, structured training;
- Weak inter-sectoral coordination with cultural authorities;
- Insufficient digital tools and connectivity to INTERPOL databases.

Countries express priority needs in the following areas:

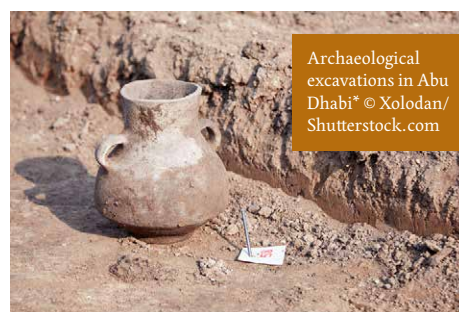
- Establishment and operationalization of specialized police units, especially in the Global South;
- Enhanced cross-regional cooperation of the polices between countries of origin, transit and market countries;
- Strengthened coordination between law enforcement and culture stakeholders;
- Operational training in monitoring and investigation of cultural heritage related crimes, including online trafficking/trade and remote archaeological and underwater sites, and integration of financial crime/AML expertise at the destination/market countries;
- Creation of databases of national stolen objects and integration with INTERPOL database.

Implications for policy and practice

This baseline illustrates the uneven global landscape of law enforcement capacity for heritage protection. While some countries have built robust, specialized systems, many others still depend on limited or informal mechanisms.

Building upon the findings of the indicative baseline, the next section presents selected examples of effective and innovative measures undertaken by law enforcement and partner institutions to address the identified gaps and challenges. The good practices were compiled through desk research, drawing on available literature and institutional reports.

They illustrate how police, customs, and cultural authorities in different regions have translated policy commitments into concrete operational and preventive actions. While contexts vary, these experiences collectively demonstrate that strengthening law enforcement for heritage protection is achievable through integrated strategies combining technology, coordination, training, community engagement, and policy innovation.



Good Practices in Law Enforcement against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property

2

1. Use of technology and digital tools

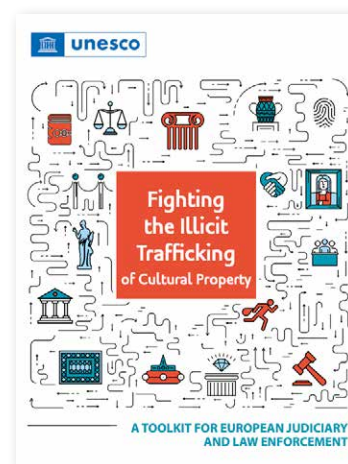
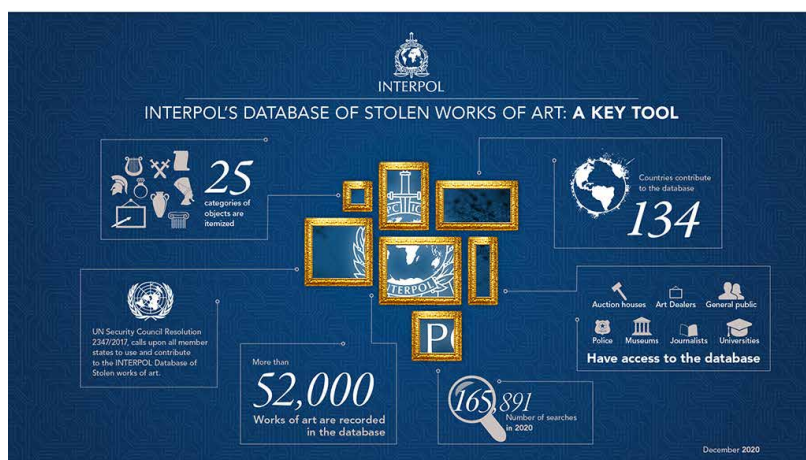
Technological innovation has become a defining feature of contemporary efforts to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property. Police and heritage authorities worldwide are increasingly using databases, digital forensics, online market monitoring, and public communication platforms to detect, trace, and recover stolen cultural objects. The following practices illustrate the diverse ways technology strengthens law enforcement and cooperation in this field.

Global and multilateral tools and data systems

INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art Database remains the key tool in tracking stolen cultural property at international level. Many countries actively upload and verify entries through their National Central Bureaus – the countries' focal point for all INTERPOL activities and embedded in the national police systems. Strengthening the regular use of the database for uploading records of stolen objects and monitoring remains critical for enhancing international cooperation.

The European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have also integrated digital technologies into their regional frameworks. OSCE's Heritage Crime Task Force trains police and customs officers to investigate trafficking cases using digital forensics and to monitor illicit trade through online and dark web platforms. In partnership with the European Union, UNESCO has developed a Toolkit for European Judiciary and Law Enforcement which, in its 2023 update, introduced new sections on online market surveillance and digital provenance verification, reflecting the growing significance of technology in cultural heritage protection.

Building on the outcome of the international conference "[Addressing Illicit Trafficking of Cultural](#)



Left: Visual overview: INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art Database* © INTERPOL
Right: Toolkit for European Judiciary and Law Enforcement (2023 Update).

2 The information in this section based on desk research conducted by the UNESCO Beijing Office, with additional inputs from the Secretariat of the 1970 Convention and participants at the workshop on "Safeguarding Heritage through Law Enforcement: International Good Practices and Regional Cooperation" (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 27-28 November 2025). Links to specific initiatives referenced here are provided in the annex of this report. Given that the review relied primarily on publicly available materials in English and Chinese, it does not aim to present an exhaustive picture of all initiatives underway, but rather to highlight a selection of illustrative good practices that can inform future cooperation.

[Property in the Digital Era](#)”, UNESCO developed a Toolbox of Good Practices for Combating Online Trafficking of Cultural Property, which serves as a practical and operational resource to support Member States and relevant stakeholders in strengthening preventive and enforcement measures in the digital environment.

