THEMATIC REPORT

HANDLING ARTEFACTS

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM KRUJA
ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM KAVAJA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF DURRËS
NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM



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MINISTRIA E TURIZMIT, KULTURËS DHE SPORTIT

UNOPS

EU4CULTURE

Cover Photo Caption

Conservator preparing artefacts for display at the Ethnographic Museum in Kavaja

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Foreword

The *EU4Culture Thematic Report Series* has been developed by UNOPS to document and share the experience and lessons learned from the conservation works implemented under the EU4Culture programme. This Series aims to serve as a professional resource for those engaged in the field of cultural heritage conservation, contributing to knowledge exchange and the continuous advancement of conservation practices in Albania and beyond.

The *EU4Culture Thematic Report Series* includes:

1. Conservation of the "Shqipëria" Mosaic on the Façade of the National Historical Museum
2. Conservation of Wall Paintings
3. Handling Artefacts
4. Conservation of Fortified Architecture and Archaeological Ruins
5. Conservation of Engineering Works and Historic Residential Dwellings
6. Restoration of the National Puppet Theater and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted

The EU4Culture programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), was launched in the aftermath of the 2019 earthquake, which caused significant damage to cultural heritage sites and monuments in Albania. While conceived as a heritage recovery initiative, its objectives extended beyond the conservation and restoration of damaged sites. By improving the physical condition, accessibility, safety, and interpretive value of cultural monuments, the programme sought to enhance public understanding and appreciation of Albania's cultural heritage, attract more visitors to restored sites, strengthen their role as tourism assets, and contribute to local socio-economic development. The programme also placed strong emphasis on capacity building, fostering a lasting sense of stewardship and supporting the continued preservation and sustainable use of Albania's cultural heritage.

The EU4Culture programme, running from October 2020 to June 2026, was carried out in close collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport[1], as well as its subordinate institutions — including the National Institute for Cultural Heritage and the Regional Directorates of National Culture in Tirana and Shkodra.

1. Formerly Ministry of Culture (2020–2024), and Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation (2024–2025)

Cooperation also extended to the Municipalities of Durrës, Kavaja, Lezha, Kruja, Kurbin, Rrogozhina, and Tirana ensuring a locally grounded and inclusive approach to heritage conservation.

Recognizing the importance of capacity building, the project established a strong link with academic institutions, notably the University of Tirana (Department of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Management) and the Polytechnic University of Tirana (Faculties of Architecture and Civil Engineering). These partnerships enabled young professionals and students to engage directly in fieldwork, transforming ongoing conservation activities into valuable platforms for experiential learning.

In total, the EU4Culture programme engaged 14 licensed conservation contractors, two multidisciplinary design companies, one supervision firm, and one commissioning company. The conservation and restoration interventions alone accounted for approximately 70,000 working days, representing the daily efforts of around 70 professionals from diverse disciplines and contributing to the timely and high-quality completion of the works.

Through this collaborative effort, 19 cultural heritage assets across Albania were restored, while four were equipped with the tools and equipment needed to support improved conservation, documentation, and operation. The outcomes, methodologies, and insights gained from these interventions are presented in a series of six thematic reports, each focusing on a different typology of conservation work: mosaic conservation; wall paintings; artefact handling; fortified architecture and archaeological ruins; engineering works and historic residential dwellings; and the restoration of selected public heritage buildings.

Read together, the six publications offer a comprehensive record of the EU4Culture programme's technical approach and practical lessons learned. They reflect not only the tangible achievements of the programme, but also the collective dedication of all those who contributed to its implementation — from national and local institutions, conservation professionals, designers, contractors, supervisors, academics, students, and community representatives, to the many individuals who supported the works on site. Their commitment, expertise, and collaboration were essential to safeguarding and celebrating Albania's cultural legacy.


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IN NUMBERS

Artefact packing timeline

Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja	7 days
Ethnographic Museum of Kruja	21 days
National Historical Museum	45 days
Archaeological Museum	45 days

Number of artefacts packed

Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja	912
Ethnographic Museum of Kruja	1010
National Historical Museum	7012
Archaeological Museum	2854

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the thematic report

The safeguarding of cultural heritage during periods of crisis, renovation, or environmental risk requires careful planning, specialised expertise, and coordinated action among heritage professionals, institutions, and authorities. This thematic report presents the comprehensive processes of evacuation, packing, storage, and conservation of artefacts undertaken at the Ethnographic Museums of Kruja and Kavaja, the Archaeological Museum in Durrës, and the National Historical Museum in Tirana. These interventions were implemented within the framework of emergency response and conservation initiatives, ensuring the long-term preservation and security of Albania's invaluable movable heritage. Following the devastating earthquake of November 2019, and in light of subsequent infrastructure restoration and museum rehabilitation works, it became necessary to temporarily remove and secure collections from vulnerable sites, and to conserve them for future display. The operations were guided by international conservation standards and national regulations, drawing upon methodologies recommended by UNESCO, ICCROM, and ICOM for the protection of cultural property in emergencies.Throughout the course of the EU4Culture programme, three museums underwent phases of artefact packing, stabilisation, and conservation for display, including the Ethnographic Museums of Kavaja and Kruja and the Archaeological Museum in Durrës. For the National Historical Museum, the EU4Culture programme included only packing and temporary storage, while conservation and future display will be implemented outside EU4Culture.

Each museum presented specific challenges due to the diversity of materials, typologies, and historical contexts represented in their collections. The Ethnographic Museums of Kruja and Kavaja required specialised handling and packing of ethnological artefacts—textiles, woodwork, ceramics, metal objects, and traditional costumes—sensitive to environmental fluctuations and physical stress.

