



## Briefing:

### **UNESCO Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context**

New guidance for assessing impacts to World Heritage Sites

- UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee (ICCRUM, ICOMOS & IUCN), have issued new guidance for assessing impacts from projects that could potentially affect World Heritage Sites: ***Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage context*** <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidance-toolkit-impact-assessments/>
- The new guidance incorporates and replaces ICOMOS' *Guidance on Impact Assessment for Cultural World Heritage Properties* (2011) and IUCN's *World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment* (2013). **It now represents the most updated reference on conducting and reviewing impact assessments for all World Heritage properties.**
- The guidance is the latest in the series of World Heritage Resource Manuals. It responds to an identified need for more focused training and capacity development in specific areas where States Parties and World Heritage site managers require greater support.
- It explains how impact assessments can be used to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties. The guidance covers the management of continuity and change to inform good decision-making and so support implementation of the *1972 World Heritage Convention*, along with the *Operational Guidelines*. At its heart is the need to identify fundamental incompatibilities between proposed actions and the primacy of protecting Outstanding Universal Value.
- The manual fosters cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary collaboration to identify solutions for protecting World Heritage sites and support good quality and appropriate development. States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, heritage managers, decision-makers, planners, developers, project proponents, communities and others are invited to use it to help realise the collective commitment to passing on heritage assets to future generations.
- The new guidance provides a framework within which to conduct impact assessments where a transformative action is proposed or undertaken in or around a World Heritage property which may affect its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) or other heritage/conservation values. The framework can be applied to both natural and cultural properties and to small- or large-scale projects.
- It has been drafted to facilitate evaluation under existing national frameworks, therefore informing assessment under processes such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It can also be applied where such formal assessments are not required to assist in producing a standalone Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA).
- The document provides an outline of the World Heritage system, high-level principles and an explanation of the process for undertaking EIAs or HIAs. There is also a **glossary**, suggested **toolkit**, and of particular practical use a series of **checklists** for applications (see document

appendices).

- It is structured as follows:
  - **Section 2** discusses the principles that UNESCO considers should underpin all impact assessments of proposed actions that could affect World Heritage properties and their Outstanding Universal Value;
  - **Section 3** explains World Heritage and the concepts on which it is based with an overview of the World Heritage system comprising the World Heritage Convention, World Heritage properties and their values and attributes, World Heritage governance and management, and links to sustainable development;
  - **Section 4** discusses the need for impact assessment and describes the different types of assessment (e.g. EIA, SEA, HIA) covering each of the sequential steps from screening and scoping through to decision-making and follow-up monitoring;
  - **Section 5** addresses cases where World Heritage needs to be considered as part of a mandatory form of impact assessment. It responds to concerns regarding the rigour of assessment of impact on OUV, and the thoroughness of understanding of OUV, attributes and other heritage/conservation values, by outlining how a wider impact assessment should address World Heritage in order to meet the requirements of the World Heritage Convention. It identifies who is responsible for each stage of the HIA process within the context of monitoring the state of conservation of individual World Heritage properties;
  - **Section 6** addresses cases where the proposed action would not require impact assessment under existing legislation under the national framework and explains the process of carrying out such a stand-alone HIA;
  - Of particular practical use will be the **Appendices** which contain a series of 3 tools which can be used during an impact assessment at a World Heritage property:
    - 1) A step-by-step approach to using the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) as a basis for the World Heritage component within a broader EIA or HIA;
    - 2) A step-by-step approach to identifying impacts which might arise when an element of a proposed action interacts with one or more attributes of a World Heritage property; and
    - 3) A step-by-step approach to evaluating impacts, particularly in relation to attributes of World Heritage. This tool is not intended to function as a substitute for research on the World Heritage property and the proposed action. It offers a way to allow the more complex data gathering and analysis to be summarised in a table so that the conclusions can be presented clearly and shared.Each tool is provided as a general template to suggest one of many possible approaches. It is appreciated that they may be further adapted and/or improved as appropriate on a case-by-case basis.