National databases and information systems

Several countries maintain specialized digital systems for tracking and verifying cultural property.

- Italy's Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, founded in 1969, manages one of the world's largest databases of stolen artworks, used to cross-check information with international law enforcement.
- France's OCBC operates the TREIMA database (established in 1995), a central platform connecting police, customs, and museums for the registration and recovery of cultural objects.
- The German federal police has its own database and cooperates closely with INTERPOL in order to guarantee the exchange of information. In addition there is a [public database](#) for stolen and displaced cultural property.
- China's National Cultural Heritage Administration has developed two publicly accessible databases: the Stolen (Lost) Cultural Relics Information Publishing Platform of China and the Stolen Foreign Cultural Relics Database. These digital platforms serve both as investigative tools and as public awareness mechanisms, enabling collectors, dealers, and the public to verify the legitimacy of artifacts.
- Spain's Guardia Civil Heritage Guard and National Police Cultural Heritage Brigade use the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute's Export Certificate System, which links cultural permits with police databases, allowing officers to instantly check the legality of objects at points of sale or export.
- Jordan's Department of Antiquities has launched MEGA-Jordan (Middle Eastern Geodatabase for Antiquities – Jordan), a cutting-edge digital platform for managing archaeological sites. It integrates geospatial data, historical records, and legal statuses into a single system, enabling authorities to coordinate conservation efforts and combat illicit activities like illegal excavations.
- Chile's National Cultural Heritage Service operates a Centralized Cultural Goods Registry, a public, multi-stakeholder platform where individuals, museums, and other institutions can register and report lost or stolen cultural objects, enabling nationwide information-sharing and supporting coordinated recovery efforts.



Top: Interface of the Stolen (Lost) Cultural Relics Information Publishing Platform of China
Bottom: Interface of MEGA-Jordan

These systems demonstrate the critical role of national databases in ensuring rapid verification, facilitating cross-border cooperation, and providing reliable evidence for judicial processes.

Emerging tools and digital campaigns

The use of digital technologies also extends to public outreach and deterrence.

- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's #ThinkBeforeYouBuy campaign (2016) combined social media, online advertising, and outreach to the art market to warn collectors about the risks

of buying artifacts without verified provenance.

- Spain's Heritage Guard uses its social media channels to publicize recovered objects and invite public reporting of suspicious activities, while Egypt's Tourist and Antiquities Police use televised press conferences and online announcements of major repatriations to raise public awareness.
- In China, online exhibitions such as The Journey Back Home at the National Museum of China (2019) combine traditional museum storytelling with digital visualization and online access to repatriated artifact data. These initiatives extend the impact of heritage protection efforts to broader audiences, including youth, and strengthen public participation in safeguarding cultural heritage.



- China's Customs uses risk control models to identify high-risk inbound and outbound shipments, focused inspections on suspicious items, and non-intrusive inspection tools such as X-ray machines and CT equipment to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of inspections.
- Mongolia is preparing to operationalize satellite-based monitoring through Google Earth Engine as part of its national action plan (2024–2028) to monitor immovable heritage, with the aim of preventing theft, destruction, and damage. This represents an innovative application of geospatial technology for the early detection of site disturbance, illegal excavation, and unauthorized land use.

Lessons learned and key takeaways

- Integrated digital systems enable timely coordination between police, customs, and heritage agencies, reducing duplication and increasing recovery rates.
- Publicly accessible databases contribute not only to transparency but also to market deterrence by discouraging illicit purchases.
- Online and social media campaigns play an essential complementary role in education and prevention, reinforcing the message that heritage protection is a shared social responsibility.
- Future innovations – such as AI-assisted provenance verification, blockchain-based tracking, and digital watermarking – could further enhance accountability and traceability in the global art and antiquities market.
- Start by establishing a robust baseline – the inventory of cultural properties, especially those most at risks, is the foundation.

2. Inter-sectoral, international cooperation and coordination mechanisms

Effective protection of cultural property depends on sustained cooperation across institutional boundaries – among police, customs, cultural authorities, and international partners. The reviewed practices demonstrate a wide range of institutional arrangements that enable coordination between enforcement and heritage agencies, promote inter-agency information sharing, and strengthen transnational collaboration in preventing illicit trafficking.

National and inter-sectoral coordination

Countries have adopted various organizational models to integrate law enforcement with cultural expertise.

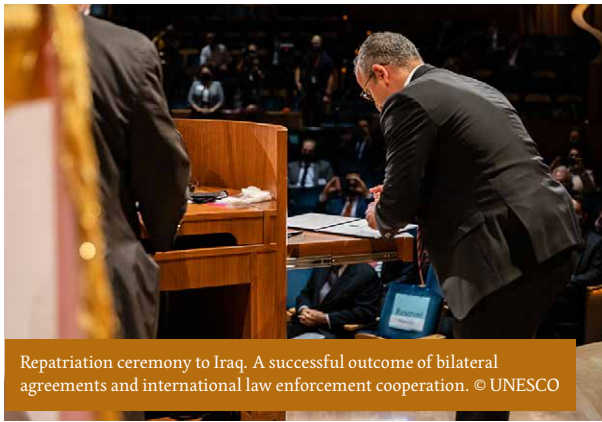
- Italy, Spain, and France stand out for establishing dedicated heritage police units within their national law enforcement systems. Italy's Carabinieri operates nationwide in close coordination with the Ministry of Culture, regional police, and customs authorities. Spain's Heritage Guard within the Guardia Civil and the National Police's Cultural Heritage Brigade work jointly with the Ministry of Culture and Sport and regional cultural departments, ensuring national coverage across diverse jurisdictions. France's OCBC (Office Central de Lutte contre le Trafic des Biens Culturels) – created in 1975 – coordinates directly with customs, the judiciary, and museums, representing one of the longest-standing models of institutionalized cooperation.
- Egypt provides a strong example of structured inter-sectoral collaboration through its Tourist and Antiquities Police, operating under the Ministry of Interior, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. A National Committee for Combating the Illicit Trafficking of Antiquities further unites police, customs, and foreign affairs agencies, creating a single coordination and strategy-setting platform.
- Cambodia's Heritage Protection Police work jointly with the APSARA National Authority in Angkor, combining law enforcement and archaeological expertise in site monitoring and artifact recovery. Cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts ensures the authenticity and proper legal treatment of recovered objects.
- Australia and the United Kingdom have adopted multi-agency coordination models without establishing specialized police units. In Australia, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and the Australian Border Force (ABF) defines clear operational roles: DCCEEW provides heritage expertise, AFP investigates, and ABF manages border enforcement. In the U.K., the Heritage Crime Programme unites police, prosecutors, and heritage organizations such as Historic England and Cadw in Wales, under a national Memorandum of Understanding, to prevent, investigate, and prosecute heritage crimes.
- Mongolia's Heritage Police Unit, under the Criminal Police Department of the National Police Agency, works closely with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Tourism, and Youth, the National Center for Cultural Heritage, district prosecutor's offices, and courts, demonstrating strong intersectoral collaboration in protecting cultural heritage.
- China has an inter-ministerial Joint Conference System for National Cultural Relics Security, a core domestic coordination mechanism approved by the State Council, with 22 member units from various sectors (e.g., cultural heritage, public security, customs, border control, etc.). This joint conference promotes joint law enforcement and policy implementation across different ministries, agencies, and departments.

