

Learning by doing



series drawing on research and capacity development actions

# DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

## Heritage tourism in the digital era

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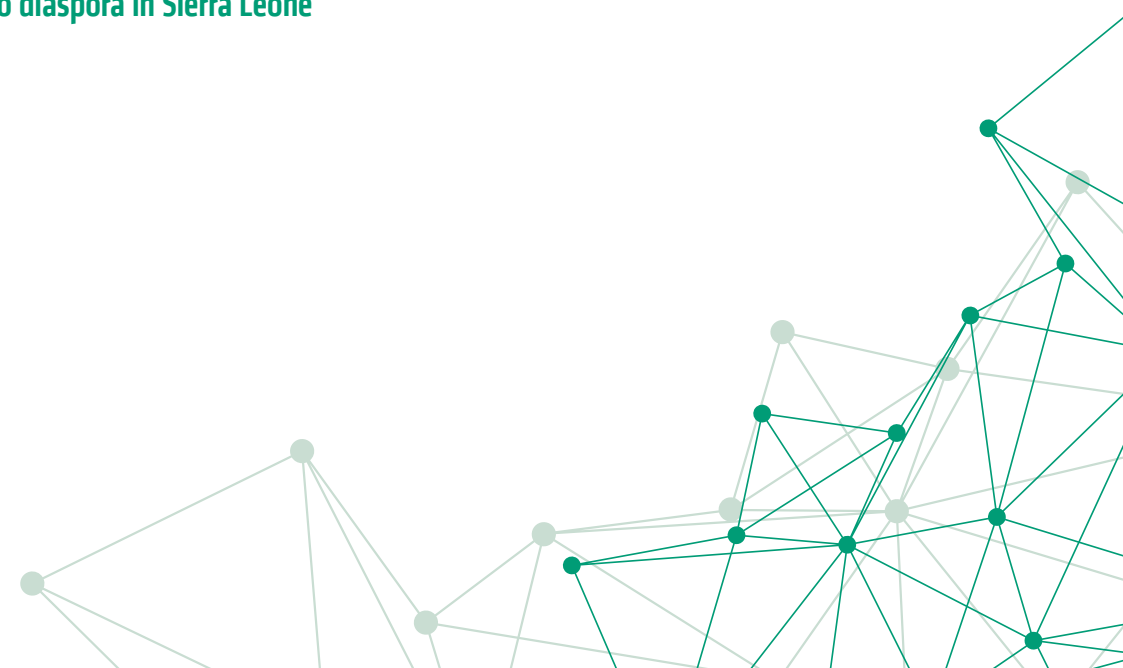


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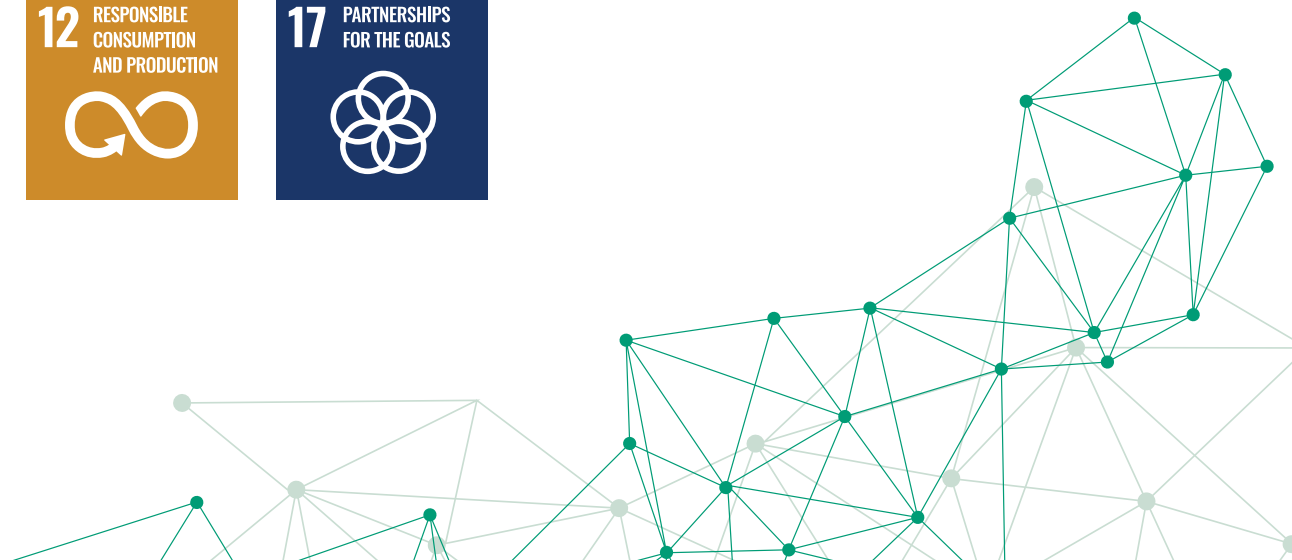
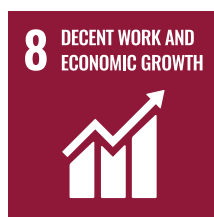


