REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE, CULTURE AND SPORT

Cultural Routes
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraires culturels
du Conseil de l'Europe

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

ROUTES THROUGH TIME AND CULTURES

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE

The 15th Advisory Forum on
Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

Yerevan, Armenia

23 to 25 September 2026

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS



THE FORUM

The 15th Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, held in Yerevan, Armenia, from 23 to 25 September 2026, under the theme "Routes Through Time and Cultures: Education for Sustainable Heritage", brought together around 250 participants from Council of Europe member states, Cultural Routes, universities, cultural and educational institutions, international organisations, civil society and heritage communities.

The Forum reaffirmed the role of cultural heritage and co-operation for the Council of Europe's mission to achieve greater unity among its member states through the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Discussions highlighted the importance of placing people and human values at the centre of cultural heritage and education policies and practices. Cultural heritage and education were reasserted as interconnected resources for strengthening shared responsibility, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, and contributing to a culture of peace.

The Forum's theme also resonated with international developments, particularly the 2025 UNESCO World Conference on Culture, which identified education as a key priority and highlighted the synergies between culture and education as essential to sustainable development and inclusive societies. This approach is further reflected in UNESCO's Framework for Culture and Arts Education, which promotes an integrated ecosystem of learning opportunities across formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Similarly, the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society situates education within a broader understanding of cultural heritage, recognising it as a source of knowledge, a driver of the cultural economy, and a means of integrating heritage into learning processes at all levels.

Armenia's rich cultural heritage and its contemporary educational, cultural and technological landscape, provided a valuable context for exploring how heritage can remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The experience of the host country offered insights into how educational objectives can be integrated into cultural policies and strategies, strengthening the contribution of cultural heritage to lifelong learning, social cohesion and sustainable development.

The Forum was co-organised by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Republic of Armenia, in partnership with the European Institute of Cultural Routes, the Foundation for the Development of Culture and the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Armenia, with the support of the City of Yerevan.

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY MESSAGE: **TOWARDS A CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM**

The Forum drew inspiration from Xenophon's *Anabasis* as a metaphor for the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. The notion of a journey evokes both discovery, progress and connection, and the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. This dual perspective captured the essence of the Cultural Routes as journeys connecting people, places and cultures while deepening understanding of Europe's shared heritage and its diverse interpretations.

The Forum emphasised a people-centred approach to cultural heritage, recognising that heritage is continually interpreted, reinterpreted and transmitted by people and communities

as an integral part of their individual and collective identities. As a living, evolving and shared resource, cultural heritage lies at the heart of the work of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

Participation in cultural heritage was highlighted as a human right, as recognised in the Faro Convention, which affirms that rights relating to cultural heritage are inherent in the right to participate in cultural life. Access to and participation in cultural heritage strengthen belonging, foster dialogue across cultural and social differences, and contribute to more inclusive and democratic societies. Education is essential to making this participation meaningful.

The protection, interpretation and transmission of cultural heritage are shared responsibilities. This requires recognising and respecting the roles of all stakeholders while ensuring that individuals and communities have the knowledge, capacities and opportunities necessary to exercise their responsibilities and participate meaningfully in heritage-related initiatives. Awareness-raising, research, education and training are essential to strengthening this collective responsibility.

These principles are closely connected to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, understood as a lifelong process involving all stakeholders. In line with the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, education plays a central role in promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, respect for diversity and equality, including gender equality, and the development of democratic citizenship.