These models illustrate how specialization or coordination – when properly institutionalized – can be equally effective, provided that mandates are clearly defined and communication channels are routine.

International cooperation and joint frameworks

International collaboration has emerged as a key enabler for preventing cross-border trafficking and ensuring restitution.

- Bilateral and multilateral agreements: Cambodia and the United States have maintained a Memorandum of Understanding on cultural property import restrictions since 2003, renewed in 2023, closing a major market for trafficked Cambodian artifacts. Similarly, China and the United States renewed their 2009 bilateral agreement on combating the illegal trade in cultural relics through 2029, facilitating the return of over 500 pieces/sets of Chinese relics. Egypt has bilateral arrangements with Italy, Switzerland, the UAE, and the U.S., among other, to ensure reciprocal law enforcement cooperation and direct exchange of intelligence.



Repatriation ceremony to Iraq. A successful outcome of bilateral agreements and international law enforcement cooperation. © UNESCO



The Gilgamesh Tablet. A recovered artifact demonstrating the efficacy of global heritage protection frameworks. © UNESCO

- **Regional and international mechanisms:** Within Europe, the OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force brings together law enforcement, customs, and museum experts to share intelligence and develop regionally coordinated responses, particularly in the context of armed conflict or natural hazards. The European Union's Regulation (EU) 2019/880 has significantly strengthened member states' alignment in preventing the illicit trade of cultural goods, and its Import of Cultural Goods (ICG) system offers a practical model for regional joint import/export management. The regulation establishes harmonized rules on import licenses, importer statements, and the prohibition of goods illegally removed from their countries of origin, supported by uniform age and value thresholds and mandatory due-diligence requirements. Its central innovation is the ICG digital platform, a Union-wide, paperless system through which importers submit applications and authorities manage approvals, share information, and conduct risk-based controls. Integrated with EU customs systems, the ICG ensures consistent enforcement, mutual recognition of licenses across member states, and improved traceability and transparency. This combination of common legal standards, a centralized IT infrastructure, and coordinated enforcement mechanisms serves as a strong example of how regions can jointly manage cultural-goods flows, reduce loopholes, enhance cross-border cooperation, and deter trafficking through shared data, harmonized procedures, and digitalized oversight.
- **Operational cooperation:** Spain and Italy conduct joint investigations and recovery operations, particularly with Latin American and Mediterranean partners. The Carabinieri TPC has participated in peacekeeping and reconstruction missions abroad, assisting in heritage site assessments, cataloguing, and training local officials. Such missions have expanded the scope of cultural heritage policing beyond national borders, integrating it into broader frameworks of international security and cultural diplomacy.
- **Global enforcement cooperation:** INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) play a key role in international enforcement cooperation for cultural heritage protection, including through information sharing and the implementation of multinational operations such as Operation Pandora in recent years.



Colombian authorities seizes 242 artifacts in anti-trafficking operations.*
© INTERPOL

Lessons learned and key takeaways

- Institutionalized cooperation at national level – through MOUs, task forces, and standing committees – proves essential for efficient case handling and clear division of responsibilities.
- The fight against illicit trafficking and return and restitution should also be more integrated into

national and regional coordination mechanism on the broader scale of Transnational Organized Crimes.

- Bilateral agreements and participation in multilateral cooperation significantly increase the likelihood of object recovery and repatriation.
- The integration of cultural expertise within police structures strengthens investigative accuracy and facilitates judicial processes.
- International cooperation on the fight against illicit trafficking can also serve as a form of “cultural diplomacy,” reinforcing trust and mutual assistance between source and market countries and benefit cultural heritage protection and exchange more broadly.
- There is a need to strengthen cooperation and exchange between police forces from different regions which can contribute to strengthened enforcement in addressing the transnational organized crimes.

3. Education and capacity-building for law enforcement

Strengthening the skills and knowledge of law enforcement officials is central to the effective protection of cultural heritage. The reviewed practices demonstrate how countries have developed specialized training programmes, cross-agency collaboration, and international exchanges to enhance investigative capacity, improve identification of cultural objects, and foster a shared understanding of legal frameworks and procedures.

National training programmes and specialized curricula

At national level, many countries have integrated training on the fight against illicit trafficking within their national police training system to ensure continuity and professionalization in cultural property protection.