The methodology adopted integrated risk assessment, documentation, condition reporting, tailored packing systems, and climate-controlled storage solutions, ensuring full traceability and reversibility of all actions. Equally important was the interdisciplinary collaboration among conservators, curators, engineers, and logistics experts, whose coordinated efforts made possible the safe transition of artefacts from museum displays to secure conservation environments and vice versa from interim storage back to display. The interiors of the restored museums were redesigned to accommodate new displays, integrating contemporary museum standards. Interpretation was also developed, providing a narrative flow for visitors, while multimedia enhancements increased

interaction and offered different ways of experiencing the museums. Through this publication, the experiences and lessons learned from these complex operations are shared as a reference for future risk preparedness and heritage protection efforts in Albania and beyond. The case studies illustrate not only the technical and ethical dimensions of conservation practice but also the resilience and adaptability of cultural institutions in responding to unforeseen challenges, while upholding the principles of preservation, authenticity, and continuity of cultural memory.

1.2 Objectives of the conservation work

The principal objective of this operation was to ensure the safeguarding, stabilisation, and preservation of artefacts at the Ethnographic Museums of Kruja and Kavaja, the Archaeological Museum of Durrës, and the National Historical Museum in Tirana, through systematic evacuation, packing, storage, and conservation processes conducted in accordance with international professional standards.

More specifically, the objectives were to:

- Protect collections from risk and damage caused by structural instability, environmental fluctuations, seismic activity, or ongoing restoration works within museum premises.
- Ensure the physical integrity and long-term preservation of artefacts through appropriate handling, packing, and preventive conservation measures tailored to the material composition and vulnerability of each object.
- Document and record the condition, location, and movement of every artefact to guarantee full traceability and accountability throughout the evacuation and storage process.
- Apply risk-based planning and prioritisation, ensuring that the most vulnerable and significant artefacts were treated and relocated first according to established conservation criteria.
- Establish safe and controlled temporary storage environments with adequate environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, light levels) and security systems to minimise deterioration during the interim period.
- Develop and implement standardised methodologies for emergency evacuation and preventive conservation applicable to future crisis response and museum management scenarios across Albania.
- Enhance professional capacities and inter-institutional cooperation among conservators, curators, museum managers, and heritage authorities to improve preparedness, response, and recovery processes for cultural heritage at risk.

Promote the adoption of international best practices aligned with the guidelines of UNESCO, ICCROM, and ICOM for the protection and management of movable heritage in emergencies.

2. Description of collections

2.1 Archaeological Museum in Durrës

The collection of the Archaeological Museum of Durrës is composed of artefacts discovered during the archaeological excavation, since the 1950s. The collection includes artefacts uncovered in Durrësand surrounding areas.

According to the inventory list issued by the National Institute of Registry of Cultural Heritage, the fund of the Archaeological Museum contains 2845 artifacts. The artifacts fall into various categories, including:

- Movable artefacts: The predominant category, encompassing a wide range of objects.
- Immovable artefacts: This category includes items like stelae and grave markers.
- The primary field are archaeological objects, with a smaller number of items falling in works of art
- The collection spans several historical periods and cultures
- Roman: A significant portion of the artifacts are from the Roman period, including bottles, beads, fragments of flooring, figurines, vases, glass bottles, oil lamps, and various everyday objects.
- Hellenistic: Numerous items are identified as Hellenistic, such as figurines, terra-cotta heads, tiles, seals, cups, amphorae, rings, and other decorative and utilitarian objects.
- Antiquity: Many artifacts are broadly categorised under Antiquity, particularly bot-tles, lacrymatory (small vessels), and other archaeological objects.
- Pre-Urban Illyrian / Illyrian City-State: This category includes items like stone stelae, spearheads, buttons, and bracelets, indicating the presence of Illyrian artifacts.
- Archaic: Some pieces, like terracotta reliefs and antefixes, are from the Archaic period.
- Medieval: A few items, such as fibulae and buttons, are from the Medieval period, specifically the Early Middle Ages.
- The collection includes a diverse array of objects:
- Vessels: Bottles, lacrymatories (small vessels), amphorae, cups, oinochoe, pelike, and various glass and clay containers are common.
- Figurines and Sculptures: Figurines of women, boys, dogs, and terracotta reliefs are present.
- Tools and Implements: Examples include stelae, weights, bone spoons, and vari-ous unidentified instruments.

- Jewelry and Ornaments: Rings, beads, fibulae, and amulets
- Architectural Fragments: Tiles, antefixes, and fragments of flooring.
- Funerary Objects: Grave stelae and urns.

The collection provides a comprehensive overview of archaeological findings, primarily focusing on movable materials from the Roman and Hellenistic periods, managed by the Durrës Archaeological Museum.

2.2 National Historical Museum

The collection of the National Historical Museum in Tirana is composed of artefacts describing the historical, cultural and social development of Albania from prehistoric times until late Socialism.

According to the inventory list issued by the National Institute of Registry of Cultural Heritage, the fund of the National Historical Museum contains 6818 artifacts. The artifacts fall into various categories, including:

Archaeology: Tracing the Ancient Roots

This section begins with the earliest remnants of human activity, featuring Paleolithic flint tools and scrapers (*Kruese stralli*) , moving through Neolithic pottery and idols to the Bronze and Iron Ages, demonstrating the early indigenous cultures (*Paraqytetare Ilire*). Of special note are the artifacts from the Illyrian period and the subsequent Hellenistic and Roman eras, showcasing the influence of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium (Durrës). Highlights include:

- Ancient coinage, including pieces from Epirus, Corinth, Apollonia, and Dyrrhachium.
- Significant sculptures and terracotta figures, such as the famous **Bukuroshja e Durrësit** (The Beauty of Durrës), the bust of the River Vjosa deity, and funerary stelae.
- A diverse array of ornate personal jewelry, such as fibulae, pins (**Gjilpërë**), pendants, and bracelets from the Byzantine-Arbërore periods.

