



# BUILDING A FUTURE IN RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Challenges and Opportunities for Young Researchers  
and Professionals

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By FRH Young Professionals & Researchers Working Group  
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# **BUILDING A FUTURE IN RELIGIOUS HERITAGE**

Challenges and Opportunities for Young Researchers  
and Professionals

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This document is prepared by young heritage researchers and professionals working in the religious heritage sector. It is addressed to other young professionals in the sector and the established entities working with young people. The document's content is the sole responsibility of its author(s), and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of any institution, national or international organisation.

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**Building a Future in Religious Heritage:  
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# PURPOSE

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This document serves as a comprehensive toolkit designed to address the challenges faced by young professionals in the field of religious heritage. It focuses on their specific needs in preserving, managing, and interpreting religious sites, artefacts, and traditions. It identifies essential components for success in both research and practice, bridging the gap between young professionals and necessary resources. The scope encompasses analysing current support systems, exploration of best practices from other sectors, and insights from experienced professionals. By proposing innovative strategies to enhance their career development and engagement, this position paper aims to create a sustainable, supportive environment that fosters new talent and effectively safeguards religious heritage. The ultimate goal is to provide clear guidelines and actionable recommendations that will empower young professionals to thrive in their careers and contribute meaningfully to the field.

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# SIGNIFICANCE

## OF ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD

Addressing the needs of young professionals in the religious heritage sector is crucial for several reasons. First and foremost, these individuals represent the future of the field. They bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a passion for preserving and promoting religious heritage. However, despite their enthusiasm and potential, young professionals often face significant challenges that hinder their career progression and impact.

One of the primary challenges is the lack of targeted training and educational opportunities that align with the specific demands of religious heritage. Traditional heritage programs may not fully encompass the unique aspects of religious heritage, such as the sensitive nature of religious artefacts, the need for community engagement, and the complexities of managing sacred sites. Addressing this gap through specialised training programs and workshops is essential.

Furthermore, young professionals frequently encounter difficulties in gaining practical experience. Internships and entry-level positions that provide hands-on experience in religious heritage are limited.

This lack of opportunities can result in a skills gap that affects their confidence and competence in the field. Establishing more accessible and diverse pathways for gaining experience is vital for their professional growth.

Financial constraints are another significant barrier. Many young professionals struggle to secure funding for their projects, research, or further education. Providing access to grants, scholarships, and other financial support mechanisms can alleviate this burden and enable them to pursue their ambitions without undue financial stress.

Lastly, general support in terms of mentorship, networking, and professional development is often insufficient. Young professionals benefit greatly from the guidance and wisdom of experienced practitioners. Structured mentorship programs and interdisciplinary networking opportunities can foster valuable relationships and facilitate knowledge transfer, helping young professionals navigate their career paths more effectively.

# METHODOLOGY

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This position paper and toolkit are grounded in a robust theoretical framework built on four key pillars:

- An examination of current scenario in the context
- Overview of past and ongoing international campaigns
- Insights and experiences of young professionals and researchers in religious heritage
- Direct input from experts and professionals actively engaged in the sector, providing current, real-world perspectives.

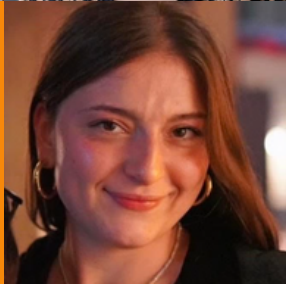
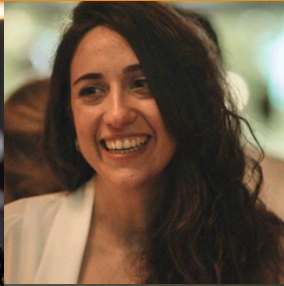
This multifaceted approach yields a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs facing young professionals in the religious heritage sector.

The toolkit's content is shaped by specific indicators derived from this theoretical framework, designed to assess the needs of emerging professionals. These indicators are further refined through the lens of international best practices, ensuring the toolkit offers relevant, actionable strategies for supporting the professional development of young individuals in the field.

This methodology combines theoretical rigor with practical insights, resulting in a toolkit that is both academically sound and directly applicable to the real-world challenges of the religious heritage sector.