Across three days of discussions and exchanges of experience, a key message emerged:

> **Education should be embedded as a strategic, cross-cutting dimension of sustainable cultural heritage management and the Cultural Routes Programme of the Council of Europe.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by the Forum's deliberations and breakout sessions, the recommendations are organised around five interconnected priority areas. They address the wider Cultural Routes community, including national authorities, local and regional governance structures, educational communities, Cultural Routes and their members, and academic networks associated with the Programme:

- Strengthening synergies between cultural heritage and education and advancing towards sustainable ecosystems of co-operation
- Placing accessibility, inclusion, participation and community engagement at the centre of educational practices in cultural heritage
- Promoting the responsible use of digital innovation in cultural heritage, guided by educational purpose, reliable knowledge, accessibility and long-term sustainability
- Enhancing the quality of education in cultural heritage through shared guiding principles aligned with international standards, peer learning, capacity building and context-sensitive evaluation
- Ensuring meaningful youth participation in the management and development of Cultural Routes, integrating young people's voices and perspectives to strengthen relevance and democratic governance.

1. Strengthening synergies between cultural heritage and education and advancing towards sustainable ecosystems of co-operation

Cultural heritage and education are mutually reinforcing public goods. Cultural Routes can serve as living educational platforms, connecting diverse actors and stakeholders across cultural heritage and education to foster knowledge exchange, participation and intercultural understanding. Realising this potential requires moving beyond isolated initiatives towards sustainable ecosystems of co-operation.

a) Strengthen co-ordination between cultural heritage and education policies, including through inter-ministerial co-operation, and recognising cultural heritage as a resource for formal, non-formal and lifelong learning.

b) Integrate Cultural Routes into relevant national education and heritage policies and programmes, with clear objectives and mechanisms for assessing educational and social outcomes.

c) Foster sustained co-operation among Cultural Routes, public authorities, educational and cultural institutions, heritage professionals and local communities, linking policy priorities with practice and facilitating the exchange of experience.

d) Promote the development of inclusive educational action plans by Cultural Routes, with clear objectives, diverse target audiences and mechanisms for assessing outcomes.

e) Promote travel and tourism along Cultural Routes as opportunities for learning, intercultural dialogue and respectful engagement with local communities, contributing to mutual understanding and a culture of peace.

f) Explore and strengthen co-operation between the EPA on Cultural Routes and relevant international organisations and programmed at the intersection of mobility, youth and education.

2. Placing accessibility, inclusion, participation and community engagement at the centre of educational practices in cultural heritage

Access to and participation in cultural heritage are essential to the realisation of the rights to culture and heritage. Accessibility and inclusion must be transversal responsibilities of Cultural Routes, addressing physical, digital, social, economic, geographical and linguistic barriers from the planning stage.

a) Integrate accessibility and inclusive learning opportunities into the design and implementation of all educational activities and programmes developed by Cultural Routes.

b) Ensure adequate resources, including financial, and apply universal design principles to address diverse accessibility needs and barriers, including those related to physical, social, economic, geographical and linguistic circumstances.

c) Involve people and communities facing barriers to access, particularly underrepresented and remote communities, in the planning, implementation and evaluation of Cultural Routes educational activities.

d) Strengthen capacity building on accessibility and inclusion for Cultural Routes and their local stakeholders, particularly those acting as multipliers, drawing on relevant Council of Europe and other international standards, guidelines and resources.

e) Reinforce the application of national and international accessibility and inclusion standards and integrate relevant indicators into the certification and evaluation of Cultural Routes.

f) Develop educational approaches rooted in living heritage, recognising the agency of communities and individuals in its interpretation, transmission and safeguarding, and promoting learning with and from them.

3. Promoting the responsible use of digital innovation in cultural heritage

Digital innovation can widen access to cultural heritage, enhance learning and support the preservation of heritage at risk. Its use should foster critical thinking and responsible engagement with reliable knowledge, ensuring that digital tools serve educational objectives, complement direct engagement with heritage and are accessible, sustainable and participatory.

a) Strengthen digital literacy, professional expertise and institutional capacity across the Cultural Routes network to ensure that digital innovation supports reliable knowledge, authenticity and critical engagement with cultural heritage.

b) Promote cross-border digital co-operation among Cultural Routes, their members, and digital technology providers, including through a shared digital repository under the auspices of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, to facilitate the exchange of multilingual heritage documentation, educational resources, and funding opportunities, and enhance visibility, accessibility and educational potential.

c) Promote the responsible and ethical use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, in heritage education, with attention to human rights, human dignity and community rights, as well as information reliability, intellectual property and data protection.

d) Integrate digital tools, including gamification, virtual reality and augmented reality, into educational programmes that strengthen the learning dimension of travel along Cultural Routes.

e) Assess the educational impact, accessibility, resource use and environmental impact of digital initiatives, ensuring their long-term sustainability, maintenance and relevance to Cultural Routes and their audiences.

