**UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples inputs into the 2024 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of the programme of activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent**

UNESCO has been committed to support the ambitions of the International Decade for People of African Descent since the adoption of this important milestone in 2013. [UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme](https://www.unesco.org/en/routes-enslaved-peoples) has been particularly mobilized in this endeavour. Initiated in 1994, the programme is addressing the history and consequences of enslavement. Advised by an International Scientific Committee composed of 20 experts, and respecting geographic and gender balance, the programme has contributed to break the silence around this tragedy, promoting remembrance to avoid this dark chapter of history to repeat itself.

In accordance with the [new strategic framework](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379611_eng/PDF/379611eng.pdf.multi) (2021) of the programme, and as a contribution to the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), UNESCO scaled up its efforts to tackle the long-lasting legacies of enslavement. In 2022, to consider the processual and legal aspects of the condition of enslavement and underline the humanity of African deported individuals, the title was changed from the Slave Route project to the Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme.

Since 2021, UNESCO’s **annual** [Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination](https://www.unesco.org/en/forum-against-racism-discrimination) **serves as a unique space in the international community to convene multiple stakeholders, including at the ministerial level, discuss prominent issues and advance the anti-racism and anti-discrimination movement through concrete actions.** Hosted by a different country each year, the Forum has become a key platform to forge partnerships, establish champions-based networks and build dialogues with communities worldwide. The history and legacies of enslavement linked to the transatlantic slave trade are being analyzed and discussed in every edition of the Fora, with the aim to share good practices and develop solutions for structural change and lasting impact.

As an outcome of the Forum’s third edition (November 2023; São Paulo, Brazil), and with the objective to assist institutions in the development of anti-racist policies, [UNESCO launched its first Anti-Racism Toolkit](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387454/PDF/387454eng.pdf.multi) targeting policymakers, activists and organizations committed to anti-racism and anti-discrimination. Drawing from global case examples and the latest research, it provides a step-by-step approach to developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating such policies. The toolkit will be piloted among members of the UNESCO International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR, Member States and partners, but also by the members of the recently launched UNESCO Network of Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Officials which aims to provide an international platform for knowledge exchange, technical assistance and collaborative initiatives on racial equity. This Network, launched in São Paulo and informed by concrete input from, and collaboration with the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, will be a significant partner for UNESCO in addressing the current challenges faced by people of African descent.

In 2023, the [UNESCO Network of Places of History and Memory linked to Enslavement and the Slave Trade](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387045/PDF/387045eng.pdf.multi) was launched to raise-awareness on this tragedy. Places will benefit from UNESCO’s expertise in the field of preservation and skills enhancement of local populations for their socio-economic benefits. The city-twinning programme between departure and deportation cities will moreover enable the sharing of good practices throughout the African diasporas, reinforcing mutual understanding and fostering research and knowledge production.

To valorize afro-descendant culture further, UNESCO adopted January 24 as World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture. The date was chosen because on the same day in 2006, the African Union Heads of State and Government adopted the Charter for Africa's Cultural Renaissance. UNESCO celebrated the date for the first time in 2020 together with the government of Costa Rica, with guests from all over the Americas.

In 2024, the Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme is celebrating its 30th anniversary. [Activities](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389177/PDF/389177eng.pdf.multi) are organized throughout the year in collaboration with Member States and partners to take stock of the achievements made; define its new orientation based on current trends and global crisis with the aim of creating impact and producing change; mobilize impacted communities, experts and intellectuals, and the wider public; and gather leading scholars, intellectuals, artists and civil society actors who establish a link between enslavement and current societal challenges to identify possible solutions. In collaboration with Brazil, a high-level ceremony and related events are scheduled for September 2024 at UNESCO Headquarters.

Also in 2024, the 30 years old [archives](https://atom.archives.unesco.org/routes-enslaved-peoples) of the programme were digitalized. Made available online and consisting of scientific articles, concept notes and letters, these archives are invaluable resources to comprehend the development of this flagship programme, recognized as an innovative change-maker by international experts and impacted communities.

UNESCO has also supported local communities in addressing the psychotraumatic consequences of enslavement and the slave trade, through a global initiative led in partnership with the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (UK). In 2023, UNESCO provided training to young adults (aged 18-34) in Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, the UK and the USA to become resource persons within their communities to address such trauma through intergenerational dialogue, valorizing traditional coping mechanisms. A series of webinars was also launched from April to December 2023 with the support of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UK), reuniting hundreds of viewers per session with the aim of sharing good practices and highlighting the latest research. The first webinar analyzed how UNESCO General History of Africa (GHA) can restore impacted communities’ historical consciousness, critical for developing self-confidence and self-esteem as a contribution to the healing process. Volume X of GHA, published in 2023 and focusing on Africa and its Diasporas, could particularly be analyzed in this context. Connexions between this programme and the Routes of Enslaved Peoples aim to be reinforced, especially through joint research. A handbook gathering good practices shared as part of the webinars will also be produced for wider dissemination, enabling the dissemination of good practices to address psychotrauma from enslavement.