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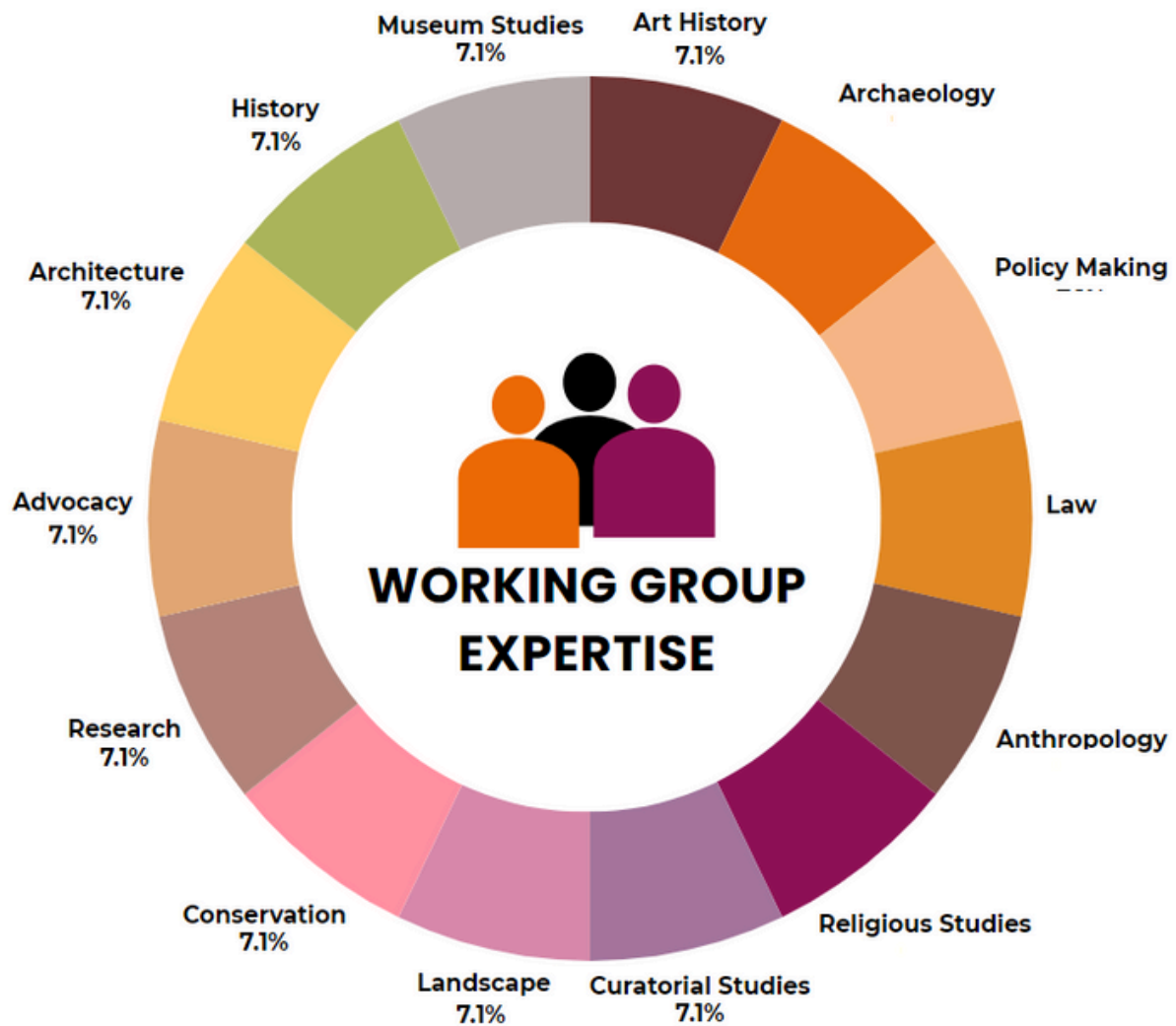
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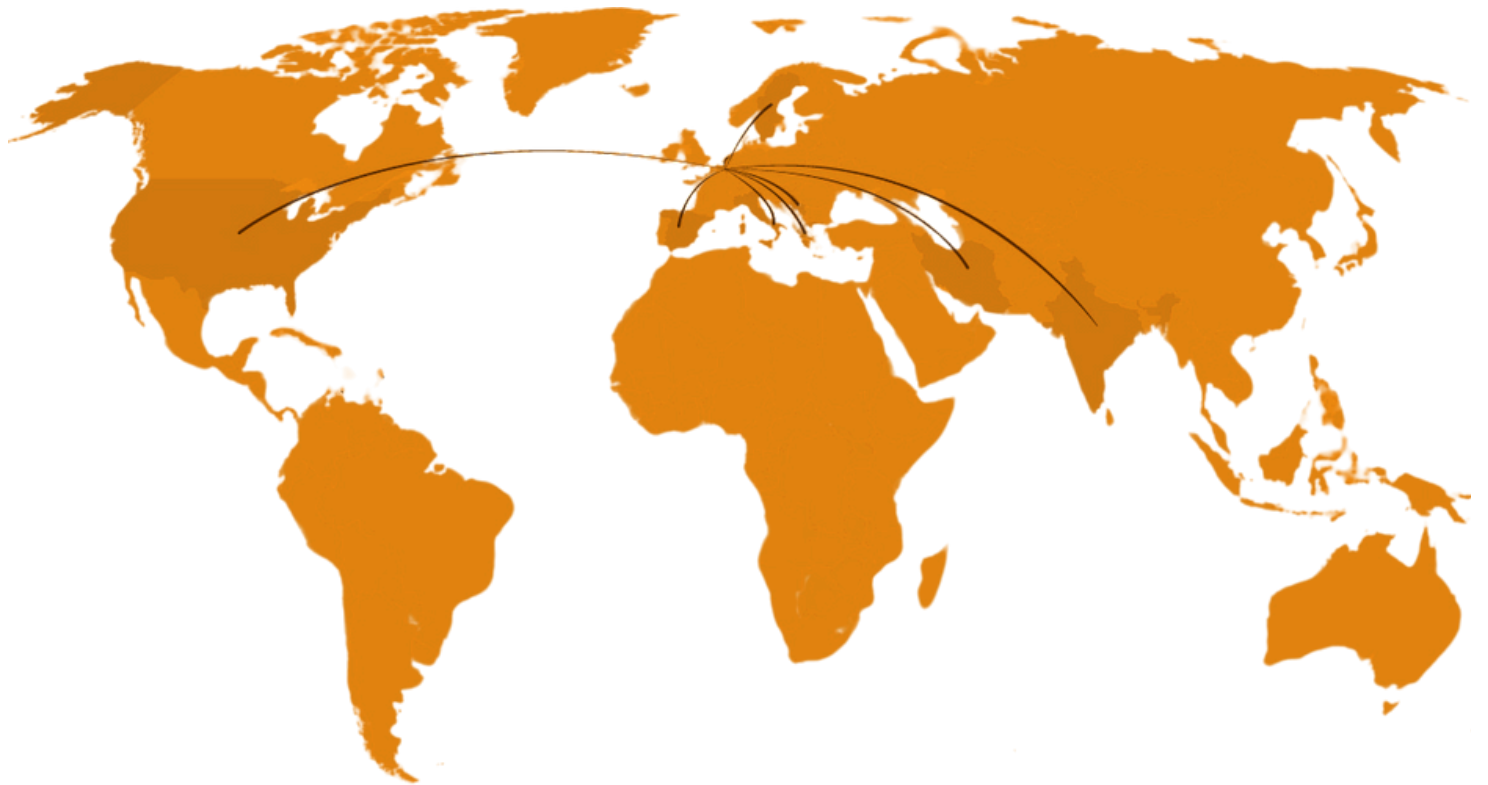
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The methodology adopted for this document reflects the complex, multidisciplinary nature of religious heritage, incorporating insights from various branches of heritage studies and related fields. It recognises that religious heritage intersects with cultural, social, economic, and environmental domains, necessitating a holistic perspective. Hence, at the micro level, the composition of the working group is critical to this methodology.

