

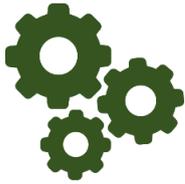


The Blue Shield aims to be the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It was founded in 1996 by the four key international organisations in their domains, the International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

Its roots, however, are in the years following the Second World War. Following the global destruction caused by the war, UNESCO adopted the [1954 Hague Convention](#) which created rules to protect cultural goods during armed conflicts. This was the first of such international treaty and highlighted the concept of common heritage. The Blue Shield is the symbol used to identify cultural sites protected by this Convention.

During the past years, we have continued to see our cultural heritage suffer damage and destruction. Natural or man-made disasters, wars and ethnic or religious conflicts represent a significant threat to the ability of future generations to enjoy the heritage we have today.

It is therefore a necessity to inform, train and help cultural heritage experts and other stakeholders to safeguard and protect our memory in order to pass it on. The Blue Shield, both at the international and national levels, provide a means for achieving this.



How Does it Work?

The Blue Shield takes a cross-sectoral approach to its work, including libraries, museums, monuments and sites, and archives. It works for the protection of the world's cultural heritage by coordinating preparations to meet and respond to emergency situations as well as providing post-crisis support. It promotes high standards of preparation through risk management training and awareness-raising campaigns for professionals and the general public.

The Blue Shield exists both at the international and the national level. *The International Committee of the Blue Shield* is constituted by representatives from the International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA) and International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). In addition, four national committee members are elected to the committee. The Chair is Karl von Habsburg (Austria), and the vice chair is Dr Peter Stone.

The International Committee looks at global issues. It acts in an advisory capacity for the protection of endangered cultural heritage, and consults and co-operates with other bodies including UNESCO, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). It also supports the development of globally relevant tools and producing statements and coordinates the work of national committees as relevant.

The National Blue Shield Committees promote the ratification and practical implementation by national governments of the Hague Convention. National committees exist in a number of countries and bring together a diverse group of professionals, local and national government, emergency services and the armed forces. They promote disaster preparedness, organise training, and can help with coordinating national disaster response.

The expertise contained in and the international and national committees allow the organisation to collect and share information on threats to cultural property worldwide, thus helping international players to take appropriate measures in case of armed conflict or disaster.

For example, Blue Shield National Committees and experts were present after the earthquake in Abruzzo, Italy, in times of conflict in Syria and just a few days after the emergency disaster in Haiti. The efforts of Blue Shield made sure that the initial momentum was translated into a long-term dedication to protection and restoration of heritage.

In Australia, the [Blue Shield Australia Symposium](#) saw participants share expertise, experiences and case studies of the protection of cultural heritage in times of natural disaster, as well as discussing climate change and the strategies being put in place by the sector to work towards a sustainable future. This is just one example of how the Blue Shield encourages the safeguarding of, and respect for, cultural heritage.

IFLA works through the Blue Shield to respond to conflicts and disasters where cultural heritage is at risk, is being destroyed or has been destroyed.

Why Should You Get Involved?



In addition to the International Committee, there are Blue Shield national committees in 19 countries, and progress towards establishing them in another six. Besides bringing together stakeholders, these groups also provide a forum to improve emergency preparedness by sharing experiences and exchanging information. They offer a focal point for efforts to raise national awareness of threats to cultural heritage.

As well as helping IFLA with its goal of preserving and restoring cultural heritage, your engagement can also advance your own objectives, and connect you with others in the field. Blue Shield is focussed on building strong experts groups to call on in case of an emergency or disaster, and people from all over the world volunteer their expertise to safeguard cultural heritage. Blue Shield also offers a wide range of training, and information on how to become an active player in the field.

Being a part of Blue Shield, you are a part of the protection of our cultural heritage. It is valuable to promote the work of Blue Shield and support safeguarding of our cultural heritage, at both international and national levels!

What Can You Do?

Engage in safeguarding and protecting cultural heritage and become a part of the Blue Shield network.

The below offer some suggestions of how to get involved:

- Apply to join the [IFLA Preservation and Conservation mailing list](#) where a world-wide group of experts on cultural heritage and libraries share news, where you will be receiving updates on our work and find many allies ready to help you in your own advocacy work!
- Learn more by **reading the reference material** on the [Blue Shield website](#) and how **IFLA has [been involved in emergency situations](#)**.
- [Contact the Blue Shield Secretariat](#) to learn about your Blue Shield National Committee and what they do. The National Committees have the strength of their accurate knowledge of the local context, and are perfect focal points for concrete action aiming at the protection of cultural heritage.
- **Form a new Blue Shield National Committee if there is not one in your country.** A support letter from the national four founding organisations is needed. [Ask IFLA to help you out!](#)
- **Let IFLA know what you've done!** Share your stories [with us](#).