- Italy’s Carabinieri provides in-house [training](#) that includes archaeology, art history, forgery detection, investigation techniques, and the management of stolen art databases. Officers also learn to coordinate with customs and museums, ensuring that recovered objects are properly handled and catalogued.
- Spain’s Heritage Guard offers similarly rigorous instruction, preparing officers to identify illicit objects, investigate trafficking networks, and collaborate with prosecutors. The Heritage Guard also conducts internal [training](#) sessions for other units of the Guardia Civil and regional police, broadening awareness across the force.
- In Germany, the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office conducts annual seminars for criminal investigation officers on the Act on the Protection of Cultural Property (2016), cooperation with the ministries responsible for cultural property, and the legal procedures.
- Egypt’s Tourist and Antiquities Police receive specialized courses on national heritage law (Law No. 117 of 1983), artifact identification, and archaeological field procedures. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities supplements this training with cultural and art history modules to improve officers’ ability to distinguish authentic artifacts from replicas.
- Australia’s DCCEEW and the Australian Federal Police co-develop training modules for border officers and investigators, focusing on the identification of indigenous cultural objects and protected materials under the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act (1986). These programmes equip officers with the knowledge to recognize, seize, and preserve cultural items with minimal risk of damage.
- China has introduced localized [training](#) at provincial levels, particularly in heritage-rich regions such as Henan and Shaanxi, where the local police force work jointly with cultural heritage departments

to identify stolen relics and enforce heritage protection laws.

- Egypt and Australia both conduct joint workshops for police, customs, and heritage officials to clarify roles in seizure, documentation, and expert verification of artifacts.
- Spain's Heritage Guard and France's OCBC regularly invite museum curators, art dealers, and archaeologists to participate in sessions that build mutual understanding between cultural and security professionals.
- The United Kingdom provides practical training for Border Force officers and police through Historic England, emphasizing the use of the ICOM Red List system and risk-based identification at points of entry.

International and regional capacity-building initiatives

Beyond national programmes, cross-border training remains a critical tool for knowledge transfer and joint operational readiness.

- The OSCE's [regional workshops](#) (2023) for Central and Eastern Europe gathered police, customs, and museum experts from eight countries to train on crime scene forensics, tracing of illicit financial flows, and use of the dark web for investigations. They also integrated prosecutors to ensure that training translates into effective prosecution outcomes.
- The United States' Cultural Property, Art, and Antiquities (CPAA) Program under Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) conducts [regular national and international training](#) in partnership with the U.S. Department of State and the Smithsonian Institution. Since 2009, nearly 500 U.S. officials and foreign partners have been trained in investigation and prosecution of cultural property crimes.
- France's OCBC and Italy's Carabinieri are active international trainers, supporting capacity-building missions for police and customs in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans. These programmes emphasize the use of INTERPOL databases, forensic documentation, and joint operational procedures.
- Cambodia benefits from long-term partnerships with foreign police forces, including the FBI, Australian Federal Police, and French Gendarmerie, who provide on-site technical training in surveillance, undercover investigation, and forensic analysis.
- The ASEAN region received a dedicated capacity-building course in March 2025, organized in Vicenza (Italy) by the Italian Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Property and the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units, for representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam, with involvement of the ASEAN Secretariat. The course also served as an opportunity to discuss possible collaboration among the Asean Member States, UNIDROIT Secretariat and the newly established Asian Transnational Law Center.
- Globally, UNESCO remains the leading capacity-builder in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property. Since 2023, the Organization has trained over 1400 law enforcement officers, customs officials, cultural professionals, prosecutors and judges from 80 countries across all regions, including Africa, Small Island Developing States, and countries in emergencies. These trainings are implemented within the framework of the 1970 Convention delivered in close partnership with key international enforcement and heritage actors, including INTERPOL, UNIDROIT, the World Customs Organization (WCO), ICOM, as well as regional and national partners such as the European Union, France's OCBC, Italy's Carabinieri TPC, and others. UNESCO's approach combines legal, operational and policy dimensions and addresses the full chain from prevention to monitoring, seizure, prosecution and restitution.

Lessons learned and key takeaways

- Regular, institutionalized training ensures that heritage crime prevention remains an integral part of police practice rather than an ad hoc activity. There is also a need to integrate cultural heritage protection into the curricula of police colleagues and universities.
- Cross-sectoral training involving cultural, customs, and police authorities enhances the entire enforcement chain, from seizure to prosecution.
- International exchanges allow officers to stay abreast of emerging trafficking trends, new technologies, and evolving legal frameworks.
- A practical balance between cultural knowledge and investigative technique is essential – officers must understand both the cultural significance and the evidentiary value of the objects they protect.

4. Community engagement and public awareness campaigns

Community engagement and public awareness are vital to the long-term prevention of illicit trafficking. When the public understands the value of cultural heritage and the damage caused by illicit trade, they become essential partners in protection. Across the reviewed countries, diverse approaches – from community monitoring and museum education to digital media outreach – show how police and cultural authorities collaborate with citizens and institutions to foster shared responsibility.

UNESCO's global initiatives



- In November 2024, UNESCO launched an awareness-raising campaign against illicit trafficking of cultural property in partnership with JCDecaux on the occasion of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). This initiative aimed to engage world leaders, the local community and tourists in safeguarding cultural heritage, emphasizing the devastating consequences of illicit trafficking on communities, cultural rights, and the shared memory of humanity. Building on this momentum, the campaign has since been progressively expanded to additional regions, with deployments and preparations underway in Latin America, Europe and the Arab States, including in Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Cyprus and Iraq.
- In September 2025, UNESCO launched the [Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects](#). A flagship project of the Organization, the Virtual Museum is the world's first immersive reality museum of stolen cultural objects at a global scale, and a powerful tool to raise global awareness on heritage protection. The Museum can also be leveraged by Law Enforcement agencies for their awareness raising initiatives.

Community-based approaches

Local communities are often the first line of defense for heritage protection, especially in rural or archaeological areas.