The team brings together a diverse array of professionals, including policymakers, legal experts, landscape and intangible heritage specialists, managers, and academics. This multidisciplinary assembly ensures a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing young professionals' needs in the religious heritage sector. It also allows for considering multiple facets of challenges faced by young professionals to develop well-rounded, practical solutions.



Serbia, Greece, Iran, Netherlands, Italy, USA, India, Spain & Sweden

Crucially, this methodology recognises the particular relevance of young voices in defining heritage, assigning meanings to it, and determining its relevance for today and the future. Young professionals and researchers are positioned as key players in mitigating conflicts and balancing various values at stake – cultural, social, economic, and religious.

By leveraging this collective expertise and recognising the unique role of young professionals, the document aims to provide innovative, practical solutions that equip a new generation of heritage professionals to safeguard and enhance our shared religious heritage for future generations.

# KEY CONCEPTS

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**Young professionals**, in the context of this paper, refers to only those between the ages of 18 and 35 who are pursuing careers in the field of (religious) heritage. This includes those who are approaching religious heritage from academia, practitioners from the galleries, libraries, archives and museum (GLAM) sector, policy experts, and preservation specialists whose area of expertise and focus is on sites, aspects and objects of religious heritage.

**Religious heritage** encompasses tangible and intangible heritage that is imbued (or have been imbued in the past) with cultural significance via religious focus. However, while religious heritage can serve as a focal point for believers, it also often represents a communal identity for both religious and secular community members.

**Sacred spaces**, in this context, are the physical spaces in which religious practices take place, or have taken place in the past. They are also places where secular or multi-faith rituals take place.

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ITALY

The Future is Heritage

## Venice Summit shows heritage is aware of future challenges, but not sure how to deal with them

JEAN QUERELLE · OCTOBER 11, 2023

### Youth Involvement

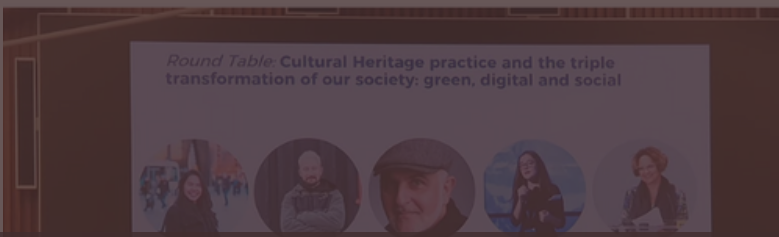
Another topic that concerns change in the heritage sector is of course the active involvement of youth. Last year set the bar high. Dozens of students and starting heritage professionals flocked to Prague to attend the Future is Heritage Summit (FISH) – organised simultaneously and in collaboration with the European Cultural Heritage Summit 2022. This year the



Adam Klups (left) and Grace Emily. Image: EHT

## Our Response to the Europa Nostra's Cultural Heritage Summit 2023

As young enthusiasts committed to shaping the future of European cultural heritage, we recently attended Europa Nostra's European Heritage Summit 2023 in Venice. While the summit was undoubtedly a celebration of our shared heritage, it is crucial that we address a pertinent issue - **the limited representation and engagement of the younger generations.**

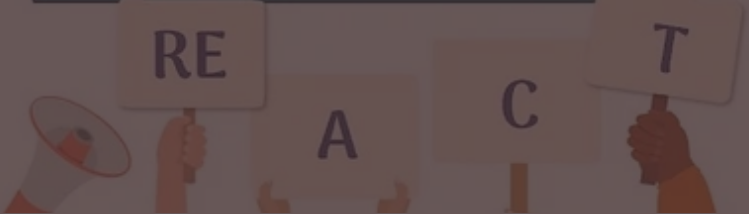


# CURRENT SCENARIO

- REWARD**  
the young professionals with fair payment, following the EU regulations on labour laws
- REPRESENT**  
young people in your workforce by introducing a tailored scheme that ensures a mentorship culture
- ASSERT**  
the roles and responsibilities of heritage professionals by drafting a clearer definition for heritage professionals and their skills.
- COMMUNICATE**  
through written legal contracts, the roles, responsibilities and rights of a volunteer and acknowledge their contributions towards the organisation
- TRANSFORM**  
the current regulations and initiatives to make mobility programmes accessible to all, especially to the under-represented and underprivileged.