Ethnography: The Fabric of National Life

The Ethnography collection vividly portrays the material culture and social life of the Albanian people, including religious objects, clothing, weaponry, and domestic items:

- Traditional Dress and Textiles: It holds numerous examples of traditional costumes (**Veshje**) and their components from various regions, including the intricate **Xhubletë**, male and female garments from Lunxhi, Dukagjini, Kosovo, Mirdita, and

the richly embroidered civilian and ceremonial dress (**Jelek, Xhamadan**).

- Weapons and Tools: The collection includes significant traditional and historical weaponry such as **Vezme** (cartridge belts), ceremonial swords, ornate pistols (**Kobure artistike**), and a vast array of revolvers, rifles, and machine guns seised during the National Liberation War (LANÇ 1939-1944). It also features tools related to traditional crafts, such as those of the silversmith (**Objekt i argjendarit**) and gunsmith (**Objekt i armëpunuesit**).
- Personal and Domestic Items: This category encompasses everyday objects such as copper and brass vessels (**Gjym, Ibrik, Sahan**), wooden utensils (**Lugë druri**), hand-carved decorative pieces, and items connected to notable figures, including the **Gjym** of Mother Teresa's family , personal accessories of Isa Boletini, and the pipe of Ali Pashë Tepelena.

Historical Documentation and Artifacts

The historical record is robust, with emphasis on key moments in Albanian history:

- National Renaissance and Independence (Rilindja 1831-1912 & Pavarësia): Documents include original works and publications by national figures such as Sami Frashëri and Jani Vreto, early Albanian schoolbooks (**Abetare e patriotit Daut Boriçi**), and artifacts directly tied to the Declaration of Independence, such as the pen used to sign the Act, the flag of Ismail Qemali, and the seals of the Provisional Government and national committees.
- National Liberation War and Socialist Era (LANÇ 1939-1944 & Socializëm '45-'90): This segment holds personal items and military gear of "Heroes of the People" (**Hero i Popullit**), including the notebook and passport of Qemal Stafa, various weapons and uniforms used by partisan units, resistance propaganda (**Zëri i Partizanit**), and items from prison life such as shackles (**Hekura duarsh**) and prisoner numbers.

Visual Arts and Numismatics

The Visual Arts display features icons and paintings from celebrated Albanian masters like Onufër Qiprioti, Kostandin Shpataraku, and Mihal Anagnosti, depicting religious scenes and figures. Modern works include portraits and sculptures of political leaders and national heroes

The collection is categorised into major types of artifacts: Documents, Ethnography, Numismatic, and Fine Arts (Artet Pamore).

2.3 Ethnographic Museum of Kruja

The collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kruja is composed of ethnographic artefacts illustrating life, craftsmanship, and cultural practices from the 18th century

to the communist era. The collections consist of wooden furniture, various tools and vessels, metalwork, ceramics, musical instruments, weapons, traditional costumes and accessories, and a small number of paintings. Materials represented include wood, metal, glass, textiles, earthenware, and ceramics. The fund of the Ethnographic Museum contains 913 artifacts.

2.4 Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja

Similarly to the Ethnographic Museum in Kruja, the collection of Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja is composed of ethnographic artefacts illustrating the social and cultural context of Kavaja throughout history. Furthermore, it describes the inner structure of family life, customs and beliefs. The collections consist of wooden furniture, various tools and vessels, metalwork, ceramics, musical instruments, weapons, traditional costumes and accessories, and a number of paintings. Materials represented include wood, metal, glass, textiles, earthenware, and ceramics. The fund of the Ethnographic Museum was initially thought to contain 370 artifacts, however after initial evacuation and packing, it resulted in having 910 artifacts in its collection.

3. Condition Assessment

The condition of the collections in all four museums varied. While all artefacts were affected by different degrees of deterioration due to a lack of maintenance and improper storage, the most affected were those of the Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja, while the least affected were those of the Archaeological Museum in Durrës.

3.1 Archaeological Museum in Durrës

The condition of all the artefacts was relatively good. This was mainly due to the fact that all the artifacts on display were conserved and consolidated in 2015, prior to their installation in the renewed museum displays.

3.2 National Historical Museum in Tirana

The general condition of the exposed objects was mostly good.
Unexposed Objects (Funds): The main issue was the relatively large number of unexposed objects in the museum funds, which are kept in inappropriate conditions.

Textiles, documents, and wooden objects were generally noted to be in poor condition. In particular, objects of ethnography and iconographic funds were found in poor conditions and were inappropriately stored. Resulting damage was documented to be caused by infestation, dust, and external damage.

3.3 Ethnographic Museum of Kruja and Kavaja

At the outset, the collections were in very poor condition. The exhibitions were overcrowded, objects were densely stacked, and many artefacts showed mechanical damage, corrosion, paint loss, or biological degradation such as woodworm or fungal infestation. Textiles were particularly vulnerable, displaying tears, insect damage, fading, and brittleness, often exacerbated by inappropriate hanging methods. Inventory numbers were incomplete or inadequately applied, and object information in the exhibition was largely missing.

The collection of the Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja was in a particularly bad condition, following the earthquake the entire collection was removed from display and stored in wooden chests and plastic bags.

