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Revive the Spirit of Mosul

The rebirth of a city:
A people's hope,
a story of reconstruction
2018-2025





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Preface by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

One year after the black flags of Daesh were lowered over Mosul, I proposed that UNESCO commit to an ambitious initiative to allow this city to rise from the ashes. This programme, launched in April 2018 at the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, aimed to 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul'.



This spirit is that of a city at the crossroads of cultures and communities, a melting pot of Iraq's plural identity, where different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups coexisted for over 2,500 years.

With our initiative, we wanted to ensure that Mosul once again lives up to its name: al-mawsil in Arabic – the link, the junction, the bridge.

Since 2019, we have carried out large-scale work to rebuild the emblematic landscapes and monuments of this ancient city, hand in hand with the Moslawi people and with the financial support of the United Arab Emirates, the European Union and a dozen other international partners.

The reconstruction of Al-Nouri Grand Mosque, Al-Hadba Minaret, Our Lady of the Hour Convent and its House of Prayer, Al-Tahera Church and 124 heritage houses has now been completed. Around 170 families have come back to live in the old city, where children's voices can be heard once again.

But stones alone cannot revive the spirit of Mosul. That is why, through its initiative, UNESCO has invested in education and cultural life. More than 400 classrooms have been renovated in the city and its surroundings, and the University of Mosul has received library equipment and support for the creation of a cinema department.

Over 5,000 teachers, educators and parents have been trained in peace education to prevent the return of violent extremism. They have learned how to re-establish dialogue with young people out of school, identify those who are suffering from psychological distress and answer sensitive questions about the events that took place.

UNESCO has also supported the revival of cultural festivals, created a space for young creators – "The Station" – and provided training on traditional musical instruments. It has opened a community information centre on the banks of the Tigris, hosting events and supporting civil society initiatives – so that Mosul can sing, dance, read and express itself freely as before.

This initiative has also created a lasting legacy for UNESCO and multilateralism, by highlighting how useful, concrete and action-oriented international cooperation can be.

Today, Mosul once again becomes the beacon of hope that it should never have ceased to be, a model of what can be done to rebuild through the power of culture and education – in Iraq and elsewhere.

Heritage houses

Al-Hadba Minaret

Key facts and figures

80% of the Old City of Mosul was destroyed during its occupation by Daesh.

US\$115 million was mobilized by UNESCO to finance the initiative, including US \$50.4 million from the United Arab Emirates and US \$48.2 million from the European Union.

15 key countries and international organizations have partnered with UNESCO on this programme.

124 heritage houses in the Old City of Mosul have been rehabilitated by UNESCO.

Al-Nouri Mosque Complex

The Our Lady of the Hour Dominican convent and its House of Prayer

THE CLOCK CHURCH

HOUSE OF PRAYER



Al-Tahera Syrian Catholic church

4 emblematic religious monuments have been rebuilt: Al-Nouri Grand Mosque, Al-Hadba Minaret, Al-Tahera Syrian Catholic church and the Our Lady of the Hour Dominican convent and its House of Prayer.

7,700 local jobs have been created by this UNESCO initiative.

2,800 students have graduated from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training programme.

Over **5,000** education actors and parents from more than 130 schools have been trained in Preventing Violent Extremism through Education (PVE-E), supporting more than 120,000 students.

404 classrooms have been renovated by UNESCO in the Nineveh province, of which 109 are in Mosul.

Over **12,047 tons** of rubble have been removed from the main project sites.

45,000 original bricks have been recovered from Al-Nouri Mosque and Al-Hadba Minaret, and have been cleaned and catalogued for the reconstruction of the latter.

115 explosive devices have been extracted, including an unexploded bomb found underneath Al-Nouri Mosque's dome.

83 tons of wood have been used to consolidate the structure of Al-Nouri Mosque.

8,718 historical fragments have been recovered, cleaned and catalogued from the four main sites.

30% of Iraqi engineers employed by UNESCO are women.

A brief history of UNESCO's initiative

Mosul, a symbol of multicultural dialogue

Mosul means 'the linking point' in Arabic. Over the past 2,500 years, the city has been a bridge between regions to the north and south, and to the east and west. Due to its location, it became a melting pot of diverse cultures and groups, a crucible of Iraq's pluralistic identity marked by the co-existence of its various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.

The rich heritage of the Old City of Mosul, with its intricate labyrinth of small streets, had long been well-preserved with monuments and buildings blending elements of Islamic and Nestorian Christian architectures and decorative arts. The built heritage of the Old City of Mosul reflected the interchange of values of tolerance and co-existence through many centuries.

The architecture of Mosul was characterized by highly decorated brick facades, marble interiors, *muqarnas* vaults (honeycomb vaulting) and masonry that is often carved with decorative motives and inscriptions, adorning doors, windows and arcades. The local alabaster stone – dubbed 'Mosul marble' – is an example of architectural sophistication that gives the city its distinctive character.

The great Al-Nouri Mosque was undoubtedly one of the most significant buildings in the Old City. Its renowned, 45-metre-tall Al-Hadba Minaret was an iconic architectural landmark and a symbol of Mosul and its inhabitants. Together with the Clock Tower of the convent of Our Lady of the Hour, Al-Hadba dominated the skyline of Mosul.

A city reduced to rubble

It is because Mosul was so singular, so multicultural, so steeped in interreligious dialogue that it was suddenly targeted by Daesh. The invasion of the city in June 2014, its occupation for three years and the subsequent battle for its liberation in July 2017, caused the destruction of 80% of the Old City.

