

# D2.1

## Report on the existing curricula assessment in cultural heritage and minority in KRI and Yemen



**TRANSITION**

PRESERVING THE  
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OF  
MINORITY  
COMMUNITIES



Co-funded by  
the European Union

TRANSITION Project n. 101178520

(Coordinator)



(associated partners)

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The TRANSITION project, “Preserving the tangible and intangible Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and in Yemen”, rests on two key assumptions: (1) education is pivotal for human rights, peace, and responsible citizenship; and (2) universities have a social responsibility to raise awareness and safeguard cultural heritage, especially that of minorities. In contexts affected by conflict and heritage loss, the project aims to build a multidisciplinary teaching environment that connects Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), policymakers, and communities to promote cultural heritage preservation and societal cohesion.

This report assesses existing cultural-heritage curricula in partner HEIs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Yemen, maps minorities’ heritage. The partners include Duhok University, Soran University, University of Suleimani and University of Zakho in KRI, and University of Adan and Taiz University in Yemen. It identifies gaps and needs, benchmarks with EU partners (University of Rome in Italy and University of Evora in Portugal). This is a milestone which sets a basis for later work (WP3: curriculum updates; WP4: training; WP5: raising awareness). The guiding questions center on how curricula balance tangible and intangible heritage, represent minority cultures, link preservation to public engagement and development, and support social cohesion; framed explicitly in the focus-group guide.

### Scope of the Work and Methodology

This study spans four complementary strands of evidence and analysis. First, it conducts a structured literature review, comparing protection of cultural heritage in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and in Yemen, reading KRI through a legal-institutional lens and Yemen through UNESCO’s international-organizational practices to surface challenges, mechanisms, and policy options for safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage in crisis settings. Second, it compiles and analyzes institutional information from partner universities via an online survey -covering academic programs, course offerings related to cultural heritage, teaching methods, languages of instruction, assessment approaches, and the presence of cross-cutting subjects (e.g., ethno-religious minorities). Third, it undertakes a close analysis of selected course books and syllabi provided by departments; partners shared titles and copies of course books, enabling a comparative review of content depth and coverage, with detailed syllabus analyses compiled in the report annexes. Finally, the project carries out interviews in the form of focus group discussions with instructors and teaching staff in each partner university—six FGDs in total—to understand perceptions and experiences, and draw recommendations on how cultural heritage (especially minority and intangible dimensions) is taught and how curricula might be improved; these FGDs complemented the survey and syllabus review.

## WP2 employed a mixed design:

1. An online survey to profile programs, subjects, languages, assessment methods, and collaborations across six partner HEIs.
2. Course/syllabus review in each selected department.
3. Six virtual Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), one per partner HEI, in Kurdish/Arabic (≈3 hours each), recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed.

A validation workshop was held online (June 17 & July 3, 2025) to present, refine, and confirm selections for WP3 updates.

## Key Findings: Curriculum Gap

### KRI's HEIs

Across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) partner universities, curricula place disproportionate weight on tangible heritage (archaeological sites, monuments, and material artifacts), while giving comparatively little systematic attention to the breadth of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), such as oral traditions, ritual practices, and craft knowledge. This pattern narrows students' exposure to the region's plural past and present and weakens links between classroom learning, communities, and practical preservation work. Even where minority heritage surfaces, it tends to be isolated rather than embedded across programs; for example, limited but notable engagement exists in Sulaimani's Philosophy and Cultural Studies, yet broader, systemic inclusion of Assyrian, Turkmen, Shabak, Armenian, Yazidi and Christian heritage is largely missing. The report warns that this omission reproduces a hierarchy of heritage—centering dominant narratives and overlooking minorities—at the expense of intercultural understanding and social cohesion in a region where minorities have faced displacement and violence.

### Yemeni HEIs

In Yemen (Aden and Taiz), heritage is frequently framed through national identity formation and its potential contribution to tourism and the broader economy. Programs in sociology, archaeology, and tourism effectively foreground heritage's public value, yet the same curricula systematically minimize the cultural expressions of Yemen's minority communities (e.g., Jewish, Christian, Bahai Ismaili, Akhdam). The result is a homogenized narrative that celebrates majority traditions while sidelining minority voices. Focus group testimony echoes this, with Yemeni participants emphasizing heritage's role in unity but showing institutional resistance to critical perspectives and sensitive topics. Moreover, a pronounced theory–practice gap persists: the curricula acknowledge the heritage–economy

nexus but offer limited applied training, fieldwork, or project-based experiences that would activate heritage for livelihoods and local development.