# Context

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest-growing global markets, accounting for 40% of the tourism sector, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Since the Covid 19-pandemic, focus has shifted to creating a more resilient and digitalised tourism model. Indeed, it was the focus of World Tourism Day 2022, which emphasised the importance of “rethinking tourism” as a key pillar for development and contributor to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Acknowledging the connection between tourism, education and employment, this sustainable approach also considers the environmental impact of tourism and opportunities for sustainable growth.

Cultural tourism includes heritage tourism, which focuses on cultural, historic, and natural resources. As it has a strong emphasis on strengthening cultural identity, this sector is a particularly promising avenue for diaspora-driven development. Within this, digitalisation – a process which is profoundly changing how we access and experience culture in general – has also widened access to heritage tourism activities..

The nexus between diaspora engagement, heritage tourism and digitalisation has become a key area of interest for EUDiF, addressed through the annual Future Forum, a dedicated case study and two interventions at local level in Moldova and Sierra Leone. The confluence of practical work and research findings made it clear that “rethinking tourism” must include diaspora engagement. In this dossier, we reflect on what we have learned from our research and actions in order to share inspiring practices and insights for future policymaking and initiatives.



# Challenges

Heritage tourism is a burgeoning industry in several countries. However, there are shortcomings that prevent governments and local actors from efficiently managing cultural sites and reaching their full tourism potential, such as:

- ▶ Heritage sites lacking proper infrastructure, education, and leisure facilities;
- ▶ Insufficient institutional capacities for adequate preservation and marketing;
- ▶ Businesses and consumers affected by the pandemic lockdowns and economic crisis;
- ▶ Governments need to prepare the local population to see heritage tourism as a business opportunity;
- ▶ There is a need to identify creative partnerships to re-brand tourism destinations and meet consumer demand;
- ▶ Increasing demand for virtual access to heritage sites in a post-Covid era and increasingly digitalised world;
- ▶ A lack of “digital heritage”, i.e. digitally preserving valuable materials for future generations.

## *Did you know*

*...that a heritage tourist spends as much as **38%** more per day and stays **22%** longer overall compared to other travellers?*