Thousands of rare books and manuscripts, as well as artefacts from Mosul's libraries, museums and collections were destroyed or looted.

Mosul lay in ruins, its heritage reduced to rubble, its religious monuments and cultural antiquities damaged, and thousands of its inhabitants displaced, leaving them scarred, in need of massive humanitarian support.

The spirit of Mosul was shattered.

Revive the Spirit of Mosul: a cross-disciplinary initiative

In February 2018, a Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq was held in Kuwait. The international community announced a strong mobilization for the rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure.

The Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, declared: 'Reconstruction will succeed, and Iraq will regain its influence only if the human dimension is given priority; education and culture are the key elements. They are forces of unity and reconciliation.'

Revive the Spirit of Mosul is UNESCO's most ambitious reconstruction campaign in recent decades. It is based on three pillars: heritage, cultural life and education, as essential drivers for the recovery of the city.

UNESCO has rebuilt the iconic Al-Nouri Mosque and its Al-Hadba Minaret, the Convent of Our Lady of the Hour including the House of Prayer, Al-Tahera Church, as well as 124 heritage houses and several other buildings of the Old City of Mosul.

These projects, carried out to the highest international standards, have generated almost 7,700 jobs. More than 2,800 people have also been trained and qualified in construction, including traditional techniques such as alabaster carving, and heritage conservation and restoration.

The initiative has also focused on reviving cultural life, by supporting traditional music and film-making, and education, with more than 400 classrooms rehabilitated in Mosul and the surrounding area and more than 5,000 teachers and educators trained in promoting culture and intercultural dialogue.



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Al-Hadba Minaret

Al-Hadba Minaret was built in 1172 by the Seljuk ruler Nur al-Din as part of the religious complex that included Al-Nouri Mosque. It was 45 metres tall and decorated with ornamental brickwork. Its iconic name 'Al-Hadba', which means 'the hunch-back' in Arabic, was given to it in the 14th century when it became noticeable that the structure was leaning.

The minaret remained untouched over the centuries and became a prominent landmark of this historic city, symbolizing its cultural value. The minaret also had great national significance, and was printed on the country's ten thousand Dinar banknote.

The destruction of the main part of the minaret in 2017 was a national tragedy. During the battle for the liberation of Mosul, residents of the city, known as Moslawis, risked their lives by forming a human chain around the site: this act of bravery prevented its complete destruction.

Rebuilding 'as it was'

UNESCO and the University of Mosul conducted a survey among Moslawis on the reconstruction of Al-Hadba Minaret. 94% of those consulted wanted to see the minaret restored exactly as it was before its destruction.

The first phase of the reconstruction work included in-depth structural, geological and archaeological studies. Teams also had to secure, clean and stabilize the remaining base of the minaret.

The reconstruction phase began in February 2022 with the support of the United Arab Emirates. The minaret was rebuilt entirely with bricks, a technique that has not been used for centuries, and with a leaning structure, which was an extraordinarily complex technical challenge.

The result is a monument that combines the ancestral architecture and know-how of Mosul with the most innovative international techniques, which guarantee the integrity and stability of the monument.

Al-Hadba Minaret in 2018, prior to reconstruction work.



3 questions to Maria Rita Acetoso, who leads the UNESCO reconstruction team for Al-Nouri Mosque, Al-Saa'a Convent and Al-Tahera Church

Why was the reconstruction of the minaret a technical challenge?

Maria Rita Acetoso: The minaret had a 40-metre rounded shaft, with an internal double helicoidal staircase and with decorative panels in carved bricks. It was built straight but, over the centuries, it leaned. Rebuilding a leaning minaret using an internal steel structure would have already been difficult: doing it with traditional material was even more challenging. And we did this on top of the original bases, already affected by severe structural problems before the intentional destruction and left significantly weakened by the massive impact of the explosion.

How did you make the minaret lean?

Maria Rita Acetoso: The lost shaft has been entirely rebuilt in brick masonry, with local improvements to reinforce the joints of the cylinder's external sections and the inner trunk. The approved angle, which means that the tower extends as far as 1.6 metres horizontally, has been reached through a special positioning of the bricks' rows, while ensuring the horizontal nature of the mortar joints, which are critical for distributing the stresses in a homogenous way, thus avoiding structural damage. We have mobilized the best international experts, including those from the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy.

UNESCO wanted to use traditional materials as much as possible. Which were they?

Maria Rita Acetoso: The use of brick masonry has ensured the compatibility with the original materials, the respect for the original construction technique, and sustainability and durability of the materials. This entailed, as much as possible, the reuse of historical fragments recovered from the original structure. It included of course the external decorative panels, made of carved bricks. By doing this, we managed to restore the true shape of the minaret back into Mosul's culture and its urban skyline.

Al-Hadba Minaret in 2025, following a painstaking reconstruction process to rebuild the monument exactly as it was.



© UNESCO/Abdulrah Rashid

Al-Nouri Mosque Complex

Following its construction in the second half of the 12th century, Al-Nouri Mosque was invested as Mosul's Great Mosque. Since then, it has been a core site in the urban life and development of the Old City of Mosul.

In 2014, Daesh hoisted its flag at the top of the mosque, and its leader proclaimed the 'new caliphate' from its prayer hall. The final blow was dealt during Daesh's retreat in 2017, when the group detonated a series of explosives inside the prayer hall.

Reinstating Al-Nouri Mosque to its rightful place as the main mosque of Mosul was not only an architectural challenge – it was a symbolic act of revival. This reconstruction aimed to restore the sense of belonging and identity of all Moslawis, and the *ethos* of Mosul as a centre of multicultural creativity.