## Professionals

### call to joint action



The European Year of Youth 2022 marked a significant milestone in the engagement of young professionals in the field of religious heritage and also saw an increased emphasis on intergenerational dialogue within the religious heritage sector. Established institutions organised forums where young professionals could present their ideas directly to senior experts and policymakers, fostering a more inclusive approach to heritage management.

However, a concerning trend emerged in the aftermath of this dedicated year. Post-2022, there was a discernible decline in youth-focused initiatives and engagement opportunities within the religious heritage field.

This sudden drop in activity raises critical questions about the sustainability and long-term commitment to youth involvement in this sector.

The marked decrease in youth engagement following the conclusion of the European Year of Youth 2022 suggests a potentially superficial approach to youth inclusion.

It prompts a scholarly examination of whether these initiatives were fundamentally integrated into organisational strategies or merely performative gestures aligned with the zeitgeist of that particular year.

This observation necessitates a rigorous analysis of the factors contributing to this decline. Potential areas of inquiry include the allocation of resources for youth programs, the integration of young professionals' perspectives into decision-making processes, and the long-term strategies heritage organisations employ to maintain youth engagement beyond designated themed years.

Furthermore, this phenomenon underscores the need for a more sustainable and consistent approach to youth involvement in religious heritage. It highlights the importance of embedding youth engagement as a core principle in heritage management rather than treating it as a temporary focus or a public relations exercise.

# GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

## **Career Development and Sustainability**

Cultural heritage initiatives like the Faro Convention have positioned heritage education as essential to vocational training, promoting lifelong learning and active citizenship to enhance employability in the cultural sectors. However, young professionals entering the field often encounter precarious working conditions. Many find themselves in short-term contracts, internships, or freelance work, lacking clear career progression and the financial stability they were promised.

While heritage education is becoming more integrated into curricula, training programs frequently lack the hands-on experience and vocational skills that professionals need. This gap between academic training and practical job skills leads to a mismatch in the labour market, leaving young professionals with qualifications that do not necessarily translate into sustainable career opportunities.

## **Funding and Financial Support**

European initiatives, such as the European Year of Cultural Heritage and the "Faro way," have increased financial support for heritage education and research, encouraging countries to ratify conventions and allocate resources for cultural heritage programs. However, criticism arises from the uneven distribution of funds across EU member states, where smaller institutions and regions with less political influence often receive insufficient funding, limiting their ability to engage in meaningful heritage research, care, and education. Additionally, complex EU funding applications and stringent reporting requirements create barriers for smaller organisations and young professionals, who may lack the institutional support to navigate these processes.

There is also a question of whether current funding schemes are sufficient to address structural issues in the heritage sector. Many projects rely on short-term grants rather than long-term investments, limiting the capacity for systemic change and leaving young professionals uncertain about the sector's potential for sustained financial support.

## **Mentorship and Networking: A Missed Opportunity for Deeper Inclusion?**

The Council of Europe has made strides in promoting mentorship and networking for young heritage professionals through programs like Cultural Routes, which foster knowledge-sharing and a sense of community within the sector. However, much like other aspects of cultural heritage development, mentorship programs tend to be limited in scope. Opportunities are often concentrated in large urban centres or prestigious institutions, limiting access for young professionals from smaller towns or marginalised backgrounds. Ensuring that these programs are inclusive and reach all corners of Europe remains a challenge.

# ISSUES IN CONTEXT

One of the most pressing issues facing young professionals in the cultural and religious heritage sectors in Europe is the lack of specialised training that addresses the sensitivities and complexities of religious heritage. Whether in academic settings or professional environments, there is a clear gap in education and training regarding the care of religious objects, safeguarding of religious practices, and managing living heritage sites. While heritage programs often cover broader aspects of cultural heritage management and preservation, they tend to overlook the nuances specific to religious heritage, such as the ritualistic, spiritual, and community-oriented nature of these sites, objects or practices. For instance, caring for a centuries-old sacred places and objects requires not only technical expertise but also cultural sensitivity to its significance in contemporary religious practices. Universities, as well as vocational training programs, must go beyond offering singular heritage projects and begin integrating optional modules focused specifically on religious heritage.

Such courses would provide students with a deeper understanding of religious heritage management, conservation, and community engagement. Short-term projects or internships cannot substitute for sustained learning experiences, which is why educational institutions and heritage organisations should consider creating specialised workshops and training opportunities that go beyond superficial exposure to religious sites.

Another major hurdle is the limited interaction young professionals have with the communities that live in or care for living heritage sites. Religious heritage, by its very nature, is "living" — it is continually shaped by the people who use, maintain, and revere these spaces. However, young professionals are rarely given opportunities to engage meaningfully with these communities. This disconnect not only hampers the professionals' understanding of religious heritage but also diminishes the potential for collaborative efforts between heritage experts and the communities themselves.

Funding is another critical issue. While organisations like Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) offer platforms for young professionals through initiatives like Masterclasses, Conferences, Site Visits, and Lectures, these opportunities are not enough. Young professionals need more than just exposure—they need sustained, hands-on involvement in the field. Moreover, many of these opportunities are framed as voluntary or short-term, further limiting the professional growth and stability of emerging heritage professionals. To build meaningful careers in the heritage sector, young professionals require stable, paid positions that go beyond volunteer work or internships.

On a macro level, the lack of dedicated funding for cultural and religious heritage remains a persistent problem. Cultural heritage funding is often lumped together with arts funding, which limits the resources available for long-term research projects. In many cases, heritage becomes a secondary priority within broader cultural initiatives, rather than being seen as a distinct area of investment.

This is evident even at the global level, where UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) largely sideline heritage, making it a minor consideration rather than a central pillar of sustainable development.

