

# Transnational Aspirational Employment Model

in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums  
(CHIM) Sector in the Danube Region

Identifying Solutions for Labor  
Market Imbalances in the  
**Cultural Heritage Sector** in the  
**Danube Region** by Improving  
Its Accessibility to  
Young Professionals



CultHeRit

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# 1 Introduction

Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM) across the Danube Region face a persistent loss of young professionals, who frequently leave the sector — or the region — in search of better prospects elsewhere. This document presents a transnational employment model developed to address the structural challenges that underlie this brain drain and to help institutions attract, integrate and retain the next generation of cultural-heritage workers.

The specific objective of the model is to define an evidence-based transnational framework for improving the accessibility of employment for young professionals in the CHIM sector in the Danube Region. Because it was defined at the transnational level rather than for a single national setting, the model is intended to be broadly applicable across the sector, while remaining open to adaptation to national regulations and local circumstances. It was developed in close cooperation within the CultHeRit partnership and in consultation with national Key Stakeholder Groups, which brought together experts from museums and heritage institutions, universities, human resource management, employment agencies and trade unions, public authorities, and civil-society organisations, including some representing vulnerable groups.

The model was developed in two stages. In the first stage, the partnership defined an aspirational employment model: a deliberately ambitious yet realistic account of desirable employment practices, designed to strike a balance between idealistic aspiration and practical feasibility and to be applicable across the many contexts in which CHIM organisations in the Danube Region operate. This aspirational model was then partly tested under real-life conditions in ten piloting organisations, each of which recruited and employed a young professional and trialled selected elements of the model in its own setting.

In the second stage, the findings of the accompanying evaluation were used to revise and refine the model. The result is the present solution model — a feasible, realistic and widely applicable version, grounded in the experience of the practitioners who applied it, and in the conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the pilot phase.

This document is conceived as a practical guide rather than an exhaustive academic study. It is aimed primarily at those responsible for human-resource management in large and medium-sized institutions in the CHIM sector, but many of its elements will also be of interest to smaller organisations and to policymakers whose decisions shape the conditions under which the sector operates. The chapters that follow describe how the model was developed and set out its structure and contents, before presenting the seven categories of the model and their individual elements in detail.

# 2 Development of the Model

As a first step, Activity 1.3, 'Definition of the Transnational Aspirational Employment Model', was carried out in the fourth quarter of 2024, led by KUPF OÖ – Kulturplattform Oberösterreich in cooperation with all CultHeRit partner organisations. Drawing on the findings of the transnational analysis of employment practices in the CHIM sector, national consultations with Key Stakeholder Groups across eight countries, and a review of relevant literature and HR management frameworks, KUPF OÖ compiled and edited the initial version of the model. The model was subsequently discussed, refined, and finalised at a transnational partner workshop in Belgrade in October 2024. At this meeting, all partner organisations contributed their perspectives and formally adopted the model as the basis for the pilot action phase. The pilot actions were carried out in the following ten organisations:

- IMM – Iparművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Applied Arts, Hungary)
- MAK – Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Austria)
- INP – Institutul Național al Patrimoniului (National Institute of Heritage, Romania)
- MNIT – Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei (National Museum for the History of Transylvania, Romania)
- RIPCM – Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture (Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments, Serbia)
- IPCMS – Međupštinski zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture – Subotica (Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments – Subotica, Serbia)
- UPM – Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze (Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, Czech Republic)
- IPC – Zavod za zaštitu kulturno istorijskog i prirodnog nasljeđa Republike Srpske (Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- MUO – Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (Museum of Arts and Crafts, Croatia)
- ZZP – Zavod Znanje Postojna – Notranjski muzej Postojna (Knowledge Institute Postojna – Notranjska Museum Postojna, Slovenia)

As part of the same workshop in Belgrade in October 2024, a joint assessment process was conducted to identify which elements should be tested more extensively during the pilot actions with Young Professionals in 2025. The following three elements (out of 25 elements in total) were selected:

- Interviewing and Assessments (within category Recruitment and Selection)
- Mentorship and Integration (within category Onboarding and Orientation)
- Employee Engagement and Satisfaction (within category Employee Relations and Engagement)

The selection was based on an intensive discussion among the project partners. Key criteria included the applicability of the elements within the partners' own organisations, the interest in testing new approaches, their overall relevance for the CHIM sector, and their importance for attracting and retaining young professionals. Based on ratings by all partner organisations, the five highest-ranked elements were identified, discussed in detail, and subsequently narrowed down to the three elements selected for the pilot action phase. Activities were primarily intended to focus on the element 'Mentorship and Integration', while selected activities would also address the other two elements. The accompanying evaluation, conducted in five rounds over the course of 2025, likewise focused on these three elements.