*Source: [www.mytravelresearch.com](http://www.mytravelresearch.com)*



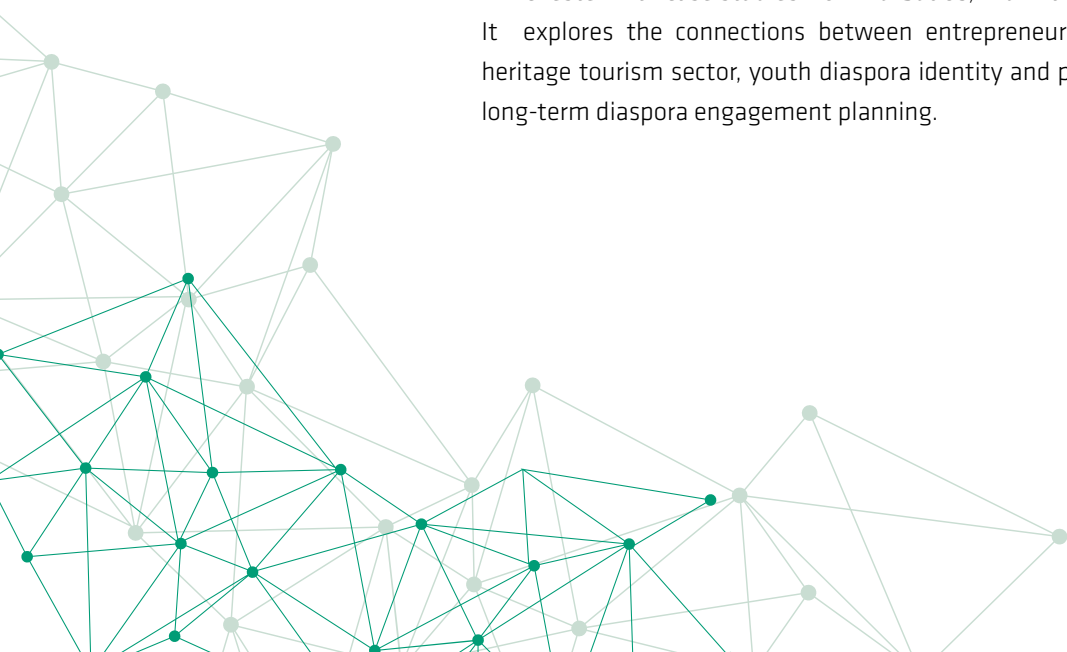
# Opportunities

Despite these challenges, opportunities arise to build the heritage tourism sector by generating collaborations, improving information exchange between sectors, and jointly reinventing tourism services and products. There is huge potential to take advantage of diaspora ties and transnationalism to revitalise the sector through *tangible* products (e.g. buildings, museums, or ruins), as well as *intangible* ones (e.g. traditional dance, storytelling, cuisine, rituals). In addition, in the digital era, the tech-savvy youth diaspora can play a special role in innovating heritage products and advancing virtual tourism.

In this paper, based on EUDiF's capacity development actions in **Moldova** and **Sierra Leone** we look at the contributions of diaspora actors in the heritage tourism sector. These two actions introduce new approaches to heritage tourism through different diaspora partnership models and expertise transfer. Additionally, we draw on the EUDiF case study on Youth entrepreneurship and heritage tourism, a piece of research conducted with the University of Winchester with case studies from **Barbados**, **Brazil** and **Rwanda**. It explores the connections between entrepreneurship in the heritage tourism sector, youth diaspora identity and potential for long-term diaspora engagement planning.

## What is "virtual tourism"?

*Virtual tourism involves the use of technology to artificially enhance or create a tourism experience. This model grants travellers remote access which allows them to discover destinations without physically visiting. Virtual cultural tourism methods make the most of technological advances and help satisfy the millennial generation's thirst for connectivity.*



# Diaspora roles in heritage tourism

Through EUDiF's research and operational work we have observed seven roles diaspora often play in the consumption, development, and innovation of heritage tourism, though more may exist. This publication goes into greater detail on the first four roles, based on our work.



## ■ Tourists

The sense of belonging, curiosity and strong connection to their personal heritage inspires many to travel to their ancestral homelands, search for roots and engage with the local community. ▶ [Page 12](#)



## ■ Trendsetters

Thanks to their global mind-set and experience, diaspora members can be pioneers in bringing new ideas and practical solutions, thus helping reinvigorating the sector and rebranding the tourism products and sectors at different levels, including on local and international markets. ▶ [Page 14](#)



## ■ Cross-cultural experts

The advantage of affinity, language, and understanding of the local context enables diaspora to transfer their transnational experience and transpose global practices into action at local level. ▶ [Page 16](#)



## ■ Influencers

With social capital and migration experience, the diaspora can reach various social groups and take the role of influencers whose communication can impact the behaviour of a wide range of citizens and empower them to see the potential of sustainable heritage tourism and take part in it. ▶ [Page 17](#)





## ■ Cultural ambassadors

Diaspora are well placed to promote distinctive attractions and the beauty of their country of heritage abroad, thereby supporting national branding efforts.