4. Approach

After analysis of the condition of artefacts was undertaken, specific measures on their protection were developed. This was in particular important as all four museums—the Ethnographic Museums of Kruja and Kavaja, the Archaeological Museum of Durrës, and the National Historical Museum— were planned to undergo comprehensive conservation.

This meant that artefacts needed to be handled through following stages:

- Initial packing and evacuation to Interim storage where they would remain until physical conservation of the building is finalised
- Conservation, consolidation and cleaning of the artefacts for their re-display in reconceptualised Museums
- Stabilisation of the artefacts in new displays ensuring their sustenance in case of future earthquakes

4.1 Initial packing

With the start of the implementation of conservation works at the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja and Kavaja, Archaeological Museum of Durrësand National Historical Museum, artefacts were packed and evacuated to an interim storage.

4.1.1 Ethnographic Museum in Kavaja

In order to set the standard of packing and evacuating and also establish a platform for skill exchange, UNOPS established a cooperation with the Institute of Conservation of the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. The team of skilled conservators from the Institute, led by Prof Dr Krist, designed a week-long workshop. The concept of the workshop was presented to the University of Tirana, Department for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, which agreed to part take by sending students from master studies and teaching staff. The workshop was implemented in the third week of November 2021 and combined practical work on packing with theoretical on-site lectures. It trained master's students in appropriate artefact handling techniques, including packing, light cleaning, inventory setting, and proper storage methods. Throughout the week, all artefacts were packed, documented and stored in boxes inside the museum. All large objects which were too heavy, too big or were fixed to floors and walls were packed and protected in situ.

Once the contractor hired to carry out the conservation of the museum building had mobilised and erected scaffolding, four climate-controlled containers equipped with monitoring systems were installed in the museum garden. The boxed artefacts from the Museum were then moved to containers. Access to the containers was permitted only to designated UNOPS and contractor staff, who carried out weekly monitoring of temperature and humidity levels inside the containers.

Protocols for artefact safeguarding during the storage period:

- Interim Storage: Packed objects were transferred to four containers on-site. These containers were equipped with climate control units and climate monitoring systems.
- Climate Conditions: The Relative Humidity (RH) levels in the containers were checked and found to be 56–57% with a temperature of around 18°C, which was deemed acceptable, but required the climate control units to be always running.
- Textile Insect Repellent: Boxes with textiles were equipped with insect repellent strips which are typically effective for six months and should be regularly changed.
- Infestation Protocol: In the event of an infestation, objects should be separated, packed, and sealed in plastic sacks.
- Monitoring: Insect traps were to be installed in each container and checked regularly. Regular monitoring of climate values was highly recommended (minimum once a week).



Photo Caption: Packing artefacts

Photo Caption: Climate control



Photo Caption: Containers



4.1.2 Ethnographic Museum in Kruja

The packing and evacuation of artefacts in the case of Ethnographic Museum of Kruja were conducted by the contractor hired to implement the conservation of the building. Already in the procurement phase, the task of artefact packing and evacuation was included in the scope of works, and the contractor was required to engage licensed specialists to lead the process. The contractor mobilised both the team of the Kruja Museum and its own conservation specialists. The packing lasted almost two months. Prof. Dr. Krist from the Institute of Conservation at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna conducted a monitoring visit during the process, confirming that it was proceeding well.

The artifacts underwent initial treatment and packing in preparation for the building conservation works:

- Packing and Cleaning: All objects were packed by the contractor according to the recommendations of the Institute of Conservation (IOC) and based on the experience gained in Kavaja in November 2021. Before being packed, the objects were roughly cleaned.
- Textiles and Costumes: Flat textiles were placed on rolls and additionally wrapped in bubble wrap. Costumes were put on hangers with Tyvek dust covers.
- Furniture and Storage: Big furniture was left packed inside the rooms. Metal shelves were installed in one ground floor room to serve as an interim store for packed objects like metals, wood, and ceramics.
- Additional recommendations:
- It was recommended to keep only the carved elements of old wooden showcases from the 1980s/90s that will not be used in the new exhibition; the undecorated wooden blanks can be reused as protective elements.
- Textile cushions and mattresses, which use woolen rests and other natural materials as filling, easily attract insects like moths and beetles.
- The decision was made to keep the hand-woven cotton covers, wash, and reuse them for the new exhibition, while replacing the old filling material with synthetic cotton wool to save space.
- Sheepskins are to be kept, washed/cleaned, and reused.
- Insect Control: Insect traps are to be installed in each container and checked regularly. Regular monitoring of climate values is highly recommended (minimum once a week).

Albeit the number of artefacts of Ethnographic Museum of Kruja and Kavaja were similar, the process in Kruja took longer since the artefacts had to be removed from displays, a process that in Kavaja was completed prior to the packing and evacuation campaign. All large objects which were too heavy, too big or were fixed to floors and walls were packed and protected in situ.

Once the packing was finalised the artefacts were stored inside the Museum premises with intention to move them from room to room with the progress of restoration works. This approach was conditioned by the fact that there were no alternative spaces available and placing containers like in the case of Kavaja was not possible due to limited and difficult access (Historical fortification with narrow and steep paths).



Photo Caption: Packing of artefacts



4.1.3 Archaeological Museum in Durrës

Similar to the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja, the packing and evacuation of artefacts in the Archaeological Museum of Durrës were carried out by the contractor engaged for the implementation of works, following the same procurement procedure as in Kruja. The contractor mobilised both the team from the Durrës Museum and its own conservation specialists. The packing process lasted close to three months. Prof. Dr. Krist from the Institute of Conservation at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna conducted a monitoring visit to review the progress and the appropriateness of the approach. All large objects which were too heavy, too big or were fixed to floors and walls were packed and protected in situ.