- Cambodia provides one of the most effective models through the APSARA National Authority and the Heritage Protection Police in the Angkor region. Former looters have been reintegrated as temple guards or maintenance workers, transforming potential offenders into protectors. Communities are



Interface of the UNESCO Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects

encouraged to report suspicious activities, building an informal but highly efficient intelligence network around key heritage sites.

- Egypt's Tourist and Antiquities Police work closely with village councils in Luxor, Aswan, and Minya, enlisting residents to monitor archaeological zones and report illicit excavations. This [collaboration](#) has created a community surveillance system that supplements formal policing.
- Spain's Heritage Guard promotes community participation through a dedicated hotline and email for reporting suspected heritage crimes. Their officers also conduct awareness activities in rural areas, encouraging farmers and local associations to act as custodians of nearby archaeological sites.
- Australia has focused its engagement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The government supports training and [documentation projects](#) that help communities record and register cultural materials, while law enforcement provides direct communication channels for rapid reporting of theft or illegal export.
- Mongolia's national campaigns "Heritage-Culture" and "Temples and Monasteries," implemented by the Heritage Police Unit, focus on preventing thefts from temples and monasteries. Collaboration with local communities and religious institutions under these initiatives has led to a documented reduction in thefts, illustrating how targeted community interventions can reduce crime incidence.

Collaboration with cultural and commercial institutions

Building partnerships with museums, galleries, auction houses, and private collectors ensures that those handling cultural goods become allies in prevention.

- Australia and Spain have developed outreach programmes targeting the art market. They train art dealers and auction houses to verify provenance, consult INTERPOL databases, and request export certificates before making purchases.
- France's OCBC and Italy's Carabinieri maintain regular dialogue with museum professionals, archaeologists, and art historians, who often detect the first signs of illicit trade.

Public awareness and media campaigns

High-visibility media campaigns have proven effective in shaping public attitudes and deterring trafficking.

- Egypt and Spain routinely organize press conferences following major recoveries, using the publicity to both celebrate successes and raise awareness about legal responsibilities.
- China's National Cultural Heritage Administration combines repatriation exhibitions such as The Journey Back Home and The Road Home with digital platforms listing stolen artifacts. These initiatives foster public pride while promoting vigilance.
- Cambodia and Italy use repatriation ceremonies as educational opportunities, generating media coverage that highlights international cooperation and the value of restitution.

- France and Australia employ museums and public exhibitions as spaces for awareness campaigns, emphasizing ethical collecting and the importance of reporting cultural crimes.
- Mongolia's Heritage Police Unit compiled cultural properties that had been prevented from being illegally exported into a publication titled "Rescued Heritage" and mounted a special exhibition of the same name at the Chinggis Khaan National Museum in 2024. The exhibition raised public awareness of the risks of illicit trafficking, and reinforced trust in police enforcement.



Recovered artifacts on display at the Chinggis Khaan National Museum, Mongolia (2024), as part of a national awareness campaign.* © National Police Agency

Lessons learned and key takeaways

- Communities are the first line of protection and defense, and must be engaged and empowered for cultural heritage protection. Sustained community engagement transforms local populations from passive observers into active protectors of heritage
- The crimes of illicit trafficking of cultural property increases communities' security risks, which needs to be taken into consideration for the implementation of response measures.
- Strengthened community-enforcement cooperation at local level increases enforcement efficiency and community resilience.



Umbakumba Elders sharing shell doll traditions with consulting parties and the next generation* © I Johnston, AIATSIS. Source: aiatsis.gov.au

- Partnerships with art market actors, museums, and collectors create shared accountability and reduce demand for illicit goods.
- Public campaigns – particularly those that humanize heritage loss through stories of return and recovery – enhance deterrence and foster collective ownership of cultural property protection.
- Transparency and visibility are crucial: each public success story reinforces trust in law enforcement and inspires broader cooperation.

5. Institutional development and policy innovation

The creation and evolution of specialized heritage police units and coordination frameworks reflect a growing global recognition that cultural heritage protection requires dedicated structures, skilled personnel, and strong legal foundations. The following practices demonstrate innovative institutional models and policy mechanisms that have shaped modern approaches to combating illicit trafficking.

Establishment and evolution of specialized units

The institutionalization of heritage policing represents one of the most significant innovations in cultural property protection.

- Italy's Carabinieri pioneered the concept of a dedicated police unit for cultural heritage. Its dual role as both a law enforcement body and a cultural protection agency has become a model replicated worldwide.
- France's OCBC extended this model into a centralized investigative service with national jurisdiction,

setting the standard for inter-agency coordination and database management.

- Spain's Heritage Guard and the National Police Cultural Heritage Brigade further adapted the model to a decentralized system that integrates national and regional authorities.
- Egypt's Tourist and Antiquities Police, Cambodia's Heritage Protection Police, and Mongolia's Heritage Police Unit show how specialized heritage policing can emerge within existing law enforcement systems, balancing cultural expertise and general policing capabilities.



Specialized units joins forces to tackle heritage crime in Wales* © gov.wales

- The United Kingdom and Australia demonstrate alternative pathways: instead of specialized units, they have established multi-agency frameworks (the U.K. Heritage Crime Programme and Australia's interdepartmental MoU system), ensuring functional specialization without institutional separation.

Policy integration and legal frameworks

Legal and policy instruments underpin effective institutional action.

- Italy's national legislation integrates cultural heritage protection within both criminal and administrative law, mandating cooperation between the Carabinieri and the Ministry of Culture.
- Germany's Act on the Protection of Cultural Property (2016) regulates the protection of national cultural property against emigration, the return of unlawfully imported and exported cultural property, and the returning of cultural properties in international loan transactions.
- The European Union's Regulation 2019/880 represents a major step toward harmonized policy innovation, setting uniform import rules across member states to prevent trafficking at the borders.
- Egypt's Antiquities Protection Law (No. 117/1983) and subsequent amendments provide a clear legal framework for enforcement, prosecution, and repatriation, empowering the Tourist and Antiquities Police to act swiftly.