The lack of prioritisation of heritage in funding frameworks weakens the potential impact of young professionals in the field. Without dedicated financial resources, professionals in cultural and religious heritage are forced to rely on unstable project-based funding, which does not provide the long-term support necessary to build expertise, sustain projects, or create lasting change. In order to truly support young professionals, there must be a shift toward recognising cultural and religious heritage as essential to both cultural identity and sustainable development. Only then will we begin to see more structured funding programs and sustained opportunities for young professionals to contribute meaningfully to the field.

**Addressing these issues holistically can help heritage become a sustainable and inclusive field for future professionals.**

# BEST PRACTICES

## FOR FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

This section aims to show how different programs and institutions are currently meeting attempting to diminish the above mentioned gaps. This list is not exhaustive and should be (re)evaluated as the field evolves in time.

### **1. Building a more comprehensive sense of commonality of religious heritage**

In an increasingly secular Europe, non-religious youth sometimes pay little attention to religious heritage because of the adscription of such heritage to a group or community to which she or he does not belong. A survey made by De Kerkeverniewers (or "The Church Innovators" in English) showed that young people visited churches and other religious buildings only on vacations. In order to build new connections between the original communities and a younger, more secular generation in The Netherlands, De Kerkeverniewers featured a youth festival where they organised seep dates, an organ quiz, various talks and workshops related to the future of church buildings [1].

### **2. Linking religious heritage with employment opportunities**

Safeguarding religious heritage requires a range of skilled workers. Protecting and restoring old religious buildings, monuments, and sites demands specific craftsmanship, which is often not taught in formal settings. This traditional knowledge, encompassing materials, tools, processes, and techniques, was passed down orally from one generation of craftsmen and craftswomen to the next. Nowadays, this traditional knowledge is imparted through vocational training courses and volunteer programs. An example is Cultural Heritage Without Borders, which provides vocational training known as "Skills for Employability of Tomorrow", drawing inspiration from the conservation ateliers that worked on Albanian monuments from the 1960s to the 1990s. This program offers young people the opportunity to become highly skilled workers specialising in the conservation of cultural and religious heritage [2].

At the European level, the platform European Heritage Volunteers offers different training courses and internships for young heritage professionals. The formers are taught by craftspeople who aim to transmit their traditional knowledge to future generations, providing them with the necessary information to undertake future decisions in accordance with a religious heritage site, its history and values. Mixing theoretical and practical approaches, EHV fostered interventions in several religious heritage sites such as the synagogue of Halberstadt (Germany), Capela de São Bras Portel (Portugal) and the Shativank Monastery's church (Armenia) [3].

### **3. Involvement in decision-making processes concerning religious heritage**

Young professionals bring new ideas, approaches and networks to the field of religious heritage. Entities and institutions dedicated to protecting and managing religious heritage should consider these valuable assets to succeed. One effective way to do this is by directly involving young people and promoting their active participation in decision-making processes. De Kerkeverniewers created a so-called "shadow board" consisting of young people who participate in making management decisions and prom-

-oting innovative projects around St. Stevenskerk (The Netherlands). This mechanism has proven to be very successful, leading to an expansion of the concept into a broader program aimed at empowering more church boards with teams of young people.

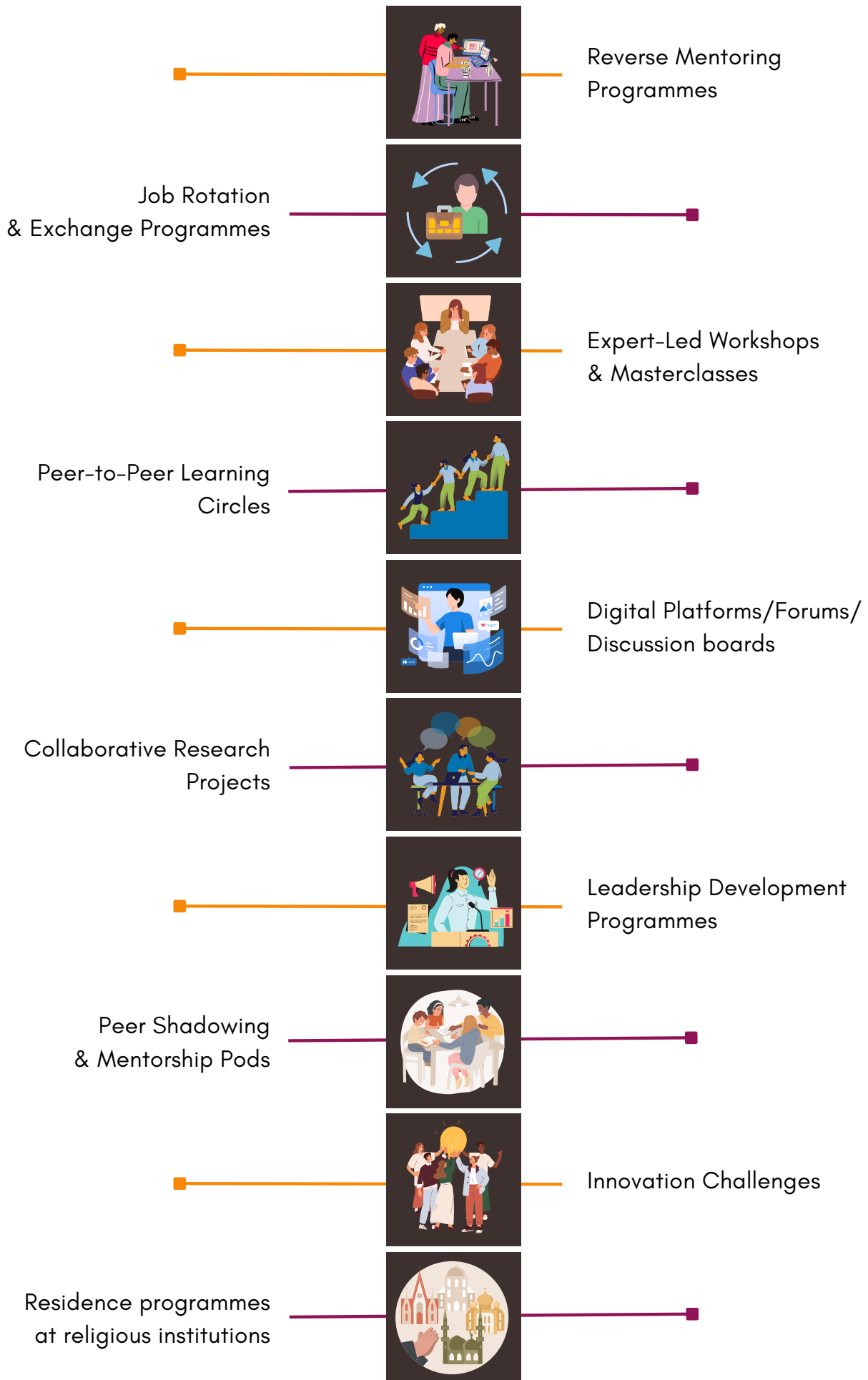
In the United Kingdom, the Heritage Lottery Fund invested more than £27 million in supporting projects designed and delivered by young people between the ages of 13-25 years. Through the Young Roots Programme lead organisations developed youth active participation in heritage project management and leadership through training and mentoring. Young participants were also involved in attending planning meetings, meeting and researching local communities, helping on tours and setting up exhibitions. They were enabled to research their projects and develop relationships with local heritage partners, paving the way for further stages of their professional journey in the field of religious heritage [4].