Once the packing was finalised, the artefacts were stored inside the designated and protected areas within the Museum premises.

The following recommendations were followed:

- Dedicated storage space: The designated storage area was used exclusively for storing objects, and all unrelated materials were removed. No non-collection items were kept in the space.
- Maintenance of storage area: Regular cleaning and maintenance were carried out. Dust accumulation was minimised, and the space was kept in good condition. Any issues detected during inspection were promptly addressed.
- Air quality and ventilation: Good air circulation and ventilation were maintained throughout the storage room. All ventilation pathways remained open and functional, preventing stagnant air and moisture buildup.
- Object placement and storage furniture: All object boxes were placed on shelves and kept off the ground, protecting them from pests and potential water damage. Galvanised metal shelving units without sharp edges were installed, replacing wooden shelves. These metal shelves provided an inert, stable, and fire-resistant storage solution.
- Organisation and cataloging: A clear and efficient organisation system was established. A catalog and inventory system was implemented and maintained, ensuring accurate tracking of all stored objects. Archival-quality labels were used throughout the storage area.

Photo Caption: Documenting artefacts during packing



- Relative humidity (RH) management: Relative Humidity levels were regularly monitored, and fluctuations were minimised. Sensitive artifacts were placed in protective enclosures containing silica gel packs to stabilise microclimates and prevent humidity-related stress.
- Light and UV exposure: Objects were successfully kept away from direct light sources. UV exposure was minimised across the storage area, with particular attention to organic, textile, and painted materials. Lights were turned off when rooms were not in use.
- Use of preservation-quality materials: All storage materials—boxes, folders, labels, and tape—were replaced with archival-quality products. Non-archival materials were phased out to ensure long-term preservation.
- Environmental conditions: The storage areas were kept dry and well-ventilated, reducing the likelihood of mold growth and pest activity.
- Building sealing: All external openings were sealed, and doors and windows were kept closed. Ventilation openings were fitted with fine mesh screens to prevent insect entry.
- Monitoring: Regular inspections of storage and collection rooms were performed. Insect traps were placed and checked according to schedule, providing ongoing monitoring for pests.
- Pest control and recordkeeping: Any detected pests were documented in a dedicated log, along with the control measures applied. Non-toxic methods of pest management were used consistently.

Photo Caption: Packed artefacts



- CCTV System Enhancement: The existing CCTV system was successfully upgraded. Additional cameras and monitors were installed in blind spots, remote areas, locations with vulnerable or valuable artifacts, emergency exits, intrusion-alarm points, and restricted-access entrances.
- An additional CCTV monitor was installed in the Contractors' office containers. This monitor has been actively used for surveillance and supports timely monitoring of activity across the facility.

4.1.4 National Historical Museum in Tirana

The packing and evacuation of artefacts in the case of the National Historical Museum was conducted by the contractor, following the same procurement procedures and requirements as in Kruja and Durrës . In the case of the National Historical Museum, the contractor hired an extensive team of experienced conservators who worked for almost two months to pack all the artefacts.

Given the large number of artefacts, once they were packed they were stored in designated temporary storage areas, and to allow progress of works, they were planned to be moved to a second designated temporary storage area. The specific feature of the storage areas for artefacts at the National Historical Museum was that, since the storage area spans two floors, it was possible to separate artefacts in good conditions from those with active infestations, by placing them in separate floors. This allowed infestation not to spread.
Implemented safety conditions and security measures included:

- Isolation measures: Isolation barriers were created using four layers of plastic sheeting and geotextile, providing effective protection against cement microparticles, external pollutants, and vibrations from construction work.
- Cleaning, disinfection, and microorganism monitoring: All areas were fully cleaned and disinfected. Microorganism traps were installed, monitored and replaced periodically.
- Light control: All windows were darkened using protective coverings, eliminating direct and harmful light exposure to the objects.
- Humidity control: Humidity meters were installed, maintaining humidity levels within the required 60–80% range.
- Object separation and allocation - exhibited objects: Objects were relocated to the second floor for protection.
- Infected or deteriorated collection objects: Damaged or contaminated objects were placed on the third floor of the Ethnography Pavilion in a disinfected and isolated space.
- Entrance control: The main entrance was secured with a three-lock system, accessible only to three authorised representatives.
- Alarm and monitoring systems: A full alarm and 24-hour infrared CCTV system were installed.

- Physical security: 24-hour physical guards were deployed at the site.
- Fire safety measures: Manual fire-extinguishing equipment was installed; the automatic system was avoided due to fragile objects.
- Alternative storage option for heavy objects: A temporary storage area was created in the museum's central hall with a secure metal-mesh cage structure. Dust protection was implemented using thick plastic and geotextile layers, and 24-hour CCTV monitoring was installed.

4.1.5 Aspects to keep in mind

EU4Culture is probably the cultural heritage programme to undertake restoration and reconceptualisation of 4 major museums in the country, and has set forth a clear path on how artefacts are to be treated in cases of full restoration of Museums.

Formal path forward:

- Removing artefacts from the established museum display is permitted only in extraordinary circumstances, such as in the EU4Culture programme, where museums were damaged and artefacts had to be removed in order to carry out repairs. This activity is allowed only after:
- The evacuation strategy is developed and approved by the National Council of Museums and National Council of Material Heritage.
- The order allowing the movement and establishing governmental monitoring groups is issued by the Minister in charge of Culture.
- The process of removing, packing and evacuating artefacts is monitored. throughout the full duration of the process by the National Institute for Registry of Cultural Heritage.
- Artefacts can be handled only by licensed conservators or institutions mandated for their protection, preservation, storing, documentation and research (Center Museums, Museums)
- The contractors tasked with packing and evacuating artefacts need to take into account the availability of licensed specialists and closely cooperate with Center Museums and/or Museums.
- The contractors need to take precautions and organise aspects such as conservation materials needed for works, insurance, and continuous cleaning of the areas where artefacts are handled.