Cover of the handbook to the Cultural Property Protection Act, published by the BKM in 2017

- Australia's Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act (1986) links law enforcement action to a clear export-permit system, offering a model for balancing protection with legitimate trade.
- China and the United States have institutionalized bilateral cooperation through formal agreements that create enforceable obligations for import restrictions and restitution, embedding international law into domestic practice.
- Mongolia integrates cultural heritage protection across multiple legal instruments, including the Constitution, the National Security Concept, the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, and key provisions of the Criminal Code (Articles 17.1, 18.5, and Chapter 25).
- In the Republic of Korea, the Act on Conservation and Utilization of Cultural Heritage (Article 2.9) specifically

defines the term “Overseas Cultural Heritage”, which means any cultural heritage located within the territory of a foreign country which has direct historical and cultural relations with the Republic of Korea. The principle of approaching such heritage is defined as “those taken out of the country illegally/illegitimately are to be repatriated to Korea; and those taken out lawfully/legitimately are to be actively preserved and utilized”.

Innovative approaches and emerging trends

Beyond structural reforms, several innovative practices are reshaping the landscape of heritage protection.

- Italy’s “cultural diplomacy” missions deploy Carabinieri officers abroad to assist in post-conflict recovery and international restitution efforts, linking cultural protection to peacekeeping and soft power.
- France and Spain integrate heritage protection within broader transnational security frameworks, emphasizing cooperation against organized crime and money laundering.
- The UNESCO toolkit (2023) for judiciary and law enforcement introduced digital tools and legal guidance that serve as adaptable global training materials.
- The OSCE’s Heritage Crime Task Force exemplifies how regional organizations can institutionalize heritage protection within broader security mandates, providing sustained support to national police forces.
- The Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, a special organization, was established in 2012 as an affiliated of the Cultural Heritage Foundation in the Republic of Korea. This organization has oversea offices in countries such as the United States and France, where major repatriation and restoration projects on overseas Korean cultural heritage are conducted.

Lessons learned and key takeaways

- Dedicated heritage police units enhance the visibility, accountability, and professionalism of cultural heritage protection efforts.
- Integrating legal frameworks with operational mandates ensures coherent enforcement and facilitates judicial outcomes.
- Policy innovation – particularly through regional frameworks and cultural diplomacy – broadens the relevance of heritage protection to global peace, development, and governance agendas.
- The most sustainable models combine specialization, inter-sectoral coordination, and international cooperation under a coherent institutional vision.

Conclusion

The experiences reviewed in this document demonstrate that police engagement in the protection of cultural heritage is evolving from reactive enforcement toward preventive, collaborative, and knowledge-based action. Law enforcement authorities are increasingly working in partnership with cultural institutions, customs, and judicial bodies, supported by the engagement of communities and the use of advanced technologies.

Taken together, the baseline findings and good practices presented here reveal a clear direction of progress. While significant disparities remain across regions in institutional capacity, coordination, and training, a growing number of Member States are establishing specialized units, adopting digital tools, and participating in international cooperation frameworks that strengthen their operational readiness and legal effectiveness.

Several overarching lessons emerge:

- Integration is essential. Effective models align the efforts of police, customs, cultural ministries, and judicial authorities through clear mandates, shared databases, and coordinated operations.
- Technology amplifies impact. National and international databases, digital forensic tools, and online monitoring systems enhance both prevention and transparency in the art market.
- Capacity development ensures sustainability. Systematic and institutionalized training – nationally and internationally – builds professional competence and continuity within law enforcement.
- Communities and institutions are indispensable allies. When citizens, museums, and market actors understand their role in safeguarding heritage, enforcement efforts become more far-reaching and effective.
- Policy innovation underpins progress. Legal clarity, institutional specialization, and diplomatic cooperation create an enabling environment for long-term success.
- Planning and resourcing determine scale. Sustainable resourcing - in financial, human resource and institutional terms - is vital to ensure strong enforcement capacities. This requires sound institutional planning and strengthening, adequate budgeting, and the strategic allocation of funds and personnel.

Protecting cultural heritage through law enforcement is not a niche undertaking but a cornerstone of sustainable development, cultural diversity, and the rule of law. As the illicit trade in cultural property continues to evolve – especially in the digital sphere – continued investment in technology, training, and inter-agency partnerships will be indispensable. Strengthening the capacity of police and customs authorities, guided by the principles of the 1970 Convention, will ensure that humanity’s shared heritage remains safeguarded for future generations.

Enhancing Law Enforcement Capacities against the Looting and Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property – a Self-assessment and Capacity Development

This checklist was used to guide the panel and group discussion at the workshop “Safeguarding Heritage through Law Enforcement: International Good Practices and Regional Cooperation” (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 27-28 November 2025). Key insights and practical observations emerging from the discussions are summarized in the text boxes under each thematic area as reference.