'This heritage links us to the roots of our ancestors'

Shaima Abdul Munaim, 50 years old, lives in the Old City. Her house is near Al-Nouri Mosque. She says: 'When the minaret was destroyed, I couldn't eat for three days, I was weeping and in mourning.'

'The leaning minaret is our heritage and an icon and symbol of Mosul. We had all the sweet memories related to the prayer time in the mosque. Since I was a little girl, we used to go to the market and on the way back we would stop in the mosque to drink water,' remembers Shaima.

To her, 'Ramadan is different there. We go to the mosque for prayers, neighbours exchange dishes so we are all like one big family.'

52-year-old Noor al-Din Nadeem, a father of three boys and a girl, adds: 'The minaret is not only important to Moslawis but to all Iraqis. Al-Nouri Mosque connects us to the roots of our fathers and ancestors. Its reconstruction fills families with hope again.'



Al-Nouri Mosque Complex in 2018.

International design competition

The preparatory phase of the rehabilitation of these iconic monuments started in autumn 2018 thanks to the support of the United Arab Emirates. The first steps included the demining of the damaged site and the removal of hazardous materials.

The rubble was then sifted to allow for the identification and preservation of valuable fragments that could be reused for reconstruction. Salvaged structural elements were restored by Iraq's Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

On-site experts also conducted structural assessments and documented their findings to plan for reconstruction and restoration. In parallel, the site was stabilized.

A 2020 residents' survey showed that 70% of the people of Mosul wished to see the Al-Nouri Prayer Hall rebuilt as it was before, but with some improvements including a large area for ablutions, administrative rooms and a garden.

UNESCO launched an international competition. The winners, an Egyptian team of four partners chosen in April 2021, finalized the detailed design in May 2022, in close

collaboration with the University of Mosul and local experts. It was presented to the Mosul community at a public event held in June 2022.

A wonderful archaeological discovery

During the works undertaken by UNESCO, an exceptional archaeological discovery was made. In August 2021, when workers were examining the site to ensure the foundations were safe, they began excavations near the prayer hall. While working on the newly exposed part of the floor, workers noticed gaps underneath which led them to a room that was almost completely buried. They then discovered four rooms, probably used for ablutions, dating back to the 12th century.

Forty workers and archaeologists from the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) participated in the excavation. The dating of the rooms was possible due to the discovery of coins from the Atabeg era. Some other artifacts were also discovered including jars and pieces of pottery and carved stone.

This remarkable archaeological find has been integrated into the reconstruction design of Al-Nouri Mosque. The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq is working with UNESCO to ensure that it is renovated and preserved as a museum where people will be able to learn about the different phases of the mosque's history.

A complex reconstruction process

In June 2024, UNESCO's teams discovered six bombs, designed to cause significant destruction, hidden by Daesh within the walls of Al-Nouri Mosque.

Iraqi authorities were promptly notified of the discovery, before the area was secured and the bombs safely disposed of.

While construction work recommenced within days, the bombs were just one of a number of complex challenges that had to be resolved during the rebuilding process.

Al-Nouri Mosque in 2024.



Our Lady of the Hour Convent

The first stone in the construction of the Convent of Our Lady of the Hour, also known locally as Al-Saa'a, was laid in 1866. From the outset, this convent had three dimensions: religious, cultural and social. It included a church, a seminary with accommodation for a community of brothers and a community of sisters, a school for boys, a school for girls, as well as a hospital and a house for mission employees. A school for women teachers was added at a later stage.

The Dominicans decided to create the first modern printing press of Mesopotamia in Mosul. They published the first

Bible in Arabic, the first Kurdish grammar book and many other texts of local interest.

Empress Eugenie de Montijo, the wife of Napoleon III, financed the construction of the bell tower – the first one built in Iraq – in 1881, including the famous four-dial clock. The clock's name was also given to the local neighbourhood and its chimes have added rhythm to people's lives across the entire city throughout the centuries.

The structure of the Convent was damaged during the occupation of the city by Daesh and its interior was looted and ransacked.



Our Lady of the Hour Convent in 2024, following the completion of reconstruction works.

© UNESCO/Abdullah Rashid



A new set of bells was cast for the convent by Cornille Havard foundry in Normandy, France, in December 2022.

© UNESCO/Christelle ALIX

Putting local communities at the heart of reconstruction

In March 2020, in close collaboration with the Dominican Order and relevant Iraqi authorities, UNESCO launched the preparatory phase for reconstruction of the Convent. The priority was to secure the site and clear it of unexploded ordnance.

This was followed by the preparation of a detailed design for the execution of the works. Developed in cooperation with experts and local stakeholders, this design aimed to satisfy local expectations and generate a sense of local ownership.

The active reconstruction phase began in April 2023. Funded by the United Arab Emirates, it focused on both restoring and modernizing the Convent's architectural elements. In addition to structural repairs, the project included a revamp of the House of Prayer's interior design and facilities, ensuring historical integrity and functionality. To make the building more sustainable, a solar panel system was installed on the roof.

Also in 2023, the Convent received three new bells - named Gabriel, Michael and Raphael - cast by the artisanal foundry

Cornille Havard in Normandy, France. Now installed in the clock tower, they once again ring for the residents of Mosul.

The rehabilitation of the Convent was completed in January 2024.

Rehabilitation of the House of Prayer

With the support of France, UNESCO initiated in 2022 the rehabilitation of the House of Prayer, a building next to the convent, as a multipurpose educational and cultural centre for the local community. Work was completed in February 2024.