Support was moreover provided to the *Kanga Nianzé* residency programme in Côte d’Ivoire, aiming to emancipate young Ivorians in socio-economic precarity through the practice of art and dance. An artistic performance around places linked to the slave trade in the country was launched in 2023 by the dancers with the aim of valorizing local traditional knowledge.

Also, as a contribution to the Decade, UNESCO fostered applied research on the history and legacies of enslavement. Pursuing its ambition to address the legacies of enslavement in and through the arts (a first [resource book](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265488/PDF/265488eng.pdf.multi) for managers of places of memory linked to enslavement was already published in 2018), UNESCO developed a guide on the representation of enslavement in museums. The publication provides curators with additional resources to display innovative exhibitions respectful of communities’ expectations and historical requirements.

A book series for children entitled *Bintou & Issa* was issued, addressing the history and legacies of enslavement adapted to a young audience. The first tome on Gorée Island was published in November 2023, analyzing the cultural heritage deriving from this tragedy, valorizing the enslaved peoples’ contributions to modern societies and reflecting on the current consequences of enslavement, such as racism.

UNESCO is also developing the first Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination with the support of the Ford Foundation. The Global Outlook is a flagship publication of UNESCO, exploring the scale, nature, and manifestations of racism and discrimination across the world, and the effectiveness of efforts being undertaken to fighting it. The first edition is monitoring global progress (or lack thereof) towards the goal of eradicating racism and discrimination, leveraging innovative AI-powered methodologies to tap upon unique online data, enabling powerful analyses and longitudinal comparisons, which includes an exploration of intersectional dynamics and influences. The thematic section of the report explores how the development and use of AI-related technologies is opening up new challenges for the fight against racism and discrimination, and the regulatory and governance strategies being employed to mitigate them. The analysis in the report provides the basis for recommendations that can stimulate reflection and dialogue, enhance peer-learning, and improve policymaking, strengthening the political attention on this issue at the global level.

In partnership with the United Nations Department of Global Communications, a research study that analyses the transatlantic and Indian ocean slave trades as root causes of racism against people of African descent has been initiated. The study will seek to quantify the socio-economic cost of these legacies in areas where the experience of racism and discrimination is most pronounced. It will also provide concrete recommendations and good practices that are easy to understand and replicate within institutions.

UNESCO reinforced its collaboration with United Nations organizations and bodies, especially in the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent. To this end, UNESCO participated in events such as the regional meeting for the Middle East organized as part of the Decade (October 2022, Geneva) and the second and third sessions of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (May 2023 in New York City; April 2024 in Geneva). The participation of UNESCO to these events led to the expansion of the programme’s network, enabling the development of joint research and activities with new partners for wider impact and visibility at the international level. Similarly, the recurrent and active participation of the former Chair of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, Ms Epsy Campbell Barr, to UNESCO events such as the Global Forum Against Racism and Discrimination contributed to a strengthened collaboration and sharing of good practices with UNESCO for the recognition of Afro-descendants’ rights.

Some of the new partnerships established include the European Commission to foster the engagement of vulnerable youth and addressing the legacies of enslavement in Europe, and with the Guardian Foundation to develop a series of Dialogues for Restorative Justice, which aim to create spaces among all stakeholders to reflect on how restorative justice and reparations could be addressed in a holistic approach and supported by institutional mechanisms. Moreover, with the aim to strengthen collaboration with the United States of America, UNESCO shared its good practices and recommendations to tackle structural racism and anti-Blackness during a symposium co-organized with The Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard Kennedy School and the U.S. Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice at the Department of State, in March 2024 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

As a conclusion, UNESCO has been particularly engaged in the following areas linked to the International Decade for People of African Descent:

* Promoting a better understanding and recognition of the culture, history and heritage of people of African descent through research, knowledge production, advocacy and skills enhancement.
* Recognizing the importance to remember the victims of these tragedies and their descendants through the establishment of Places of History and Memory testifying to this past.
* Encouraging the international community to honour this memory through different means, and to fight racism and discrimination in all its forms against people of African Descent.

Conscious of the current challenges still faced by Afro-descendants worldwide in access to basic services, UNESCO calls for an extension of the Decade, with a focus on restorative justice from the history of oppression led against these communities.