*Georgia's Young Ambassadors Programme, an annual programme designed for Georgian youth living abroad to represent Georgia in their respective countries of residence and aimed to promote tourism, investment, and cultural activities.*



## ■ Investors

Having insider knowledge in both country of heritage and residence, diaspora are able to identify opportunities and invest in related businesses (package tours, branding of crafts), sometimes acting as angel investors. They also send remittances to support family, friends and the wider community which in turn supports local business.



*Year of Return in Ghana 2019 is a government initiative encouraging African diaspora to come to Africa (especially Ghana) to settle, to re-connect, get involved and invest in the continent, including tourism.*

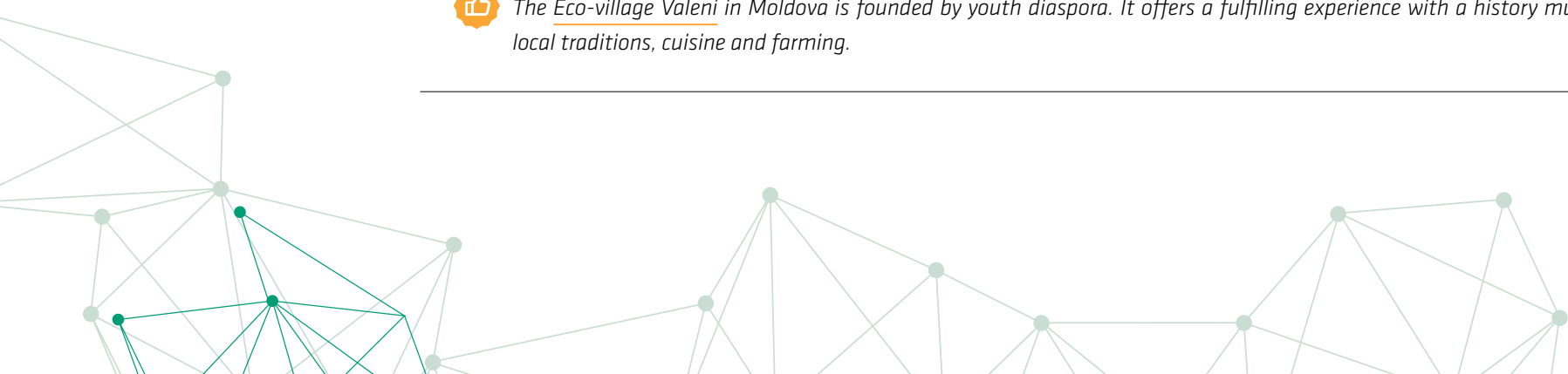


## ■ Social entrepreneurs

Often diaspora have an interest in 'making a difference' through social entrepreneurship. Thanks to their greater adaptability to change and ability to work in multicultural and digital environment, for example young diaspora entrepreneurs have flair to identify niche markets and to respond creatively to opportunities arising in the cultural sector.



*The Eco-village Valeni in Moldova is founded by youth diaspora. It offers a fulfilling experience with a history museum ('House of Logging'), local traditions, cuisine and farming.*



# Diaspora & heritage tourism in action

## Promoting heritage tourism in Moldova through diaspora expertise

In partnership with the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History

### Summary

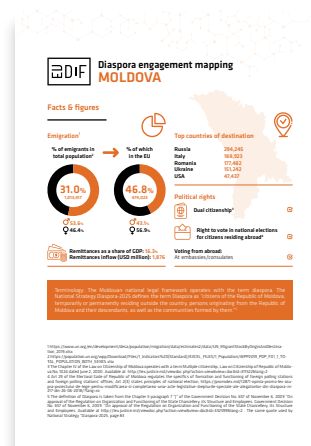
The landscape reserve Tipova-Saharna, managed by the museum, embraces one of the most ancient natural monuments from Moldova and Eastern Europe. EUDiF helped to modernise tourist services in the reserve and the museum's activities, in particular by:

- Piloting strategic tools and concepts for rebuilding routes;
- Exploring alternative models of local heritage tourism and entrepreneurship;
- Enhancing the museum's organisational and management capacities of heritage sites.

