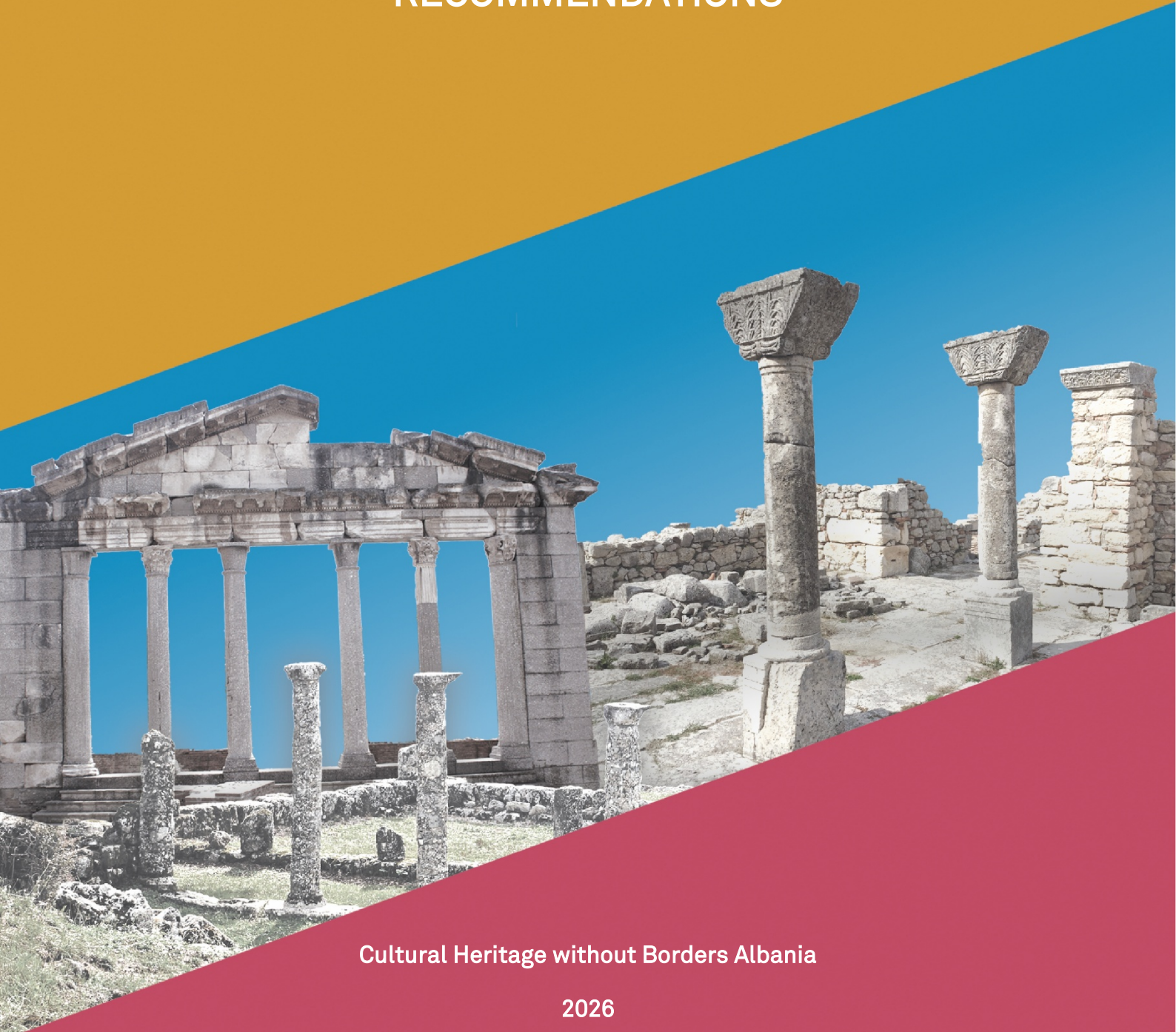




Build Local Capacity and Law Enforcement Cooperation to Combat Illicit Trafficking of Albanian Cultural Heritage

RECOMMENDATIONS



Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania

2026



As part of the "Build Local Capacity and Law Enforcement Cooperation to Combat Illicit Trafficking of Albanian Cultural Heritage" project, Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania (CHWB Albania) has focused its efforts at fostering conditions for an increased stakeholder collaboration and commitment to preventing illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts. This aligns with the project's Objective 1: Strengthen stakeholder collaboration and commitment to prevent illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts, with a particular focus on enhancing institutional capacity, improving inter-agency coordination, and fostering concerted efforts among key actors involved in cultural property protection across the country.

As a core activity under this objective, CHWB Albania organized a series of four roundtable discussions, held between September and December 2025 in four different cities across Albania: Gjirokastër, Fier, Shkodër, and Korçë. These roundtables were designed as inclusive, structured platforms bringing together representatives from law enforcement, cultural heritage institutions, customs authorities, local government, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. By situating the discussions in different regions, the project ensured that local perspectives, operational realities, and region-specific challenges were meaningfully reflected alongside national-level priorities.

Each roundtable followed a standardized methodology. The project team presented the overall objectives and scope of the initiative, while selected experts shared research, data, and contextual analyses on illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts. A dedicated moderator facilitated open and constructive dialogue among participants, encouraging the exchange of experiences, identification of good practices, and candid discussion of challenges faced in daily professional practice. Particular attention was given to gaps in legislation, coordination, information sharing, institutional mandates, and implementation of existing frameworks.