4.2 Conservation, consolidation and cleaning of the artefacts

The activities of conservation, consolidation, and cleaning of artefacts were undertaken in accordance with the musealisation plans newly developed for the Ethnographic Museums in Kruja and Kavaja, the Archaeological Museum in Durrës, and the National

Historical Museum. Therefore, the process of preparing the artefacts was, in fact, a core element of implementing the museum display concepts. EU4Culture oversaw the following processes:

- Development and Implementation of Musealisation Concept and artefact conservation for the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja
- Development and Implementation of Musealisation Concept and artefact conservation for the Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja
- Development and Implementation of Musealisation Concept and artefact conservation for the Archaeological Museum in Durrës
- Development of Musealisation Concept for the National Historical Museum in Tirana

4.2.1 Musealisation concept for the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja

The musealisation concept for the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja is built upon preserving the authenticity and identity of the historic house while reorganizing it into a coherent and engaging museum experience. Researchers determined that the museum had previously been "overburdened" with objects displayed in a disorganised manner. The curatorial approach therefore focused on reducing excess items, retaining only those that align with regional traditions and the historical narrative, and enhancing the visibility and interpretative value of the most important artefacts for visitors. Interventions were intentionally minimal, ensuring that the house continues to function as a museum house rather than a reconstructed or overly modernised display environment.

This philosophy continues throughout the rooms, where objects are placed as they were historically used, often following the original logic of the family who lived in the house. For example, in the men's guest room, the numerous decorative elements—murals and wood paintings—prevent major alterations, so the objects are simply returned to their original intended places, and even the head of the household's weapon is mounted in its customary location. Similarly, the winter room showcases the traditional low table (sofër), displayed both mounted on the wall and prepared with its full setting, allowing visitors to understand how it functioned in daily life.

Multimedia elements are integrated thoughtfully so as not to disrupt the natural character of the house. The musealisation concept emphasises that even when digital installations were added, the team "worked carefully not to interfere with the naturalness of the house". Examples include the videomapping installation projected onto the rock wall holding amphorae, animating local history and legends in a subtle, atmospheric way that enhances rather than overwhelms the traditional setting. In the Bride's Room, a monitor presents staged scenes showing the customs and rites of a traditional wedding, while a VR station offers an immersive experience of the bride's day. Across the museum, an audio guide available in five languages accompanies visitors, with each room focusing

on only a few key objects to maintain clarity and accessibility for all age groups.

Overall, the musealisation strategy blends authentic domestic context, carefully curated object displays, and selected multimedia enhancements to offer visitors an experience that is immersive, historically grounded, and respectful of the building's cultural and architectural heritage.

4.2.1.2 Conservation, consolidation and cleaning of the artefacts

The conservation of artefacts at the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja followed a structured and methodical process aimed at stabilizing objects, preventing further deterioration, and preparing the collections for future exhibition and storage. During the conservation campaign, objects were systematically unpacked and treated. Surface cleaning was carried out using both dry and wet methods, depending on material needs. Metals were freed from corrosion through mechanical and chemical reduction, followed by protective microcrystalline wax coatings. Ceramics and wooden objects were cleaned, re-adhered, and stabilised using appropriate adhesives. Fragile or broken areas were reconstructed only when essential for the safe handling of artefacts
Textiles—representing the largest and most delicate portion of the collection—received specialised care. Costumes were vacuum-cleaned, their creases reduced, and loose embroidery or tears secured through hand sewing. Selected garments were mounted on adjusted or padded mannequins for exhibition, while others were packed for storage. Carpets were dried, vacuum-cleaned, and rolled with protective layers to prevent deformation.

Throughout the process, pest management remained a continual priority. Insect traps were installed, repellent strips used where appropriate, and actively infested objects isolated. Damp or mould-affected artefacts were separated to prevent cross-contamination, with severely infested items requiring specialised off-site treatment.

Finally, every treated item was repacked, relabelled, and documented. New temporary labels were created to correct inconsistencies in the old inventory system, and box lists ensured that each container's contents were traceable. Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing construction, inadequate storage space, and inconsistent prior documentation, the teams successfully treated, cleaned, and secured hundreds of artefacts, laying a solid foundation for their long-term preservation and exhibition.

4.2.2 Ethnographic Museum in Kavaja

The musealisation of the Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja is shaped by a careful balance between preserving the authenticity of the historic house and introducing contemporary interpretive tools that enhance understanding. The building's natural symmetry—

two nearly identical halves—guides the visitor journey. One half is restored to reflect the original domestic environment of a traditional Kavaja household, while the other incorporates curated displays, multimedia, and modern educational features.

Visitors begin in the Hayat, where the history of Kavaja, the Arkaxhiu family, and the architectural identity of the house are introduced through interpretive panels and subtle lighting that highlights the original wooden structure. Rooms such as the Guest Room, the Couple's Room, and the Fireplace Room immerse visitors in traditional family life. Furniture, textiles, and household tools are arranged according to their historic use, allowing the house itself to tell the story.

As the route continues, the experience transitions into themed spaces dedicated to craftsmanship, commerce, and local heritage. In these rooms, contemporary cases, large-scale graphics, and digital elements—such as videomapping, holographic demonstrations, and interactive screens—illustrate the city's artisanal traditions. One room focuses on pottery and stonework, where a holographic potter's table shows traditional techniques, while another highlights weaving, silk production, and costume history, enriched by a virtual dressing room that allows visitors to digitally "try on" Albanian garments.