#### **4. Fostering intersectionality in the protection and management of religious heritage**

Today, religious heritage faces multifaceted challenges. The most prominent hazards to religious heritage are armed conflicts, climate change and rising religious intolerance. To counteract and/or mitigate the consequences of these phenomena, intersectional education on religious heritage is crucial. Although intersectional education must reach the general population, younger generations are the ones to put the focus on, as they will become the rules and advocates of tomorrow. In Germany, the Institute of Heritage Studies in cooperation with the German Commission for UNESCO released the international educational project Young Climate Action for World Heritage. Thanks to this project, international teams from the UNESCO Associated Schools Network and beyond explore World Heritage Sites in Germany [5] and the ways they can take responsibility for their sustainable preservation and, at the same time, combating climate change locally.

In terms of religious intolerance, getting direct, veritable information from religious communities is a way to refute mis

-information and deconstruct fake myths and pre-made beliefs. In 2023, the Spanish association Patrimonio para Jóvenes articulated the Monasteries: Past, Present and Future programme. This programme gave young people the opportunity to visit different monasteries in the summer and share their experiences both with their colleagues and with a public audience. These journeys allowed young people to visit living monasteries (those that maintain their original functions and host a religious community) and monasteries with different uses. Through photography and videos, young participants engaged in raising awareness campaigns about religious heritage in Spain [6].



# TOOLKIT

## TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE AND FACILITATE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN THE (RELIGIOUS) HERITAGE SECTOR

- 1. Reverse Mentoring Programmes:** Implement reverse mentoring programmes in educational and professional institutions, both public and private, where young professionals are paired with senior experts in the field. These programmes allow young professionals to share their insights on emerging trends, technology, and innovative approaches, while also learning from the wisdom and experience of their senior counterparts.
- 2. Job Rotation and Exchange Programmes:** Develop opportunities for financially remunerated job rotations and exchange programmes. Unpaid work, such as uncompensated internships, is an inherently exclusionary practice which limits the ability of young professionals to remain working in their areas of expertise, or to expand their skill sets. The positions proposed here will take the form of paid job rotations and exchange programmes which will allow young professionals to temporarily work in different departments or organisations within the religious heritage sector. This will provide them with exposure to diverse roles, perspectives, and working environments, fostering professional growth and cross-functional collaboration.
- 3. Expert-Led Workshops and Masterclasses:** Organise expert-led workshops and masterclasses on specific topics or skills relevant to heritage frameworks and management. Young professionals can participate in hands-on learning experiences facilitated by seasoned experts, gaining practical knowledge and insights applicable to their work.
- 4. Peer-to-Peer Learning Circles:** Establish peer-to-peer learning circles where young professionals can come together in small groups to discuss challenges, share best practices, and brainstorm solutions related to religious heritage frameworks and management. Facilitated by a mentor or coach, these circles provide a supportive environment for collaborative learning and skill development.
- 5. Digital Platforms/Forums/Discussion boards:** Create interactive online forums and discussion boards where young professionals can engage in ongoing dialogue with senior experts and peers. They can ask questions, seek advice, and share resources related to heritage frameworks and management, fostering a culture of continuous learning and knowledge exchange. One example of such platforms is European Heritage Hub: Social Forum.

6. **Collaborative Research Projects:** Encourage and provide support to collaborative research projects between senior experts, academic institutions, and young professionals where stakeholder communities are also essential participants. These projects can explore emerging topics, conduct field studies, or develop innovative solutions to challenges in heritage frameworks and management.

7. **Leadership Development Programmes:** Offer leadership development programmes specifically tailored to young professionals in the religious heritage sector. These programmes can include theoretical as well as practical training in strategic planning, project management, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making skills, preparing them for leadership roles in heritage conservation and management.