4. Strengthening the quality of education in cultural heritage

Quality education for sustainable heritage requires a values-based approach and quality standards that combine shared principles, professionalism and flexibility to reflect the diverse contexts of Cultural Routes. Non-formal education, particularly experiential, learner-centred and participatory approaches, offers a relevant framework for this purpose.

a) Strengthen co-operation between Cultural Routes, the EPA, Ministries of Education and educational institutions to integrate Cultural Routes resources and activities into curricula and recognised extracurricular learning.

b) Develop shared, adaptable guidelines for quality heritage education, grounded in international principles and non-formal education methodologies, with clear learning outcomes and learner-centred approaches.

c) Develop and implement sustained capacity-building programmes for teachers, school administrations, heritage professionals, community practitioners and public officials, supported by shared pedagogical resources, practical methodologies and tools for assessing educational outcomes.

d) Strengthen links between formal and non-formal education through experiential, interdisciplinary and contextual learning, recognising communities and practitioners as active educational agents and fostering intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace.

e) Integrate appropriate quality and pedagogical indicators into Cultural Routes certification and evaluation processes to support the quality and continuous improvement of educational activities.

f) Explore structured co-operation between the Council of Europe, the UNESCO World Heritage Education Program and other relevant international frameworks to strengthen heritage education, including youth engagement, through the exchange of expertise, methodologies and resources.

5. Ensuring meaningful youth participation in the management and development of Cultural Routes

Meaningful youth participation is essential to the relevance, quality of heritage education and sustainability of Cultural Routes. Young people should be recognised as active contributors to heritage interpretation, content creation and decision-making, with opportunities to shape the development of Cultural Routes and their educational activities.

a) Engage young people not only as participants, but as active contributors to the interpretation, transmission and contemporary meaning of heritage.

b) Create practical opportunities for young people to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of Cultural Routes' activities and programmes.

c) Promote youth representation in relevant Cultural Routes governance and decision-making structures to strengthen democratic governance and responsiveness to young people's needs and perspectives.

d) Involve young people in the development and evaluation of digital tools and resources for heritage education, recognising them as both users and contributors.

e) Strengthen co-operation between the EPA and relevant youth organisations and programmed working on youth mobility, education and participation, including the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card.

f) Establish links with local youth councils, children's and youth organisations, student associations and other representative structures to involve young people in the development of Cultural Routes, their sites and activities.

CONCLUSIONS: Towards a stronger Cultural Routes Programme

The conclusions of the 15th Annual Advisory Forum of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme, held in Yerevan, identify key priorities for strengthening the Programme's educational dimension, governance, inclusiveness and long-term sustainability.

A stronger Cultural Routes Programme requires greater representativeness, meaningful youth participation, educational quality and sustainability, supported by co-operation across sectors

and governance levels. Representativeness must extend beyond geographical coverage to reflect Europe's diverse histories, communities and perspectives.

The Programme should strengthen the balance between heritage protection, education, community well-being and responsible tourism, while reinforcing co-operation with educational institutions, universities and research communities. By connecting local and regional heritage with wider European narratives, Cultural Routes can foster intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and a sense of shared responsibility for Europe's heritage.

The Forum calls on the Council of Europe, its member states, Cultural Routes, public authorities, educational and cultural institutions, and partner organisations to advance these priorities through co-ordinated action and sustained commitment.

As the Programme approaches its 40th anniversary, its future depends on ensuring that cultural heritage remains a living resource: understood, valued and protected, and actively shaped by present and future generations.