### Strands of work

1. Designing a conceptual package and promotional material for the Tipova-Saharna route;
2. Developing the strategy for modernisation of the route including the concept note on storytelling;
3. Building skills and thematic knowledge in sustainable tourism for Museum' staff and local authorities.

### Read more



This is a unique project for the Museum as it brings two highly qualified members of our diaspora. We have the opportunity to benefit from the experience and expertise they have accumulated in Uppsala university in Sweden. This action contributes to the intense efforts of the museum to develop and modernise the Tipova-Saharna route according to European standards.

- Petru Vicol, Executive Director, National Museum, Moldova



### Leveraging local communities is crucial

The National Museum was the main beneficiary, but the action involved local communities too. From its launch, local authorities, local guides, artisans, activists, teachers and historians were part of the discussions, trainings and awareness raising activities. They brought local perspectives and identified existing gaps. Direct involvement of local communities and businesses in tourism development creates ownership of what follows. Moreover, if local communities are involved from the beginning, they will be less inclined to resist development efforts and be more tolerant towards tourists.

## Local heritage tourism as a connection to diaspora in Sierra Leone

*In partnership with Freetown City Council (FCC)  
and AfricaOracle*

### Summary

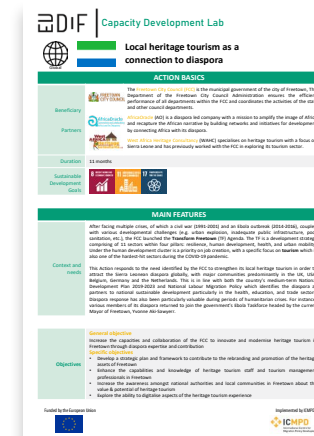
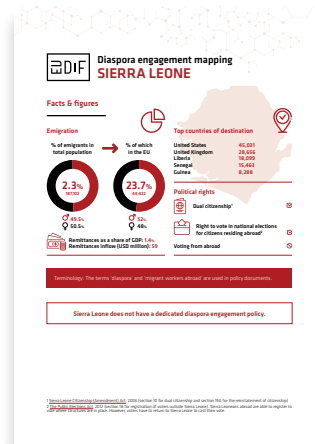
The action supports FCC's heritage tourism priorities based on the FCC Transform Freetown agenda which guides the city's development planning. Transform Freetown underscores the potential of tourism for job creation and enhancing the business sector. Collaboration with EUDiF and AfricaOracle enables FCC to:

- ▶ Develop a heritage tourism strategic framework to rebrand the Freetown's heritage assets;
- ▶ Increase the awareness of national authorities and local communities of the value of heritage tourism;
- ▶ Strengthen the capabilities and knowledge of heritage tourism staff and tourism management professionals in FCC.

### Strands of work

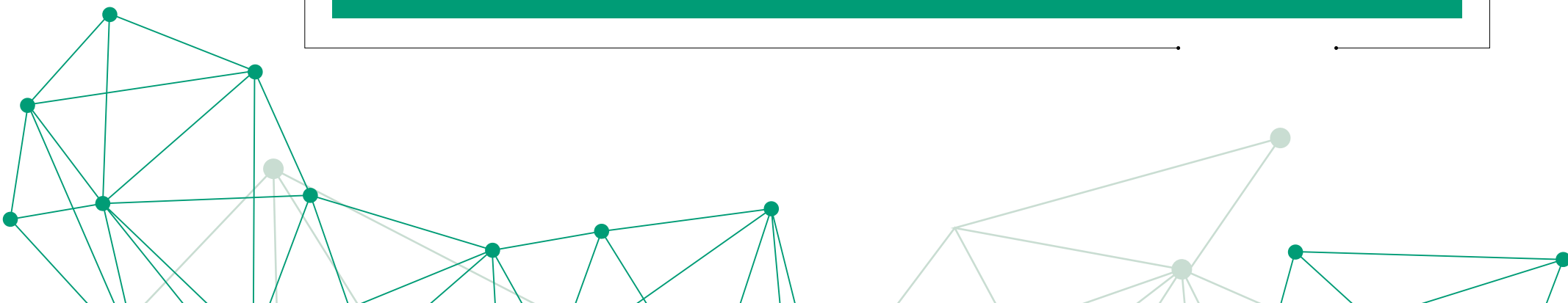
1. Assessment of sectoral needs and stakeholders to better understand the market priorities;
2. Developing the strategic and conceptual packages to promote heritage tourism, including concept notes on walking tours and a roots festival;
3. Training sessions and peer exchanges on sustainable tourism and best practices in heritage tourism for the FCC staff.