3 questions to Brother Nicolas Tixier, OP, Prior Provincial of the Order of Preachers, representative of the Dominican Order in Mosul

What makes Mosul unique?

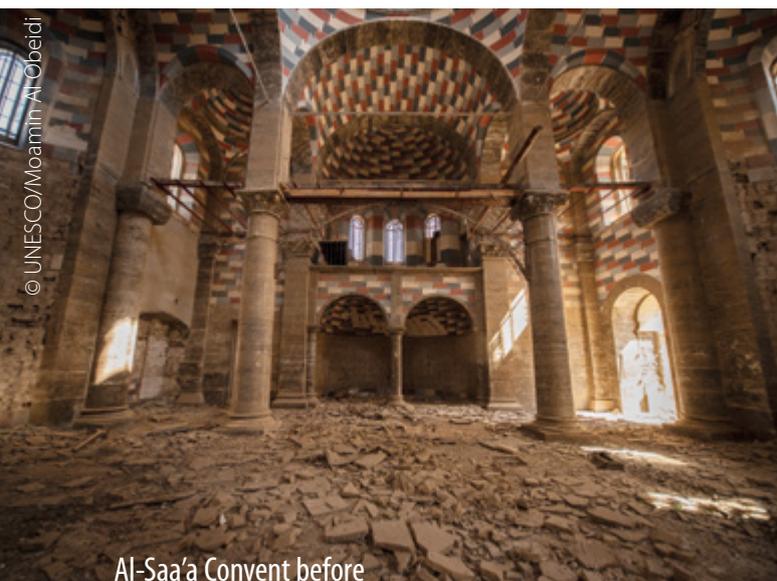
Brother Nicolas: Mosul has always been a meeting place – a place where different paths converge. The Convent of Our Lady of the Hour was built by both Christians and Muslims. Over the last two decades it became a sanctuary frequented by the faithful of both religions. This is what characterizes Mosul: the city is a mosaic, marked by different hues which form a harmonious design. These links were shattered by the war. Today, we want to rediscover them.

What are the challenges of Our Lady of the Hour's project?

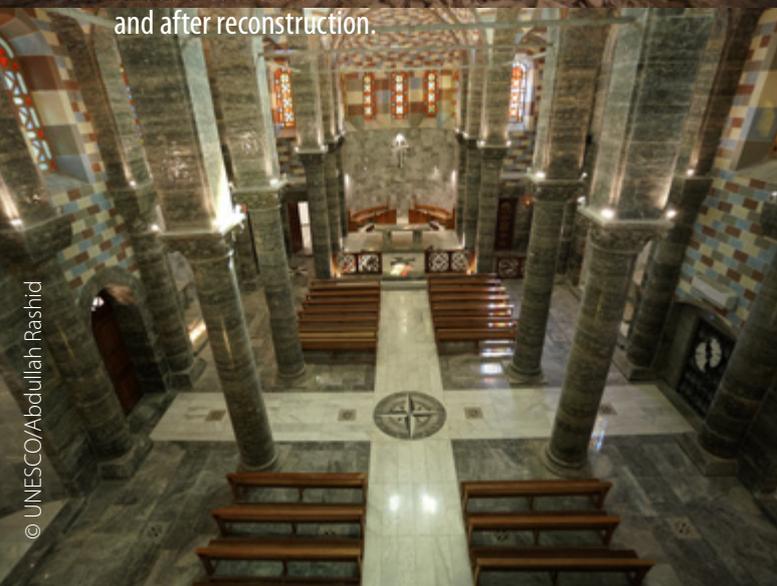
When the reconstruction of Mosul began, we were worried this part of our heritage would be forgotten. Without the drive of UNESCO, and the financial support of the United Arab Emirates, the reconstruction of the convent would never have been considered. The reason why the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative has created so much hope is because it has rebuilt the city's morale. Rebuilding the city together is a way of rebuilding society. We want these sites to rediscover their purpose, to help breathe life into the three elements at the heart of the first Pope's Mission to Mesopotamia – the religious, the cultural and the social. This convent has always been open to all, to people from all sectors of society and of all faiths, and to women and men alike.

Women seem to have an important place in the convent, can you tell us why?

In traditional societies, it's important to have places in which women can come and go freely, and this includes religious sites. Our Lady of the Hour hosted the first school for girls in Mesopotamia and also the first college for female teachers. These Iraqi women then fanned out across the entire Nineveh Plains, and also travelled to the mountains as far as Zakho, in order to establish schools in the villages. Our mission has not changed. Today, there are 150 Dominican Sisters in Iraq, who follow the same type of instruction. Our most important raw material is humanity.



Al-Saa'a Convent before and after reconstruction.



Al-Tahera Church

Al-Tahera Church was built in 1859 and opened in 1862. Its multiple altars, its dining room, two sacristy rooms and the mezzanine floor that occupies the church's western side set it aside from other churches of the same period.

The Syriac Catholic Church underwent renovation about 100 years after its construction. Its external walls were finished with stone. The tribunes were built to accommodate school students during great celebrations. Also, it was painted inside.

In 2017, the Church was almost completely destroyed. Reconstruction work was complex as the roof had collapsed, large parts of the arcades and vaults had been destroyed, along with the external walls.

The first step of the project, which began in 2019, consisted in dismantling the remaining parts of its concrete roof which were in danger of collapsing. The 650-m² site was then demined and the remaining parts were temporarily stabilized. The workers cleared the rubble and sorted the fragments to recover more than 6,000 elements of heritage

interest, that could be reused at various reconstruction stages.