A large multi-touch table encourages hands-on learning, enabling visitors to explore patterns, tools, and costumes through interactive games and digital objects. The musealisation culminates in the room titled Tradition and the Future, where documentary projections and a 3D model narrate the evolution of Kavaja and the continuity of its cultural practices.

Throughout the museum, multilingual audio guides and visually discreet signage help orient visitors without disrupting the historic character of the house. The result is an experience where original architecture, authentic objects, and modern interpretive media work together to illuminate Kavaja's cultural heritage in an engaging, accessible, and meaningful way.

4.2.2.2 Conservation, consolidation and cleaning of the artefacts

The conservation of artefacts at the Ethnographic Museum of Kavaja followed a structured workflow aimed at stabilizing, cleaning, documenting, and preparing the collection for safe display and long-term preservation. After renovation works were completed, the objects previously stored in containers were transferred back into the building, where conservators set up specialised workspaces for textiles, objects, and paintings.

The process began with the unpacking and initial assessment of each artefact. Objects made from wood, metal, ceramics, stone, leather, and mixed materials were cleaned using soft brushes, controlled vacuuming, latex sponges, and, when necessary, carefully applied wet-cleaning methods with suitable solvents.



Photo Caption: Final display





Structural problems such as cracks, unstable surfaces, or corroded elements were consolidated using reversible conservation materials, including adhesives, acrylic dispersions, resin fills, and protective wax coatings. Broken components were reattached, surfaces were stabilised, and missing areas were rebuilt only when necessary for the safe handling of the artefacts.Textiles—including costumes, accessories, flat weavings, and carpets—underwent vacuum cleaning, crease reduction, tear repair, and securing of loose embroidery. Mold-affected pieces were isolated, cleaned, and stabilised. Custom supports such as padded mannequins, textile cushions, and protective covers were created to ensure safe mounting or storage. Paintings were surface cleaned, consolidated, repaired, retouched, and reframed using appropriate conservation techniques. Once stabilised, each artwork was prepared for exhibition and fitted into new protective frames.

All artefacts were then correctly relabelled, replacing inappropriate or damaging labels with archive-safe tags or conservation-approved inscriptions. The conservation team provided training to museum staff on the proper application of these labels to ensure consistent documentation standards.

When the collection was ready, conservators carried out the installation of objects in the new exhibition, adapting supports, creating custom mounts, securing heavy items, and arranging displays to minimise physical stress and vibration. Objects not selected for exhibition were reorganised into improved storage areas, where they were repacked in polypropylene boxes with acid-free materials, placed on upgraded shelving, and arranged according to material type to ensure long-term preservation. Throughout the work, the conservation team emphasised preventive care, recommending improvements to pest control, sealing of building openings, monitoring of environmental conditions, and regular inspection routines.

In total, more than 700 artefacts were cleaned, stabilised, conserved, or safely repacked, ensuring that the museum's collection was ready for both exhibition and future preservation.

4.2.3 Archaeological Museum in Durrës

The musealisation concept for the Archaeological Museum of Durrës reimagines the institution as a coherent and engaging narrative of the city's past, rather than a simple collection of objects. The project aims to preserve the building's architectural identity while completely reorganising the exhibition to present Durrës' development—from prehistory to the medieval period—in a clear, thematic, and accessible way. The redesign begins outdoors, where the courtyard and backyard are transformed into structured open-air galleries with reorganised sculptures, large fragments, and new informative panels. Inside, the ground floor is revitalised through modern showcases, improved lighting. Rooms are reorganised to highlight major themes such as environment, colonisation, trade, religion, and daily life. Special attention is given to the Artemision of Epidamnos-Dyrrachium,

where new research informs a focused presentation of terracottas, votive offerings, and sculptures. The first floor becomes a new exhibition dedicated to Late Antique and Medieval Durrës, using maps, models, and selected artifacts to illustrate urban transformation, governance, economy, and belief systems.

A unified visual identity—a consistent colour palette, and updated signage—ensures clarity and coherence throughout the museum.

Overall, the musealisation concept transforms the museum into a structured, and research-informed journey through Durrës' layered history, allowing visitors to understand the city's cultural evolution through both objects and meaningful storytelling.

4.2.3.1 Conservation, consolidation and cleaning of the artefacts

The conservation of artefacts at the Archaeological Museum of Durrës focused primarily on addressing the significant deterioration risks created by unsuitable past storage and exhibition conditions. Many objects—particularly those displayed in the outdoor yard—had been exposed to temperature fluctuations, atmospheric pollutants, moisture, and oxidation, all of which accelerated corrosion and structural instability in stone, metal, and ceramic pieces. Inside the museum, artefacts exhibited on the ground floor also suffered from instability, inadequate supports, and insufficient environmental control, making conservation essential before any reinstallation.

The conservation process began with a systematic assessment of each artifact to identify material-specific damage and structural weaknesses. Objects vulnerable to oxidation—especially metal pieces—were stabilised through cleaning and the reduction of corrosion layers, while fragile ceramics and stone fragments were reinforced and reassembled where needed. Surfaces were cleaned of accumulated dust, soil deposits, and atmospheric residue that had built up during years of poor environmental exposure.

Equally important was the improvement of preventive conservation conditions. Because many artefacts had been previously displayed on unstable pedestals or in open-air settings, the conservation team re-housed them in more secure supports, ensuring proper weight distribution and vibration-free placement. Objects were then fitted into new, safer display systems designed to mitigate risk and allow controlled microenvironment conditions. This included the creation or selection of appropriate bases, mounts, and sealed showcases to reduce contact with harmful external factors noted in the report.

