



Cultural Heritage Agency  
*Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*

**INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE  
COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2021-2024**

# **From shared heritage to shared challenges**

**KEY POINTS**

## Continuation and new emphasis

A worldwide heritage community, in which professionals connect, learn from each other and develop knowledge together. That is the mission of the International Heritage Cooperation Programme of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE). This is not only because of the importance of ensuring that heritage is passed on to future generations, but primarily because heritage is valuable in a changing world. Heritage reveals who we are, where we come from and what we stand for. Without knowledge of the past, understanding ourselves and others is virtually impossible. Equally, heritage can contribute to identifying solutions for societal challenges, such as climate change, sustainability, participation and social inclusion. The challenges faced by society call for continuous development, the ability to respond to changing demands and circumstances and a shared quest for appropriate solutions. They call for curiosity, openness and innovation of a kind that are not confined within national boundaries. Indeed, it is only by joining forces and learning from – and with – each other that we can fully benefit from the true potential of heritage. International cooperation can enhance countries' abilities to develop and shape a sustainable future.

The RCE is just one of many players within the worldwide heritage community. Yet the RCE has an important role to play in promoting international cooperation in heritage and the sharing of knowledge. In this context, societal challenges in which international cooperation offers an added value above national cooperation alone, are central. Think, for instance, of issues such as the repatriation of colonial collections, the management of shipwrecks in foreign waters and urban renewal. Together with its foreign and Dutch partners, the RCE contributes to finding solutions for these (shared) challenges by bringing experts together and facilitating the sharing and development of knowledge. This enhances heritage conservation both in the Netherlands and in the partner countries. In doing this, the RCE is also fostering relationships with other countries and contributing to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

In order to achieve these ambitions, the RCE has established the International Heritage Cooperation programme. It continues the work achieved in the period 2009–2020 within the Shared Cultural Heritage programme. Although shared heritage remains relevant for the Netherlands, this new policy period will focus on the shared challenges we face. After all, every country faces similar issues in caring for its heritage. But because every country operates in a different context, with different issues and approaches, we can also learn from each other. This shift in emphasis is in line with the need in the partner countries and the Netherlands to ensure that international cooperation not only benefits our shared heritage, but also the shared challenges we face.

## International Cultural Policy

For the period 2021–2024, the RCE has again been given the task to focus on international heritage cooperation. The Netherlands' International Cultural Policy (Internationaal Cultuurbeleid, ICB) for 2021–2024 – drawn up by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (BZ), the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) – singles out heritage as an area of focus. This policy framework has the following aims:

1. The Dutch cultural sector will occupy a strong position abroad through visibility, exchanges and long-term partnerships.
2. Dutch cultural expression will be used to support bilateral relationships with other countries.
3. We will harness the power of the cultural sector and creative industries in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in connection with the BHOS agenda in focus regions.

## ICB partners and their roles

In the ICB 2021–2024, the RCE has been appointed as one of the executing agencies on the topic of cultural heritage. Other executive organisations are: National Archives of the Netherlands, DutchCulture, the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (KIEN) and the Dutch embassies in 23 partner countries, namely Belgium/Flanders, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, the UK, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, China, South Korea, Australia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, the United States and South Africa. The RCE already cooperated on shared heritage with the last ten of these countries during the previous period.

These organisations and partners work with each other and other institutions and experts on a sustainable future for heritage. Each partner has its own programme based on its own specific expertise. The National Archives of the Netherlands ensures that archives can be used. DutchCulture supports Dutch heritage organisations in their international activities. KIEN focuses on intangible heritage. In each partner country, the Dutch embassy serves as a cultural coordinator. The RCE focuses on sharing knowledge and expertise. In recent years, the RCE has been engaged in active cooperation with Australia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, the United States and South Africa and will continue to build on this work. In addition, the RCE is open to cooperation with the other 13 countries, depending on the issues raised and the opportunities that cooperation with these countries offers, in relation to the challenges identified and available resources and capacity. Given that the budget and capacity will remain virtually unchanged, selections will have to be made.

## Aims of the International Heritage Cooperation programme

“To give our future a past and our past a future”. That is the essence of the RCE’s mission. As part of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the RCE reports directly to the Minister and implements legislation and regulations and heritage policy set jointly by the Ministry and the Agency. The RCE also develops knowledge that can be applied in practice and provides advice on national monuments, landscape & environment, archaeology and movable heritage.

As executive agency for the International Cultural Policy, the RCE will work to achieve this mission based on the view that international exchange and cooperation is essential for countries’ abilities to develop and shape a sustainable future. The RCE aims to make an important contribution to boosting and facilitating international connections, jointly developing new knowledge and expertise and ensuring that the results are visible and accessible. This centres on those societal challenges in which international cooperation offers greater added value than national cooperation alone. In doing so, the International Heritage Cooperation programme promotes the conservation of heritage in the Netherlands and the partner countries.

This ambition is reflected in the following goals:

1. Fostering connections, exchange and cooperation in order to enhance heritage conservation in the Netherlands and in the partner countries
2. Developing new knowledge and expertise together for the purpose of societal challenges where international cooperation offers greater added value than national cooperation alone
3. Ensuring that knowledge and expertise developed within the programme are visible and accessible.

## New emphases

The programme will build further on experiences and insights gained in previous years, with certain key shifts in emphasis. In previous years, the RCE aimed to cooperate internationally based on its own knowledge and expertise. In the new policy period, the focus will be on the opportunities that the RCE can offer in the joint development of new knowledge, expertise and instruments and sharing the results thereof. To make that possible, we create space for experimentation in shaping the future of heritage conservation in cooperation with the international field.

In its work with other countries, the programme will focus on challenges where international cooperation offers greater added value than national cooperation alone, based on issues identified jointly with the partner countries. A demand-driven approach, both in responding to demand from partner countries and to Dutch challenges, will be essential in ensuring the sustainability of international cooperation. In identifying challenges, the RCE will play a proactive role, taking the initiative when necessary regarding specific challenges and seeking out partners with shared interests. In assessing potential challenges, the following criteria will be applied: relevance, urgency and added value.

## More information

If you would like to know more about the RCE’s International Heritage Cooperation programme, please contact Jinna Smit, Programme Director International Heritage Cooperation, via [j.smit@cultureelerfgoed.nl](mailto:j.smit@cultureelerfgoed.nl).

## Colophon

Text: Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

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