8. **Peer Shadowing and Mentorship Pods:** Implement peer shadowing and mentorship pods where young professionals are grouped together with a mix of experienced mentors and peers. This allows them to shadow each other's work, exchange feedback, and provide mutual support and guidance in their professional development journey.

9. **Innovation Challenges:** Organise hackathons and innovation challenges focused on addressing specific issues or opportunities in heritage frameworks and management. Young professionals can collaborate in cross-functional teams to develop creative solutions, leveraging their diverse skills and perspectives to drive meaningful impact in the field.

10. **Residence programmes at religious institutions:** Short stays for young professionals in different religious institutions where they can engage with religious communities and learn the traditions, values, and know-how behind the management of religious buildings and sites.





## APPENDIX

This section presents insights gathered from in-depth interviews with leading experts in the field of religious heritage. These professionals, with extensive experience across various aspects of heritage, offer a nuanced perspective on current trends, challenges, and opportunities in this specialised sector. Their reflections provide valuable guidance for young professionals, highlighting the skills, strategies, and collaborative approaches essential for impactful work in religious heritage. By incorporating these expert opinions, this document gains a practical dimension,

helping readers connect theoretical frameworks with real-world applications in heritage management. For better understanding, the section utilises the same questions asked in the interviews and provides summarised answers from the experts.

[For readers seeking further details, the full, unedited version of these interviews is available on the FRH website under a new section titled "Heritage Handover". This resource serves as a comprehensive reference for deeper exploration into the field's evolving dynamics and expert viewpoints.]

# QUESTION-ANSWERS

## **1. What are the first steps a young researcher or professional should take to reach European institutions and other relevant stakeholders?**

The strategies to reach European institutions and other relevant stakeholders vary depending on the discipline. First, it is advisable to research questions linked with one's field of study, current trends, challenges, and how one can contribute. After that, it's important to conduct a preliminary identification of stakeholders (or "stakeholder mapping") and relevant European institutions. These might include Churches as institutions, Ministries of Culture and related agencies, research institutes, universities, NGOs, and museums working with religious heritage.

Stakeholder engagement allows for both formal and informal connections, potentially leading to practical work opportunities in heritage through internships, volunteering, or assistant jobs. Gaining experience with various types of heritage across different regions or countries is beneficial. A couple of years of work experience is a decisive advantage when approaching European institutions.

In dealing with European institutions, young researchers approach them for economic reasons (funds), intellectual partnerships, or collaborative projects. This engagement often takes place in a formal, bureaucratic setting via calls and scholarships, where teamwork is essential due to the need for grant-application skills. Building a community around aligned scientific interests can also strengthen connections.

Young researchers or professionals can also create their networks at the local, regional, national or international level through the organisation of workshops, talks, exchanges, etc. After graduation, motivation and ideas are still fresh, so it is the best moment to start a new networking project. A good way to start is to engage in professional and/or academic discussions on different platforms like FRH, DOCOMOMO, WAT, ICOMOS or ICOM, where senior experts as well as other young people are present. Learning from the experience of well-established associations, young researchers and professionals can gain valuable insights to set, manage and promote their networking projects.

## **2. From your observations, what resources or support systems (academic institutions or otherwise) do you think are most beneficial for young professionals entering the field of religious heritage?**

The support systems available vary by country and sector. Academic institutions (universities, research institutes, design schools) are a major resource, fostering the development of new ideas within structured environments. Yet, academic institutions alone may limit practical exposure, which NGOs, cultural foundations, and government bodies can supplement. These organisations encourage knowledge-sharing across disciplines, building connections, and exchanging ideas.

Governmental organisations at various levels—such as Ministries of Culture and other cultural agencies—support young professionals interested in on-the-ground work like policy-making and cultural strategy implementation. They provide access to essential, updated information about field developments.

## **3. In your view, what specific areas of professional development or training do you consider essential for those entering this field? And how do you see mentorship with established professionals/experts as a contributing factor to the career advancement of young professionals of religious heritage?**

Professional development needs vary by sector, but advancing knowledge on issues affecting religious heritage is universally beneficial. Professionals need a solid, broad education in humanities, art history, religious studies, communication, and semiotics. Motivation, expertise, and adaptability are essential, along with a critical outlook on heritage needs and changes. Young professionals should understand local customs and their influence on heritage conservation.

Beyond technical skills, sensitivity is critical, especially respecting the social and spiritual importance of religious sites. Professionals should communicate with religious institutions and leaders to understand their visions for heritage. For designers and architects, developing financial acumen is necessary to create sustainable business models for these sites.

Mentorship plays a crucial role in advancing careers, with mentors offering insights into project management, network-building, and complex decision-making in religious heritage.

#### **4. Have you collaborated with or mentored young professionals in religious heritage? If yes, what were the outcomes and lessons learned?**

All the experts interviewed have mentored young professionals in academic settings, NGOs, and heritage institutions, using real cases and current trends to help students develop relevant skills. Humanities-focused academic mentorship expands students' perspectives on religious heritage and its place in society. Supervision of theses and research projects further deepens this learning.

In NGOs, internship programs allow small groups of young professionals to gain practical insights, contributing enthusiasm and diverse backgrounds. Mentorship by senior officers in heritage institutions is mutually enriching, enabling knowledge exchange on emerging trends and new research. Creating an open environment for these exchanges benefits both the organisation and its mentors.