Read more



**Returnee diaspora as drivers for local development**

*The diasporic experience (personal and professional) can inspire partnerships for local development. In the case of Sierra Leone, the action builds on the enthusiasm and leadership of the Mayor of Freetown, Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, a returnee from the diaspora who promotes the FCC Transform Agenda. Her experience in the diaspora includes founding a charity, contributing to combat the Ebola virus and as well as the creation of twin cities. Mayor Yvonne is utilising her experiences abroad to bring sustainable development opportunities to Freetown through holistic partnerships, including with diaspora.*



# What comes next?

## Scalability and replicability

### Geographic

These actions can be replicated through the development of other tourist routes in these two countries and beyond.

### Range of services

Both beneficiaries can now share the tried-and-tested tools and concepts (e.g. storytelling) with other sub-sectors in the tourism industry such as rural tourism, wine-tourism, agro-tourism, farm-tourism, eco-tourism.

### Range of final beneficiaries

This can be expanded to other target groups for e.g., investors, youth diaspora, civil society etc.

The action with Sierra Leone's Freetown City Council took inspiration from our collaboration with museum in Moldova, which is a direct example of the potential for peer learning to generate action. We continue to provide such spaces because we see potential for more heritage tourism and diaspora engagement initiatives. Moreover, we are pleased to see that the methods used in our actions are achieving the desired results (and sometimes more besides!). EUDiF actions are characterised by being practical in nature, taking a multi-stakeholder approach and having diaspora as catalysts for building local partnerships. For more details on what we see as the success factors for capacity development, explore "[Learning by doing: Success factors for capacity development in diaspora engagement.](#)"



# Diaspora as tourists

Diaspora tourists often have deep relationships with the heritage sites, due to their connection to ancestral history, roots, culture, traditions, etc. This can be explained by the fact that it can help them feel a sense of belonging, as argued in the [EUDiF's case study](#).

The case study highlighted that youth diaspora are more interested in intangible heritage because they often did not recognise themselves in the tangible heritage products proposed by their countries of origin. For example, youth diaspora from **Barbados** sought the cultural heritage found in music and food. Another example comes from **Rwanda**, where the government organises experiences for young Rwandans in the diaspora to explore a narrative about the country that goes beyond the recent history of genocide often taught in their countries of residence. According to one Rwandese student, *"it enabled us to see our past with our own eyes"*. The youth diaspora's interest in intangible products is in line with the recent shift in tourism towards cultural experiences.

Moreover, diaspora are likely to have the linguistic skills, contacts, general knowledge and financial means necessary to actively engage with local people and businesses. Compared to visitors with no diaspora connection, they might choose to stay in locally owned accommodation, eat at local restaurants, arrange their own travel, and seek out themed experiences such as root-seeking or adventure tours. In this way, they can have a more direct impact on local economy.



## The digital transformation

Heritage tourism is an area in which diaspora engage digitally and can be partners in co-creation of heritage, as well as consumers. For example, working with the Barbados Museum, EU-LAC-MUSEUMS project devised a Virtual Museum of Caribbean Migration and Memory centred on the story of the Windrush generation of migrants in the late 1940s onwards. This stimulated great interest in diaspora community history, but also wider histories of countries of origin.