As with the other sites' reconstruction plans, Al-Tahera's project was carried out in line with local community expectations, and the cultural and religious history. The church has been fully restored to its original state and was handed over to the Christian community in September 2024.

As part of the reconstruction, the internal alabaster surfaces underwent a meticulous restoration and conservation process, revealing the original painted floral decorations of the church. This effort was supported by a team of thirteen students from the Fine Arts Department at the University of Mosul, including 30% female participants. These students received hands-on training in surface conservation throughout the project as part of UNESCO's commitment to practical technical training.

The restoration was marked by a high level of technical detail and the use of specific consolidation techniques and materials, implemented for the first time in Iraq.

The reconstruction was completed in August 2024.



Al-Tahera Church in 2018.
© UNESCO/Moamin Al Obeidi



The rescue of ancient manuscripts

The library of Mosul originally housed a unique collection of ancient manuscripts dating back to the 9th century in addition to printed books from 1515. Multi-faith in origin, the archive contained not only ancient Syriac and Aramaic Christian texts, but also Muslim, Jewish and Yazidi papers on history, mathematics, history and literature.

When Daesh arrived in Mosul in 2014, Father Najeeb, the Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, and many of his supporters were able to remove 800 manuscripts and flee to Erbil. Since then, they have been restoring and digitizing the ancient manuscripts of Mosul. With the financial assistance of Hungary and Lithuania, UNESCO has been supporting this project by opening a Conservation Laboratory, providing technical equipment and training in conservation and restoration techniques for his staff and volunteers.

‘The archives of the Digital Centre of Eastern Manuscripts embody the spirit of Mosul: a spirit of trust, confidence and peaceful co-existence between Iraq’s numerous communities,’ explained Father Najeeb. ‘It is essential to preserve and give public access to these archives so that in building the future, the history of interaction between communities is remembered and can serve as an inspiration’.

More than 8,000 manuscripts from 105 different collections from Iraq, Turkey and Iran are being digitized. Currently there are *circa* 10,000 manuscripts still to be conserved and archived.



Al-Tahera Church in 2025, following the completion of extensive reconstruction work.

© UNESCO/Abdullah Rashid

Heritage houses

Revive the Spirit of Mosul also means bringing the old city back to life by allowing residents to return to their homes destroyed during the war.

UNESCO has restored and rebuilt 124 heritage houses, with the support of the European Union. Reconstruction concerned walls as well as the upgrading of the electrical network, septic tanks, drainage, road surfacing and public lighting.

Before rebuilding, the neighbourhood had to be cleared. Some 2,107 tons of rubble and 21 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) were removed.

The restoration and rehabilitation of one hundred twenty two heritage houses as well as of two historic palatial houses, Suliman al Sayegh and Al Zyada, were successfully completed by February 2024 and the buildings were handed over to their owners.

Work focused on the reconstruction and careful restoration of the houses' architectural elements, using traditional techniques and materials, to preserve the identity and urban integrity of the old city.

The restored Suliman al Sayegh palatial house will be used as a museum.

This project has also generated over 3500 local jobs in Mosul. UNESCO launched an apprenticeship programme to encourage youth employment in the fields of bricklaying, masonry, electrical installation and carpentry. More than 937 young men and women have received this training.

In addition, an apprenticeship programme for marble, stone and alabaster carvers was conducted to support seven small-to-medium enterprises in Mosul under the supervision of the Department of Labour and Social Affairs.



In March 2023, the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, met with families whose houses were being renovated as part of the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative.

Families return to old Mosul

'In total, we rebuilt 124 residential houses, benefitting around 170 families and over 700 people,' says Bahaa Hussain Ali, UNESCO's social coordinator.

Ahmad Waad, 35 years old, is one of the beneficiaries. He lives with his wife, their child and his brother and mother. 'During the war, the destruction was very frightening. All the rooms of my house collapsed. Moreover, we didn't have access to basic services such as electricity and water. There were only

hills of rubble and destroyed houses,' explains Ahmad.

He remembers: 'We fled to the Hulaila camp [for Internally Displaced People]. We stayed there for two months. Then we were hosted by my uncle in al-Yarmok neighbourhood. I couldn't stay at my uncle's for very long, so I rented a house in Hirmat quarter and stayed there for three years. Mosul was liberated in 2017, but I couldn't come back: the city was destroyed and there was no

work here. But one day, in 2019, I got a call from my neighbour saying that my house would be rebuilt by UNESCO. I couldn't believe my ears!'

Today, Ahmad is once again living in the house where he was born: 'My house was rebuilt in one year. I received it in September 2021. It's a new life that has begun. There is nothing better than the smell of my neighbourhood!'



Zyada Palatial House, one of the most prominent buildings in the Old City of Mosul, before and after reconstruction work.



Reviving Mosul's vibrant cultural scene

The spirit of Mosul is made of living heritage and a vibrant cultural life, from traditional music festivals to booksellers on the streets. UNESCO and its partners have implemented a comprehensive plan to restore cultural life and cultural institutions. Film, music and all creative industries are at the heart of this work.

In autumn 2019, UNESCO organized the first cultural festival in Mosul since its occupation by Daesh. It was held on Al Najafi Street, which is famous for its open-air book market and considered as a centre of cultural life in the city. UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund financed multiple events, including the launch of the documentary film *Long Live the Music* and music-related activities.