#### **5. What do you believe are the current gaps or deficiencies in the support provided to young professionals in the religious heritage sector?**

The experts identified some major gaps in support for young professionals. First, a lack of structured financial support and career pathways tailored to religious heritage means many rely on grant-based or temporary positions. No dedicated institutes exist for young professionals in religious heritage, and there is minimal knowledge-sharing about asset management by religious institutions.

Additionally, the field lacks clear societal recognition, with limited frameworks or definitions for religious heritage. This affects policymaking and stakeholder engagement, particularly in addressing religious heritage destruction in wartime.

Third, there is a general misconception that there might be a one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges in the field of religious heritage. Each project requires a tailor-made approach. Generic solutions are often inadequate because they fail to grasp the unique characteristics of each site, community and cultural context. Yet, the search for specific solutions requires time and resources.

Last, rigid organisations, staff and supervisors are not ready to make the effort to actually adopt young professionals. This is a mental barrier that can be overcome with information on the benefits and positive outcomes of having these young researchers and professionals working closely, such as the revitalisation of the organisation and its senior employees.

## **6. Have you observed any promising emerging trends or approaches in religious heritage preservation that young professionals should be aware of or involved in?**

**(Add on question)- Looking towards the future, what changes or advancements do you anticipate in the field of religious heritage, and how can young professionals be positioned to adapt and thrive in this evolving landscape?**

Emerging trends include sustainability and adaptive reuse. Historic religious buildings increasingly need to meet modern environmental standards, and young professionals should explore sustainable practices that respect these sites' architectural and spiritual aspects. Adaptive reuse is essential as secularisation leaves many buildings vacant; transforming them for housing or community use maintains historical value.

Managing these projects requires financial acumen, particularly in crafting business models.

Finally, global trends such as urbanisation, climate change, and the safeguarding of heritage in conflict or disaster zones were identified as pressing challenges. Young professionals should be prepared to address these issues and adapt to the evolving demands of religious heritage preservation.

## **7. From your perspective, what steps can organisations or institutions take to create more opportunities for young professionals to engage in meaningful work in religious heritage preservation and management?**

Experts suggest several ways organisations can create more opportunities for young professionals in religious heritage. They can support young professionals by providing internships and project placements with hands-on experience. Foundations and government collaborations can ensure funding for heritage projects. Mentorship programs pairing young professionals with experienced practitioners are invaluable for knowledge transfer and skill-building.

Universities should incorporate religious heritage management into curricula, combining academic learning with fieldwork opportunities.

Additionally, institutions should ensure fair compensation for young professionals through paid internships, fellowships, or research roles. It's important to recognise their contributions and avoid unpaid roles that can limit their engagement. Encouraging collaborative authorship in academic research can also help young professionals gain visibility and contribute meaningfully to the field.

## **8. How can young professionals benefit from international collaboration and interdisciplinary perspectives, particularly considering the global nature of religious heritage?**

**Furthermore, what opportunities do you see emerging for such collaborative efforts?**

The experts highlighted the importance of international collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches in safeguarding religious heritage. Given the global significance of religious sites, collaboration across cultural contexts enables young professionals to gain a deeper understanding of diverse preservation practices, fostering innovative solutions that would be difficult to achieve in isolation. This is particularly relevant for the adaptive reuse of religious buildings, which varies significantly across different countries.

Interdisciplinary perspectives—encompassing architecture, sociology, environmental science, and economics etc—are critical for addressing the complex challenges facing religious heritage. Young professionals must approach preservation not only as a technical or architectural task but as a multidisciplinary effort that considers sustainability, economic viability, and social relevance. Opportunities for such collaborative work are available through European Union funding and foundations, such as the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, which support international projects.

National initiatives, like the Netherlands' "kerkenvisies" program, further demonstrate how governmental support can enhance interdisciplinary collaborations in heritage projects.

The experts also emphasised that international exchanges are vital for building a shared body of knowledge in the field. Conferences, research collaborations, and symposia facilitate the exchange of best practices and establish networks that young professionals can leverage throughout their careers.

Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field's advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.

### **9. Reflecting on your own career journey, what advice or guidance would you offer to young professionals aspiring to make an impact in the religious heritage sector?**

"Be the captain of your own ship. There is no other way than your way. Find your own path by exploring what truly drives you, and pursue opportunities that align with your passions."

Experts recommend that young professionals follow their passions and define unique career paths, rather than adhering strictly to conventional routes. Practical experience outside academia is invaluable, as it builds confidence and enriches research. Knowledge in areas like legislation, government processes, and international institutions such as UNESCO is crucial for professionals aiming to work at both local and global levels.

Skills like grant writing are vital, given funding's central role in heritage work. With targeted learning and hands-on experience, young professionals can effectively navigate the religious heritage field and contribute meaningfully to its future.

# NOTES

[1] For more information, see the Project “Only on Vacation” on De Kerkevernieuwers website: <https://www.kerkvernieuwers.nl/>.

[2] The programme of “Skills for Employability of Tomorrow” has provided a complete training in traditional working techniques in the UENSCO World Heritage Sites of Berat and Gjirokastra, and in Korça and Dürres. For more information: Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field’s advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.

[3] For further information, see: Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field’s advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.

[4] For more details on the 1,250 projects that have so far taking place, see: Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field’s advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.

[5] Of the six World Heritage Sites involved in this project, the most important in terms of religious heritage is the Moravian Church Settlements in which Germany participates along with the UK and the US. See: Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field’s advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.

[6] This programme got the FRH Innovator of the Year Award in 2023. See Such collaborations often result in the publication of valuable research and guidelines that contribute to the field’s advancement, while also ensuring young professionals are well-prepared to contribute to this global and multifaceted field.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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