Photo from *Galleries - VMCM (eu-lac.org)*

## Incentives for Youth Diaspora

As well, governments can play on this sense of belonging and longing for the heritage country to attract diaspora tourists, like in the example of Moldova below. The Diaspora. Origins. Return programme (DOR) – literally meaning “missing your country” – includes annual summer camps for the young generation of diaspora. It has been run by the Moldovan Diaspora Relations Office since 2013. The programme aims to raise the younger generation’s awareness of cultural and national identity and to strengthen their emotional and cultural connection with Moldova.



Photo from the Moldovan Bureau for Diaspora Relations official website [www.emoldovata.md](http://www.emoldovata.md)

# Diaspora as trendsetters

Diaspora can drive innovation<sup>1</sup> in heritage tourism by building new partnerships, piloting new tourist products and services or entrepreneurship models. In our actions, we worked with diaspora professionals who acted as **trendsetters** when co-creating heritage tourism products with FCC and the Museum respectively by bringing new ideas:

|   | Moldova   | Sierra Leone   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Change...</b> → <b>in approach to heritage tourism</b>           | <i>Diaspora professionals factored <u>sustainable tourism</u> principles in the strategy of modernisation of the Tipova-Saharna route when co-drafting the Strategy Implementation Action Plan (2022-2024) with the museum.</i>   | <i>Diaspora actors made aware the FCC staff and local actors about the best practices of sustainable tourism products, for example by promoting the concept of themed routes that foster sustainable heritage tourism in Freetown.</i>                         |
| <b>Change...</b> → <b>in management of heritage cultural sites</b>  | <i>The <b>open-air museum model</b> (i.e. a museum which recreates landscapes and building from the past to create a living history experience for visitors) was introduced by diasporans with experience in the Swedish open-air museum in <u>Skansen</u> and the medieval city of <u>Visby</u>.</i> | <i>Development of <b>historical walking tours</b> to provide a story linked to the heritage sites and the captivating history of Freetown. The walking tours can incorporate digital tools to facilitate storytelling along the route of historical sites.</i> |
| <b>Change...</b> → <b>in branding tourism products and services</b> | <i>Piloting <b>storytelling products</b>, for example the experts provided a note on how to organise storytelling events, inspired by the practice of <u>Land of Legends</u> in Sweden.</i>   | <i>Conceptualising <b>storytelling</b> and promoting its piloting. The team developed a concept for a Roots Festival which provides experiential cultural engagement through music, dance and more.</i>  |

<sup>1</sup> Introduction of new things, ideas, or ways of doing something, including elements of scalability, replicability and - when applicable - the inclusion of specific groups

## Piloting the storytelling model

Storytelling is a form of intangible cultural heritage. However, in Moldova it is not much used and known. In the EUDiF action diaspora professionals prepared a background note to introduce a new type of storytelling festival and provided a few trainings on how to run such a festival based on their experience in Sweden. Following the trainings and under the expert's guidance, the museum organised the first edition of the **Festival of Legends** in Țipova on 17 September 2022. It was co-hosted by the local museum and a guest-house run by a local entrepreneur. We were thrilled to witness the immediate use of the action products.



# Diaspora as cross-cultural experts

Diaspora's cross-cultural expertise means they are well informed to support capacity development for local stakeholders. They are able to understand which global practices can be transposed into the local context, while considering local sensitivities. They can also provide advice on resources and tools that can be used to build partnerships at local level thanks to their understanding of local markets.

Thematic training sessions and knowledge transfer events were delivered in both actions, which proved extremely useful to beneficiaries. They covered topics such as fundraising in heritage tourism, sustainable tourism, modern heritage practices, and digital marketing. Moreover, EUDiF facilitated peer-learning exchanges between Moldova and Sierra Leone on best practices related to storytelling and heritage tourism. In addition to their tourism experience, the diaspora experts in both actions specialise in project management and diaspora engagement. The combined attributes of professional knowledge and cultural fluency have been essential in making these interventions as engaging and effective as possible.

In the case of **Sierra Leone**, the action embraced a wider collective working approach. The transfer of expertise was led by a diaspora organisation - AfricaOracle in UK - in partnership with local heritage tourism experts (West Africa Heritage Consultancy) and academics (University of Derby). The benefits of varied perspectives and diaspora insight greatly enriched the design process.