The consultations were not conceived as standalone events, but as an iterative process aimed at generating concrete, actionable outcomes. Through these discussions, stakeholders jointly identified needs, priorities, and opportunities for improved cooperation, while also reflecting on practical steps that could strengthen the implementation of existing policies. The insights gathered during the four roundtables were systematically documented, analyzed, and consolidated by the project team.

This document presents the compiled recommendations emerging from the four roundtables and associated consultations with key stakeholders at local and national levels. These recommendations represent a collective product of the participatory process and reflect the shared commitment of involved institutions to enhance coordination, strengthen capacities, and improve Albania's response to illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts. They are intended to support ongoing and future efforts by national authorities and partners, and to inform donor-supported interventions aimed at safeguarding Albania's cultural heritage in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

The recommendations have been grouped in seven categories, as listed below:



I. Institutional Capacity Building, Training, and Expertise

- I. Drafting operational manuals for handling cases of trafficking in cultural heritage objects.
- II. Involvement of museum experts, archaeologists, and various field specialists in investigative processes, as well as police and customs services.
- III. Specialized training for the police, prosecution, and courts on the identification of cultural heritage objects.
- IV. Organization of specialized joint training sessions and exercises for staff engaged in combating illicit trafficking of cultural heritage, within the country and in counterpart institutions abroad, aiming to gain advanced knowledge, international best practices, and strengthen professional capacities in prevention, identification, and prosecution. Including the use of digital technologies (3D scanning, visual databases, artificial intelligence for image comparison).
- V. Employment of individuals with a background in cultural heritage in institutions such as customs, the prosecutor's office, and the police, as well as the employment of individuals with a background in security at archaeological sites and museums.

II. Inter-Institutional Coordination and Governance Mechanisms

- I. Establishment of an inter-institutional working group in regions - a task force dedicated to combating cultural heritage trafficking.
- II. Organization of more frequent meetings with all stakeholders.
- III. Strengthening cooperation between heritage institutions and the police for the division of responsibilities, in accordance with the law, and for following up on reported cases.
- IV. Establishment of permanent coordination procedures between the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports (MTCS) and the State Police, Customs, and the Prosecution Office.
- V. Inclusion of the topic in the work of Community Safety Councils.
- VI. An online coordination platform for real-time information exchange among institutions.

III. Legal Framework and Policy Enforcement

- I. Review and improvement of legislation on cultural heritage and the criminal code.
- II. Harmonization of national legislation with international conventions (UNESCO 1970, Nicosia Convention).
- III. Amendment of the Penal Code to include illegal excavations as a criminal offense.



- IV. Enforcement of the MTCS strategic plan against trafficking and the implementation of the agreement signed with the U.S. government for combating cultural heritage trafficking.
- V. Approval of an Action Plan related to the MTCS Strategic Plan.
- VI. Approval of an Action Plan related to the Cultural Property Agreement.
- VII. The establishment of an inspectorate for monitoring the trafficking and damage of cultural heritage.
- VIII. Drafting practical legal guidelines for the police and prosecution on procedures for the seizure and restitution of objects.
- IX. Establishing a legal database of previous trafficking cases to support judicial decision-making.

IV. International Cooperation and Information Exchange

- I. Enhancing cooperation with INTERPOL, EUROPOL, and regional networks.
- II. Active use of international databases for stolen objects.
- III. Bilateral agreements with neighboring countries for the exchange of information on trafficking.

V. Inventory, Documentation, and Digital Systems

- I. Inventorying and digitalization of cultural assets at the local level, including municipal and private museums, and collections.
- II. Enabling access for law enforcement institutions to the national database.
- III. Standardization of the inventory management system and integration with international databases, allowing tracking and identifying.
- IV. Use of blockchain for provenance tracking of cultural heritage objects.
- V. Creation of a platform where all information on stolen/lost objects is entered before being forwarded to the police or INTERPOL.
- VI. Compiling a list of “lost” objects from religious communities.
- VII. Monitoring commercial activities related to artistic and historical objects.
- VIII. Updating the monetary value of inventoried objects.

VI. Protection, Preservation, and Site Management

- I. Ensuring proper conditions for the preservation of seized objects at the Regional Directorates of Cultural Heritage level.
- II. Drafting risk management plans in regard for illicit activities for each heritage site.
- III. Installing warning and informational signage at heritage sites.



- IV. Installation of alarm systems, surveillance cameras, and other security measures at heritage sites.
- V. Inclusion of the Security Level Self-Assessment Form for Cultural Properties in MTCS periodic reporting.

VII. Public Awareness, Education, and Community Engagement

- I. Informative campaigns for local communities on the importance of protecting cultural heritage in schools and the media.
- II. Initiatives to encourage citizens to report suspicious cases.
- III. Establishment of a dedicated hotline for reporting cases of illicit trafficking.
- IV. Involvement of local communities in voluntary patrols for the protection of archaeological sites, alongside encouragement of their employment at heritage sites, particularly those located in remote or isolated areas
- V. Coordination among academic institutions to organize open sessions for the exchange of knowledge.
- VI. Awareness and incentive programs for the registration of objects held by private collectors.

Disclaimer

This document has been developed within the framework of "Build Local Capacity and Law Enforcement Cooperation to Combat Illicit Trafficking of Albanian Cultural Heritage" project, implemented by CHWB Albania with financial support from the Cultural Property Agreement Implementation Grant Program (CPAIG), offered by the U.S. Department of State, through the U.S. Embassy in Albania, and is intended solely for use by the participating sites and institutions. Any reproduction, distribution, or reuse of its content, including text and images, without the prior written consent of the authors is not permitted.

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