To support the revival of traditional music in Mosul, UNESCO also launched the Listening to Iraq programme, in partnership with the NGO Action for Hope. It provided training to 24 musicians from Mosul, leading to the creation of four ensembles who benefited from grants for music touring in Iraq.

A new milestone was reached in March 2022: the Mosul Traditional Music Festival took place in the Old City, including concerts in a fully rehabilitated heritage house. It was the first event of its kind since the Liberation. The third edition of the festival is set to take place in April 2025.

With the support of the European Union, and in partnership with the Theatre of Ghent in Belgium, UNESCO established a film lab at the Institute of Fine Arts of Mosul. Twenty students have been trained and, while producing nine short movies, got hands-on experience of the fundamental aspects of film production: director, screenwriter, editor, actor, set and costume design, audio and light technician and production assistant.

Moreover, a creative space called 'The Station' was opened in 2021. It serves as a hub for young people working on cultural and creative industries to meet, learn and exchange ideas. Many events such as concerts, workshops and exhibitions are taking place in the space.

Testimonials from film students

Kawthar Ahmad Yassin, 27 years old, studied in the film department of the College of Fine Arts. 'I love filming as it reflects the situation of Mosul and to reach all around the world. Our community is a conservative one that objects the appearance of women on TV, this is a major challenge for us young women,' she explains.

'Yet, my parents encourage me to do what I like and always tell me to neglect the negative comments I see on social media pertaining to my work. My father always gives me this advice do what you love and don't listen to people's opinions,' Kawthar adds. She directed *Eyes of the Darkness*, then made the film titled *Noora* which dealt with child sexual abuse, homeless children and child labour.

Faryal Ahmad, 23 years old, was also a film student. 'I had my mother take part in a movie. Then my whole family supported me. We are a family that loves art. My film is called *Faslya*, a word to imply paying an amount of money or giving away girls to another family to solve a conflict. I wish I could work more in films as being behind the camera is my true passion,' says Faryal.



© UNESCO/NTGent



A Community Information Centre

In November 2022, UNESCO opened a Community Information Centre in the Old City of Mosul to make sure that people are informed of, and participate in, UNESCO's initiative. The Centre is located by the Tigris River in the headquarters of the local foundation known as Mosul Heritage.

The centre includes an interactive exhibition on the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative to explain its different pillars and activities and to answer the community's questions. It is open every day except for Fridays.

The centre organizes weekly visits to project sites open to any community member as well as to foreign tourists. School visits to the sites are similarly organized, followed by educational activities related to heritage and culture. Moreover, the centre organizes regular cultural activities.

Since the centre's inauguration, more than 107,000 people have visited the exhibition.

Rebuilding peace through education

Revive the Spirit of Mosul is also about ensuring a safe learning environment for every child. More than 400 classrooms have been renovated in Mosul and its environs, and 5,000 education professionals have been trained in peace education to prevent the return of violent extremism.

In addition to causing extensive material damage, the war took a heavy toll on the mental health and well-being of young Moslawis. Most children missed three years of education, from 2014 to 2017, while those who stayed in school were exposed to the violent and extreme ideology of Daesh. To address this challenge, UNESCO launched the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education (PVE-E) project. More than 5,000 education actors (teachers, parents, principals, etc.) have been trained, 60% of whom are women, for the benefit of more than 120,000 students.

With support from the European Union, UNESCO is also working on access to quality primary and secondary education for the community, including by addressing the needs of refugees, the displaced and other vulnerable groups.

This effort aims to create a safe and conducive learning environment in schools by strengthening teaching capacity, providing textbooks and learning materials to school-age children, improving children's well-being through psychosocial support, and reducing the risk of unexploded ordnance and mines to children through awareness-raising activities.

Al-Ekhlis Primary School

Al-Ekhlis Primary School has been a fixture in the west side of the Old City of Mosul for nearly 60 years. During the city's occupation by Daesh, the students and their families saw their dreams of a promising future crumble under the weight of war and destruction.



UNESCO rebuilt this school with the support of the European Union. Students, parents and school administrators contributed their ideas for the design through a consultative process.

Reconstruction work was completed in February 2024. The new fully furnished and equipped school, with cutting-edge design, modern and child-friendly facilities, aims to provide a safe and stimulating learning environment for hundreds of children who have been affected by the recent conflict.

The school is equipped with 12 classrooms, a library, two laboratories, one cantina, principal and teachers rooms and a sports facility, ensuring a comprehensive approach to child care, development and education for over 400 students per shift. The initiative not only focuses on educational revival but also on community rebuilding, offering a much-needed school for the children in the old city but also hope and a sense of normalcy to the families returning to Old Mosul. The Syriac Catholic Church, which owns and manages the school, plans to welcome the first students in 2025.

Restoring the Mosul University Library

In partnership with Italy, UNESCO is working to ensure that the Mosul University Library resumes operations and becomes accessible as it was before the destructions and occupation from 2014 to 2017. Launched in June 2023 with a USD 2 million grant, the “Restoring Mosul University Library” project focuses on modernizing the library.

So far, 87 staff members have undergone training in areas such as Library Management, Digitalization, Cataloguing, Preservation, Partnerships, and other key library functions. The library has been equipped with a state-of-the-art Library Information System, software, and other essential tools, creating a fully automated process that grants access to over 70,000 students and 5,000 faculty members, connecting them to invaluable internal and external knowledge resources. A specialized Library Materials Restoration Unit has been established and is being supplied with the essential equipment and materials to ensure the proper restoration, preservation, and digitalization of rare books, manuscripts, and other significant collections, which will be housed in a safe library repository to be developed soon. Furthermore, key partnerships have been established with national and international institutions to secure support, learning materials, and expertise to benefit students and researchers alike.

The Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, meets with the President of the University of Mosul, Prof. Dr. Kossay Alahmady, in March 2023.

Testimonials from Mosul teachers

‘The Moslawi community has survived a psychological crisis that led pupils to refuse the idea of going back to school and follow a curriculum. We had in our primary school pupils who suffered from psychological issues we couldn’t handle. We lost several learners and we also had students with a hardline, extreme mentality,’ said Faris Abdulla, 46 years old, a Yarimja Primary School teacher.

‘UNESCO’s training taught us how to solve issues like hate against school, the community and overall learning. It has given us tools to talk to our students, to go to their families and sit down with them, to stay close to them. We were able to bring them to the right track and convince them to return to school through activities and dialogue,’ explained Faris.

Maha Abid Hssain, 52 years old, works on many activities to encourage the group work and exchange ideas among pupils. ‘I use the activities that I learned in training: implicating them in painting, drawing and design. I want to promote the love of the country, to encourage them to study and specify their targets for the future. Now, they start to love school and to spend with me more than the 40 minutes class time,’ said Maha.

The Islamic education teacher Mohammed Hilal Ahmad, 43 years old, mentioned the challenges that he is still facing with some of the students. ‘I receive 40 to 50 questions every day from the pupils about religion and about some delicate matters that can’t be uttered from a small child’s mind by themselves but from their adult relatives,’ detailed Mohammed. UNESCO’s techniques paid off in a really good way. Drawing and other techniques I also use in the classroom reduce quarrels and trouble among the students. Pupils have regained enthusiasm to learn more and work out with each other with the energy that they have in them,’ he added.



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Professional training

With support from the European Union, UNESCO implemented a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme in Mosul for adults which combined general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills relevant to the world of work. The project addressed the lack of training opportunities and skills for unemployed youth in urban areas.

2,800 trainees were reached, 18% of whom were women. They graduated in competency-based technical and vocational training in construction. 80% of graduates joined on-site work-based training on rehabilitating historic buildings.

The skills acquired are relevant to the broader construction industry and have increased trainees' chances of future employment. Heritage and home reconstruction projects are a major source of employment for these trainees: UNESCO created more than 7,700 jobs as part of its initiative in Mosul.

Re-establishing a set of heritage professionals and craftsmen

UNESCO also implemented a training programme with the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the University of Mosul, which responded to the need to re-establish a pool of heritage professionals and craftspeople in Mosul, as well as to ensure their direct involvement in the reconstruction process.

The training programme targeted two categories of workers: 50 local professionals – architects, engineers and archaeologists – who were involved in assessing and documenting damage and defining the necessary interventions. It also targeted 70 local craftspeople as key players in the actual execution of restoration and reconstruction works.

The first step included mapping of the most common historical materials and construction techniques used in Mosul, as well as a full assessment of craftsmanship in the



city, in order to evaluate needs, especially in stone masonry, alabaster restoration, plaster, metal works and carpentry.

The 2-year programme has been successfully completed, with 50 students receiving specialized, hands-on training from internationally renowned experts and graduating in 2023.

Enhancing employability for vulnerable youth in Nineveh

The Republic of Korea also funded a project to enhance the employability of vulnerable youth in Nineveh. As of September 2024, 100 teachers and trainers (25% female) from

Nineveh Vocational Centre and 2 vocational schools had enhanced their knowledge of quality assurance. 120 teachers and trainers (55 % female) received training on Competency-based Pedagogy and Assessment. To date, 400 youths (40% female) have benefited from vocational training courses under the project.

The project has rehabilitated the Intissar Commercial School for Girls and built six workshops for the Nineveh Agricultural School and Mosul Vocational Training Centre. It has also established three Career Development Centres, to support graduates as they enter the labour market and search for employment.



Young Moslawis learn new skills

Rayan Riadh Ahmad, 33 years old, is a technical institute graduate. 'When the city was liberated, I had no more hope and I couldn't find a job. But, in 2019, I heard about TVET and applied. A couple of months later, I got the call to join a training in the masonry department which lasted for 45 days. This training opportunity came with a first job: a work as monitor in the Shams Al-Humam company which was also funded by UNESCO. After the completion of this contract, I was ready to find a job myself. I applied to the Sami company and I work there now. TVET really affected my life in a positive way,' said the young man.

The initiative supports the inhabitants of the Old City, but also of Mosul and the region as a whole. 'We receive the names from the vocational institute or from the unemployment database. For trainees to learn a new work skill while supporting their families, they will also receive an amount of money as *per diem* expenses,' explained Raya Issa, the TVET supervisor.

Yarub Sameer, 28 years old, who has a master's degree in plantation technology, also has a job opportunity thanks to UNESCO's programme: 'I started at the beginning of 2021 as a trainee.

I did the training on colouring and mending alabaster. I got the opportunity to meet people and build up a network of contacts. I am working now independently with the Shams Al-Humam company.'

'My work is decorating, mending and colouring alabaster,' said Yarub. 'One day, a 68-year-old man told me that he remembered scratching his house's yard alabaster with his nail to create a mark his sons and grandsons could remember. Me and my friends developed an idea to create a "save the heritage" volunteer team to help preserve Moslawi heritage and relics. We rebuild and resurrect the memories of people who were devoted to these pieces of alabaster.'