Checklist

1. Use of technology and digital tools

Guiding questions/assessment

- Does the country have a national database of stolen or missing cultural property?
- Do you have established protocol of uploading stolen and missing objects into the INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art Database?
- Do border control authorities (customs, police) have real-time access to these databases?
- Are there standard operating procedures (SOPs) for documenting and preserving digital evidence?
- Are these databases and other related information publicly accessible to enable due diligence by museums, collectors, and the public?
- Does the country monitor online art markets, social media, and e-commerce platforms for illicit sales?
- Are there mechanisms for cooperation with digital platforms and technology providers?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Establish or upgrade national databases of stolen and missing cultural objects, ensuring digital interoperability with INTERPOL and other international systems.
- » Remain in close contact with the competent authority for culture. If digitization and geo-reference inventories of at-risk cultural heritage are created as the baseline for technology integration.
- » Integrate database access across law enforcement, customs, and cultural institutions to enable information exchange and verification for investigations and border check.
- » Develop and institutionalize SOPs for digital evidence collection, forensic imaging, metadata management, and secure archiving of seized materials.
- » Conclude cooperation agreements with online platforms to enable proactive listing filters, seller verification (KYC), and rapid removal of suspicious listings.
- » Leverage emerging technologies such as AI-assisted image recognition for investigation and border control. *If your country already has such tools, consider using it to support the countries in crisis or with limited capacities.*

Discussions in Mongolia underscored that national heritage databases are only effective when they are institutionally embedded and routinely used by law enforcement and border authorities. Participants emphasized the need to operationalize Mongolia's cultural heritage registration and information system (introduced in 2025) by granting systematic access to police and customs and establishing procedures for regular data consultation during investigations and border controls. The experience highlights a key policy lesson: digital tools must be accompanied by clear governance arrangements, access protocols, and inter-agency coordination mechanisms to translate technical systems into operational impact against illicit trafficking.

2. Inter-sectoral integration and national coordination mechanisms

Guiding questions/assessment

- Does a national coordination mechanism exist among police, customs, cultural, and judicial authorities for cultural property protection?
- Are roles and responsibilities across ministries and agencies clearly defined?
- Are there formalized cooperation mechanisms (e.g., MoUs, standing committees, task forces, joint databases) for information sharing and joint operations?
- Is cultural property protection included within broader strategies and mechanisms in national security, organized crime, cybercrime, anti-money laundering, and border management?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Establish or strengthen national inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms bringing together police, customs, culture, judiciary, foreign affairs, security agencies, and other relevant bodies, with clear terms of reference and operating protocols.
- » Designate focal points within each authority and establish secure, real-time communication channels to facilitate rapid information sharing and operational coordination.
- » Organize annual or semestral coordination meetings to assess risks, exchange information, and plan joint operations.
- » Integrate cultural property protection into national organized crime, cybercrime, anti-money-laundering, and transnational trafficking strategies, and advocate for its inclusion in regional/subregional mechanisms.
- » Develop or update national Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for the seizure, documentation, and chain of custody of cultural objects.
- » Promote structured cooperation with sub-national authorities, museums, communities, and custodial institutions, including through simplified reporting templates and local early-warning mechanisms.

The Mongolia workshop revealed that fragmented institutional mandates and siloed operations remain a major constraint in addressing cultural property crime. Participants identified the need to strengthen coordination among the Ministry of Culture, cultural heritage institutions, police, customs, and prosecutorial authorities through formalized mechanisms and regular information exchange. Particular emphasis was placed on clarifying roles, improving communication between national and local levels, and integrating cultural heritage protection into broader enforcement cooperation frameworks. This experience reinforces the policy importance of institutionalized coordination mechanisms as a prerequisite for effective and timely responses to illicit trafficking.

3. Education and capacity-building for law enforcement

Guiding questions/assessment

- Is the protection of cultural property integrated into police and customs training curricula at national and local levels?
- Are there dedicated modules on art crime investigation, cultural heritage law, and handling of artifacts in the formal education of law enforcement?
- Do training programmes involve cross-sectoral participation (law enforcement, customs, museums, judiciary)?
- Are there regular and institutionalized capacity-building activities, rather than ad hoc workshops?
- Does the country participate in regional or international training initiatives organized by UNESCO and other international organizations?
- Do you have dedicated research programme to analyse the crimes related with theft, looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property, such as organized crime groups involved, the trafficking hubs, routes, and patterns?
- Are universities and training/research academies engaged as knowledge partners for combatting illicit trafficking and heritage protection?
- Are there localized and adapted training materials and case studies to reflect current trafficking trends, including online trade?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Integrate cultural heritage protection into national police and customs curricula, including modules on relevant legislation, identification of cultural property, and investigative procedures.
- » Develop specialized training programmes for heritage crime units, combining legal, archaeological, and forensic dimensions.
- » Institutionalize regular refresher courses and certification systems for officers, customs agents, and prosecutors.
- » Conduct joint inter-agency training workshops involving law enforcement, customs, museum professionals, and art-market actors to strengthen mutual understanding and coordination.
- » Establish partnerships with universities and heritage institutions to develop academic modules and research on art crime and provenance studies.
- » Facilitate international and interregional exchanges to share case experience, standardize procedures, and build networks of trained specialists.
- » Include cultural heritage modules in peacekeeping and crisis-response training, ensuring that deployed officers can identify and protect cultural sites and objects.
- » Develop e-learning and open-access resources to reach wider audiences and ensure continuity of learning, especially in resource-constrained contexts.
- » Document and share good practices through national or regional training databases (e.g., UNESCO-INTERPOL-ICCROM repositories).

Mongolia's experience illustrates the limitations of one-off training activities in the absence of institutional follow-up. While tailored trainings have been delivered to police, customs, and cultural professionals, participants stressed the need to integrate cultural heritage protection into formal police and customs curricula and to establish mechanisms to assess training outcomes. Priority was given to developing specialized expertise within investigative and judicial institutions and to expanding participation in international training programmes. This highlights a broader policy lesson: sustainable capacity development requires institutionalization, continuity, and performance-based evaluation.