A key part of the process involved protecting objects from environmental fluctuations, particularly addressing issues of humidity, temperature, and UV exposure, all of which had contributed to ongoing deterioration. Objects once exposed outdoors were relocated to controlled interiors or reorganised into improved exterior arrangements with protective barriers.

Finally, the conservation process incorporated documentation and improved interpretation, correcting previous gaps in information and ensuring that objects were accompanied by accurate, updated labels and contextual descriptions. This approach not only safeguarded the physical condition of the artefacts, but also restored their interpretive coherence within the museum's renewed exhibition vision.

Together, these measures ensured that the archaeological collection—previously at risk from instability, oxidation, and poor housing—was stabilised, conserved, and prepared for a safer and more coherent museal display.



Photo Caption: Above: Finalised exhibitor; Below: Placing of artefacts



4.2.4 National Historical Museum

The musealisation concept for the National Historical Museum envisions a complete transformation of the institution—from a static, chronologically arranged museum inherited from the 1981 socialist-era design into a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and visitor-centered cultural space. This reconceptualisation responds to the museum's structural and narrative limitations, the effects of the 2019 earthquake, and the broader ambition to align Albania's principal museum with contemporary international standards.

At the heart of the new concept is a shift from a rigid historical timeline towards a richer, more flexible structure organised around three disciplinary pillars: Archaeology, Ethnography, and the Albanian Language. This reorganisation breaks with the former model of isolated pavilions, creating instead a museum that interprets Albanian culture and identity in multidimensional ways. The new exhibitions will no longer attempt to present exhaustive, encyclopedic histories; rather, each gallery will tell carefully selected stories designed to communicate meaning, spark curiosity, and remain adaptable over time. To preserve continuity with the historical identity of the building, the concept introduces the "Path of History", a chronological thread that acts as a walkable timeline weaving through the entire structure—from the courtyard to the roof. This pathway recalls the museum's original architectural symbolism while giving it new relevance as a flexible platform incorporating images, facsimiles, and digital interpretation. It also supports the broader idea of a "Mutating Museum", where content can evolve in tandem with new research, temporary exhibitions, and changing cultural dialogues.

A major priority of the musealisation concept is audience accessibility. Recognising the diversity of visitors—from children to specialists—the design introduces layered interpretation lines that allow for quick visits, standard visits, and in-depth exploration through mobile devices and QR-linked content. Children encounter history through play-based learning spaces embedded throughout the building, while young people engage with the museum through multimedia experiences, influencers, and interactive devices. Adults benefit from storytelling that goes beyond factual narratives, revealing personal histories behind objects and their journey into the national collection. Technology plays a central role in enhancing the visitor experience. Augmented reality, virtual reality, immersive projections, and interactive stations provide new ways of exploring Albania's past, inviting visitors to step into reconstructed environments, manipulate digital artifacts, or experience curated virtual journeys. These tools are conceived not merely as add-ons, but as integral components that adapt to contemporary communication habits and support remote learning beyond the museum walls.

Educational engagement is strengthened through dedicated learning spaces, including workshop rooms, a digital project lab, and a children's library. These spaces position the museum as an active cultural and pedagogical hub, rather than a passive repository of objects.

Finally, the musealisation strategy integrates conservation, storage, and research as essential elements of the museum ecosystem. New archives and restoration laboratories ensure that each object's display is supported by appropriate environmental controls, proper documentation, and long-term stewardship. This ensures that the museum's public narrative is anchored in rigorous conservation practice and scientific care.

In sum, the musealisation concept reimagines the National Historical Museum as a living, evolving institution—one that preserves Albania's heritage while engaging visitors through compelling narratives, digital innovation, inclusive design, and a renewed commitment to education and research. It strengthens the museum's role as a national cultural center and positions it as a modern institution capable of inspiring dialogue about both the past and the future.

Photo Caption: Interim storage with artefacts of the National Historical Museum









5. Final Results

The conservation and musealisation work undertaken through the EU4Culture programme resulted in a comprehensive safeguarding of collections across four major museums in Albania. Artefacts were successfully evacuated, packed, and stabilised using international conservation standards. Temporary storage solutions ensured safe environmental conditions, while multidisciplinary teams collaborated to assess, clean, repair, document, and reinstall objects. The project established the first nationally coordinated methodology for emergency evacuation and conservation of movable heritage, strengthening professional capacity and ensuring continuity in cultural preservation.

6. Recommendations

- Institutionalise national emergency evacuation protocols for museums.
- Establish permanent conservation workflows in all museums, including climate-controlled storage and preventive conservation schedules.
- Standardise documentation through unified digital inventory systems and conservation-approved labelling practices.
- Expand professional training programs in conservation, documentation, and emergency preparedness.
- Integrate conservation criteria into all future musealisation and exhibition design.
- Ensure sustainable funding for preventive conservation.
- Strengthen inter-institutional cooperation among museums, universities, and heritage authorities.

7. Conclusion

The EU4Culture conservation interventions mark a pivotal moment for cultural heritage protection in Albania. Through coordinated action, rigorous methodology, and international collaboration, thousands of artefacts were protected, conserved, and reintegrated into improved museal contexts. The project demonstrates that heritage preservation is a holistic process requiring scientific conservation, strong institutional frameworks, and visitor-centred museology. The methodologies and structures established through this effort provide a national model for future interventions and contribute to a resilient heritage sector capable of safeguarding Albania's cultural memory for generations to come.

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