### Cross-case FGD insights

Comparative FGD analysis highlights complementary emphases and shared obstacles. KRI participants openly acknowledge exclusion of minorities and call for explicit reforms—e.g., dedicated Yazidi heritage content and stronger ICH components. Yemeni participants, by contrast, tend to frame heritage as a unifying national symbol, often downplaying minority distinctions and avoiding contentious topics. Both contexts report structural barriers to practical engagement: limited time and resources for preservation methods; a lack of field-based training that connects students with communities and living traditions; and institutional reluctance to embrace critical, multi-perspective approaches to heritage in conflict-affected settings. These dynamics underscore why curriculum updates must simultaneously expand minority/ICH content and create pathways for hands-on, community-linked learning.

### Survey snapshots

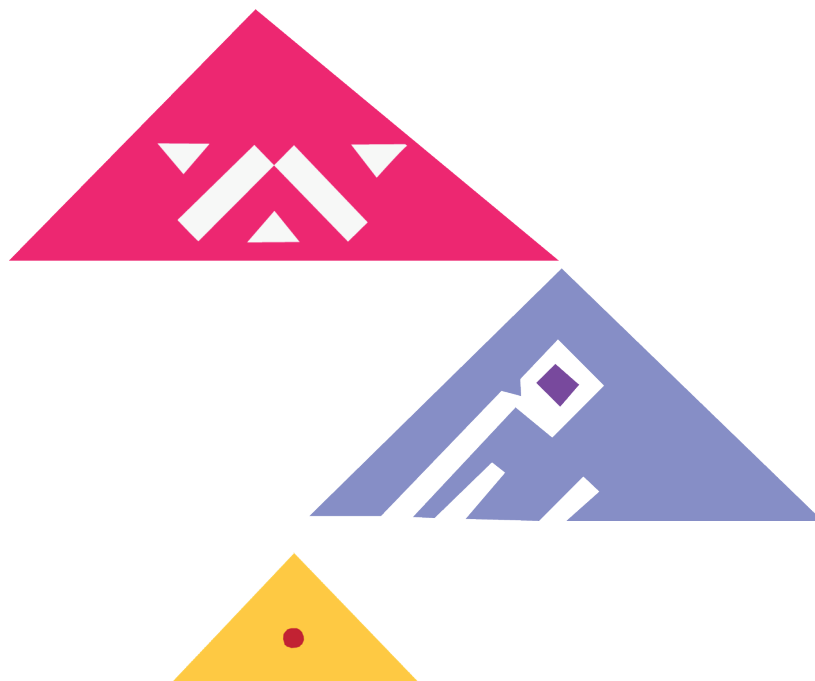
Theoretical lectures dominate in 7 of 8 partner universities, while group work and project-based learning are present but less systematic. Assessment still leans heavily on exams, with projects/presentations used less often (especially outside applied fields) limiting iterative, practice-oriented learning. Language of instruction mirrors institutional geographies: Arabic and Kurdish prevail in KRI and Yemen; Italian/Portuguese in EU partners; and English appears in only three universities. On standards and exposure, all Kurdish partners report adopting Bologna/ECTS in cultural-heritage courses, whereas Yemeni universities do not; yet even in KRI, internationalization remains uneven, with only five of eight partners reporting faculty mobility and several noting weak links to ministries and local cultural actors. Together, these indicators point to system-level levers (pedagogy, assessment, language policy, mobility, and partnerships) through which the project can accelerate inclusion of minorities and ICH and build practice-ready competencies.

## Recommendations

1. Integrate Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of minority groups explicitly into curricula (modules, case studies, fieldwork).
2. Strengthen capacity for documentation and protection (conservation methods, digital tools, field practice).
3. Embed heritage within sustainable development and tourism policies to connect learning with livelihoods.
4. Promote gender-inclusive heritage practices across teaching and community engagement.
5. Prioritize WP3 updates to the twelve selected curricula and align WP4 training on foundations, minority-heritage specializations, inclusive pedagogy, and structural/systemic needs.

## Conclusion

Comparative analysis underscores complementary pathways: in KRI, legal and institutional reforms for inclusive governance; in Yemen, holistic preservation strategies intertwined with education and community engagement. Overall, safeguarding cultural heritage in conflict-affected settings requires not only technical restoration but also legal recognition, institutional support, and community empowerment; so heritage can catalyze identity, cohesion, and long-term peace.





## Get in touch



Info@transition-project.eu



<http://www.transition-project.eu>

## Social Media



Co-funded by  
the European Union

**TRANSITION Project n. 101178520**

“Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”