In the case of **Moldova**, the two diaspora professionals played a central role in the action. More about the positive experience and motivation of one of them is shared in this [diaspora voice](#). The National Museum in Moldova highly appreciated their commitment, extensive knowledge and distinct expertise.



Bunce House, a site of importance for its use in the slave trade. It features on the tours being developed.



Training on sustainable tourism held in Tipova, Moldova in 2022



# Diaspora as influencers

The speedy progress of technology has influenced the tourism industry and led to the support of new experiences, as well as a change in consumer behaviour and preferences in the new tourism market, especially for the young generation. In order to provide a more inclusive and wider access to heritage tourism products, it is important to go to where the communities are, and social media are one way to break down this divide.

Social media provide opportunities for actors who are not the “usual suspects,” such as youth; they can take the role of activists, influencers, role models, and empower their contacts to be actively engaged in sustainable tourism activities. Word of mouth being a key sales channel – with consumers seeking “authentic reviews” – social media can help heritage countries to reach a bigger pool of tourists, including international clientele. Indeed, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram provide the digital homes of an ever-growing online influencer world, where low-cost tools can be used to promote heritage tourism, particularly among diaspora youth.

## A Rwandan summer on socials

Rwanda Youth Club began in Belgium in 2019 with the aim of creating youth-owned spaces for diaspora students and professionals to network, socialise and talk about issues that matter to them. The aim is to centre Rwandese diaspora youth talents and interests, and discuss tourism, business and internship opportunities available in Rwanda. For the Summer Youth Tour to Rwanda, they used social media to generate awareness. During the trip, participants and organisers shared and re-shared pictures and videos; several participants made vlogs and TikTok videos. Organisers continued to use social media after the trip, incorporating heritage quizzes and nostalgia photos from the trip, to create wider interest. A few months after the trip, there was a very popular follow-up social event during which participants discussed their experiences and what they had learnt. It was attended by over 200 Rwandese youth and generated lots of interest in the next Summer Youth Tour.

# Learn more



- Youth entrepreneurship and heritage tourism: long-term thinking for diaspora engagement lessons from Rwanda, Brazil, and Barbados**  
The European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) commissioned researchers at the University of Winchester (UK) to conduct a case study-based research project examining the connections between diaspora youth identity, entrepreneurship and the heritage tourism sector in Barbados, Brazil, and Rwanda.
- EUDiF collection on youth initiatives**  
EUDiF completed a diaspora engagement mapping of 108 countries, exploring policies, practices and trends in diaspora engagement around the world. The collection is a compilation of all spotlight initiatives related to youth diaspora engagement around the world gathered through our mapping exercise and further research.
- Heritage Tourism and Nostalgia Trade: A Diaspora Niche in the Development Landscape**  
This study by the Migration Policy Development explores the development potential of forms of tourism and trade that involve diasporas.
- World Heritage Centre - World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme**  
The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme introduces a fresh approach that emphasizes dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, integrating tourism and heritage management at the destination level, valuing and safeguarding natural and cultural assets, and promoting responsible tourism development.





5. **World Heritage in the face of COVID-19 - UNESCO Digital Library**

UNESCO launched a far-reaching survey of World Heritage site managers and national authorities to understand the impact of COVID-19 on World Heritage one year after the start of the pandemic.



6. **World Tourism Day Celebrations | UNWTO(PDF) Diaspora, Cultural Heritage and Tourism**

This paper explores the potential roles of the diaspora in preserving, promoting, and developing tourism around Surakarta's cultural heritage, emphasising the interplay between economic considerations and intangible cultural elements for the city's economic and cultural prosperity.



7. **What is Virtual Tourism and is it the Future? (2023)**

This article explores virtual tourism as a future tourism model in light of post-Covid 19 tourism.



8. **Rethinking tourism (2023)**

Learn more about the "Rethinking tourism" trend that sparks debate around recognising tourism as a key pillar for development and contributing to SDGs.



# European Union Global Diaspora Facility

## European Union Global Diaspora Facility

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