4. Community engagement and public awareness campaigns

Guiding questions/assessment

- Are local communities engaged in the protection and monitoring of cultural heritage, especially in high-risk or remote areas?
- Are there formal or informal mechanisms for communities to report suspected looting or trafficking? Such as a community-hotline or online platform?
- Do law enforcement and cultural authorities collaborate with museums, educational institutions, and community organizations to promote awareness?
- Are there national communication strategies or campaigns on the prevention of illicit trafficking, including on the occasions of UNESCO International Day against illicit trafficking of cultural property?
- Are there educational programmes on the fight against illicit trafficking and return and restitution, focusing on the youth?
- Are art-market actors, private collectors, and galleries involved in awareness and ethical-trade initiatives?
- Are digital and social-media platforms leveraged to foster transparency and public participation in heritage protection?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Establish structured community-based monitoring systems for archaeological sites and cultural areas, providing local residents with reporting channels and small-scale incentives for participation.
- » Integrate cultural heritage protection into local education and awareness-raising programmes, especially in areas surrounding heritage sites.
- » Develop local liaison mechanisms between law enforcement and community representatives to facilitate information exchange.
- » Launch nationwide awareness campaigns (press, television, social media) emphasizing the value of cultural heritage and the risks of illicit trafficking.
- » Engage museums, auction houses, and collectors in ethical-trade dialogues, promoting due-diligence practices and self-regulatory codes.
- » Use return and restitution and related exhibitions and events as opportunities for public outreach, education, and media storytelling that highlight the human dimension of heritage recovery.
- » Encourage youth participation and creative outreach, such as school projects, exhibitions, and digital storytelling projects focused on cultural identity and heritage protection.
- » Leverage partnerships with media or platforms to engage the public and raise awareness.

The workshop emphasized that in geographically vast and sparsely populated areas, communities play a critical preventive role in heritage protection. In Mongolia, local residents and environmental inspectors are often the first to detect illegal excavations, particularly in remote pastoral landscapes. Strong cultural and religious values – especially concerning heritage associated with Genghis Khan – function as informal protection mechanisms. However, participants noted the absence of dedicated reporting channels and limited awareness of legal responsibilities. This experience underscores the policy need to formalize community engagement through accessible reporting mechanisms, targeted awareness campaigns, and basic training for local actors.

5. Institutional development and resourcing

Guiding questions/assessment

- Does the country have a dedicated heritage police or specialized enforcement unit for cultural property protection?
- Are there local enforcement capacities to deal with the issue of theft, looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property?
- Are customs units, border posts, and airport authorities equipped with specialized officers or focal points for cultural property control?
- Is there dedicated and predictable budget allocation for preventive and response measures against looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property (annual training, technology advancement, equipment, investigation, storage, transport, legal processes, community engagement)?
- Do enforcement institutions have access to necessary infrastructure (secure storage, evidence rooms, digital inventory systems, communication tools, online monitoring tools)?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Establish or strengthen specialized police or customs units dedicated to cultural property protection, ensuring adequate staffing, training, and budget allocation.
- » Designate specialized customs and border officers and equip them with the necessary tools (red lists, scanners, SOPs, digital inventory templates, secure storage).
- » Provide staffing for cultural property protection in police and customs.
- » Invest in essential tools, equipment and infrastructure, including investigation and inspection tools, secure storage and handling infrastructure, operational field kits, and digital systems and communication platforms.
- » Promote the creation of joint investigation teams, including cybercrime and financial crime specialists, to address emerging online trafficking and money-laundering aspects.
- » Encourage regular institutional self-assessment to identify gaps in staffing, resources, and coordination, informing annual planning and budget requests.

Mongolia's discussions highlighted the importance of aligning legal frameworks with institutional capacity and operational practice. Participants identified gaps in legal clarity, limited specialization within enforcement agencies, and insufficient integration of cultural property protection into national security and crime-prevention strategies. Priority actions included designating specialized officers, improving inter-agency information systems, and strengthening cooperation with experienced international counterparts. This experience illustrates that institutional development must be supported by coherent legal mandates, predictable resourcing, and long-term policy planning to effectively combat illicit trafficking.

6. International cooperation and exchange

Guiding questions/assessment

- Is culture included into existing enforcement cooperation frameworks, such as bilateral and regional joint investigation teams (JITs) and financial and cybercrime?
- Are there established channels for cross-border information exchange, including rapid alerts on thefts, seizures, and trafficking routes?
- Are joint investigations or coordinated operations with other countries conducted, particularly when trafficking networks span borders?
- Does the country contribute to or benefit from shared regional/international facilities, laboratories, digital tools, or AI-based systems for object identification, provenance verification, or online monitoring?
- Is there participation in regional or international peer exchange, capacity-building programmes, and training-of-trainers programmes, including connecting the neighbouring countries and the countries of origins, transit and destination?

Recommended actions (how/what)

- » Integrate cultural property protection into existing bilateral, regional, and international enforcement cooperation frameworks, including joint investigation teams (JITs), financial intelligence exchanges, and cybercrime cooperation mechanisms.
- » Strengthen cross-border information exchange, including explore to establish or upgrade rapid-alert mechanisms for thefts, seizures, suspicious shipments, and online trafficking.
- » Develop and operationalize joint investigations with countries of origin, transit, and destination, ensuring close collaboration between police, customs, prosecutors, cybercrime units, and cultural authorities, including for online trafficking.
- » Pool and share expertise, facilities and technologies, establish a national roster of experts that can support both national and international joint investigations, pool and expand access to facilities and technologies, such as AI-based image recognition tools, provenance research centres, digital forensics labs, and secure storage facilities for seized objects.
- » Participate or initiate structured peer-to-peer exchanges and regional capacity-building, including dialogue between countries of origin, transit, and destination, training-of-trainers schemes, secondments, and joint simulation exercises with neighbouring and partner countries.

Discussions in Mongolia highlighted the need to move from ad hoc international cooperation toward more structured and operational exchange mechanisms. Participants emphasized strengthening cross-border information sharing, making systematic use of INTERPOL channels, and establishing direct contact points between police and customs authorities in countries of origin, transit, and destination. The workshop also underscored the value of peer-to-peer learning through bilateral and regional capacity-building activities, particularly to adapt proven tools and procedures to national contexts. This experience illustrates that sustained international cooperation depends on institutionalized communication, shared information systems, and regular joint activities rather than isolated exchanges.

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