Iman Taha, aged 27, is also working on alabaster work. She is divorced and supports her child, her late sister's children and her mother. 'My mother didn't like the idea of me working on construction sites, where usually only men work. But she allowed me to do so when she came and saw other young women working here,' said Iman. Subsequently, the women who received the TVET training agreed to work together by creating their own private and independent venture.



The alleyways surrounding Al-Nouri Mosque come to life in March 2024 following rehabilitation.

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Bab Al-Saray Bazaar in Mosul's Old City in November 2024.

© UNESCO/Hadi Al-Najjar



People celebrate New Year's Eve at Khan Al-Gumrug, a heritage building from the 17th century, in January 2025.

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A market in Mosul's Old City comes back to life in September 2023 following reconstruction work.

© UNESCO/Moyasser Nasseer



Fish are sold at the market near the Old Bridge of Mosul in December 2024.

© UNESCO/Hadi Al-Najjar



The lights of Al-Saa'a Church once again shine over Nineveh Street in December 2024.

© UNESCO/Hadi Al-Najjar



A man pours tea for customers at a local café in the Old City in December 2024.

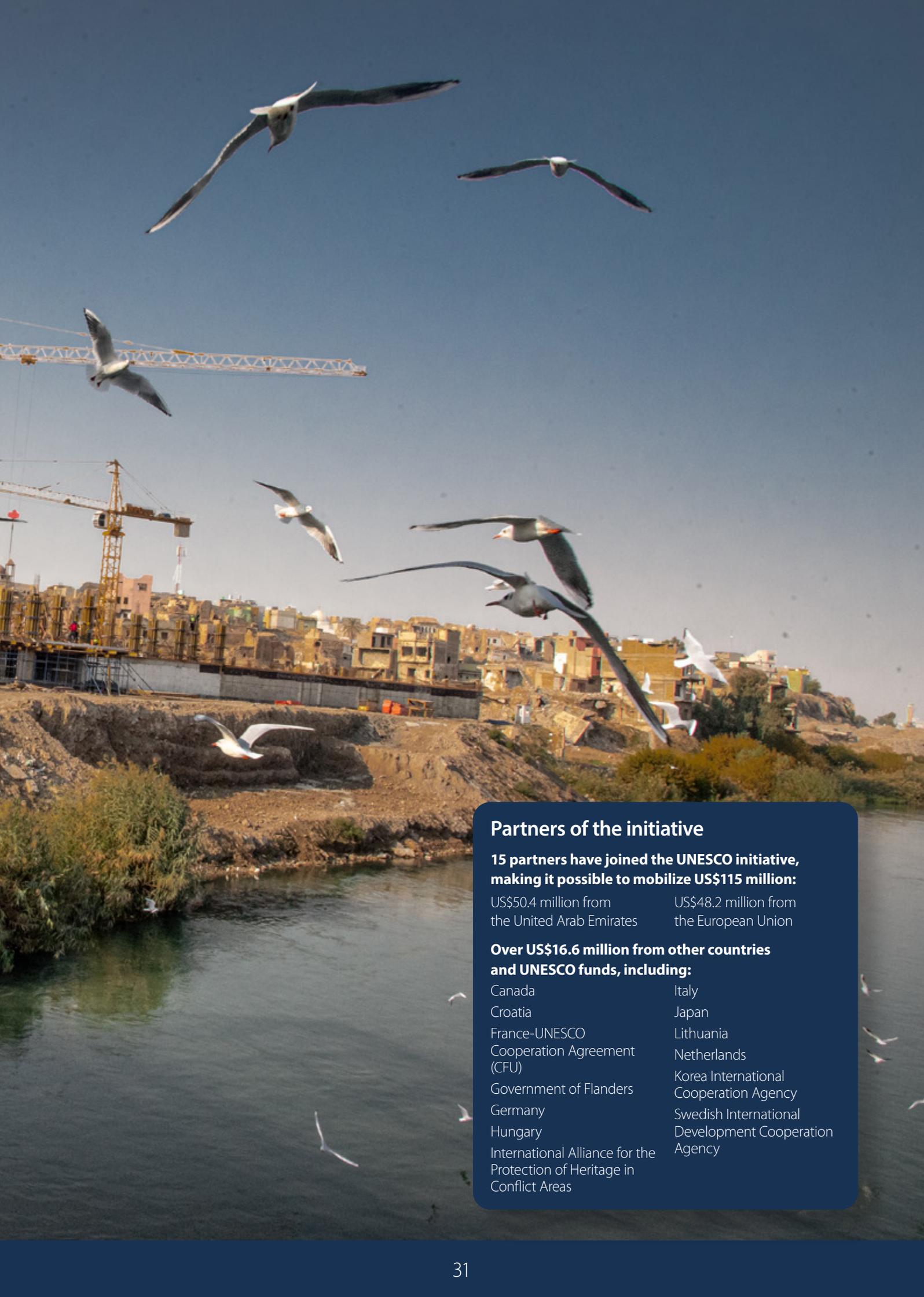
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Students tour the UNESCO Community Information Centre, located at the Mosul Heritage foundation, in December 2024.

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Partners of the initiative

15 partners have joined the UNESCO initiative, making it possible to mobilize US\$115 million:

US\$50.4 million from the United Arab Emirates

US\$48.2 million from the European Union

Over US\$16.6 million from other countries and UNESCO funds, including:

Canada

Italy

Croatia

Japan

France-UNESCO Cooperation Agreement (CFU)

Lithuania

Government of Flanders

Netherlands

Germany

Korea International Cooperation Agency

Hungary

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas



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