Throughout the pilot action phase (January to December 2025), the model underwent a continuous process of review and refinement. All partner organisations provided ongoing feedback through the five evaluation rounds coordinated by KUPF OÖ, as well as through contributions at the project meetings in Banja Luka (April 2025), Bucharest (June 2025), Postojna (October 2025), Linz (December 2025), and Prague (February 2026). At each of these meetings, selected evaluation findings and partner experiences were presented and discussed, with a particular focus on the three pilot elements. The feedback gathered was systematically consolidated and prepared for integration into the draft model.

A first draft of the updated transnational aspirational employment model was presented and discussed at a partner meeting in Prague in February 2026, marking a key milestone in the transition from Activities 2.1 'Testing the transnational aspirational employment model – pilot actions' and 2.2 'Evaluation of the pilot implementation' to Activity 2.3 'Definition of the solution transnational aspirational employment model'. Building on the discussions at this partner meeting, the present transnational employment model was finalised in the months that followed.

# 3 Structure of the Model

The transnational employment model for the CHIM sector in the Danube Region comprises various categories in Human Resource Management (HRM), from recruitment procedures to workplace integration practices, to compensation and benefit programmes, and to exit management, and focuses on young professionals. The model aims to achieve a balance between idealistic aspirations and realistic feasibility, and is based on:

- a transnational analysis of employment practices conducted as part of a survey of employers, alumni and students in the CHIM sector in the Danube Region in mid-2024,
- an analysis of books, studies and materials on the topic of HRM, partly with a special focus on the CHIM sector (see Bibliography),
- an evaluation of a pilot phase in which young professionals were recruited and employed in ten organisations involved in the CultHeRit project,
- a series of reflections and discussions among all project partners involved in CultHeRit and in the Key Stakeholder Groups set up by them, including numerous experts from the CHIM sector,
- other useful material in the context of the employment situation of young professionals in the CHIM sector.

The transnational employment model consists of seven categories that relate to different phases or areas of HRM:

- Recruitment and Selection
- Onboarding and Orientation
- Performance Management and Development
- Compensation and Benefits
- Employee Relations and Engagement
- Separation and Exit Processes
- Policy Making and HR Administration

Each of these seven categories contains several elements that describe various activities, procedures and measures in HRM that can be used by organisations in the CHIM sector to attract, integrate, retain, promote or release young professionals. The focus here is primarily on medium-sized to large organisations in the CHIM sector that do not work on a purely voluntary basis or in which only a few people are employed. Nevertheless, individual elements in the categories may also be of interest for smaller organisations. Indeed, given that a large share of CHIM organisations in the Danube Region are small or very small, many of the elements below are deliberately framed so that they can be scaled down and applied selectively. Smaller organisations should feel free to adopt individual measures that fit their capacity rather than the model as a whole.

The following notes address scope, context and limitations of the model.

Across the seven categories, a single underlying orientation guides this model: good employment in CHIM institutions is understood here as the practical achievement of decent work conditions, meaningful professional development and inclusive institutional culture, pursued within the structural realities of publicly funded cultural work. The elements that follow describe practices that institutions can take up to advance this orientation, but they should be read within the legal, financial and collective-agreement frameworks that govern each institution's actual room for manoeuvre. Where institutional autonomy is limited, the elements still serve as benchmarks for advocacy and as guidance for the areas of discretion that exist.

The CHIM sector is currently being reshaped by several broader developments that influence both the work itself and the profiles of those who carry it out – among them the revised ICOM museum definition of 2022, with its emphasis on inclusion, participation and sustainability; the ongoing debates on the decolonisation of collections and the restitution of cultural property; the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural funding, digital practice and the cultural workforce; and the international 'decent work' agenda. A full treatment of these developments lies beyond the scope of this document, but they form the backdrop against which the employment practices discussed here unfold, and engaging with them would enrich any institution's HR strategy (see ICOM 2022; Sarr & Savoy 2018; NEMO 2021; ILO).

A further development relevant to this model is the transformation of CHIM work itself through artificial intelligence and digital tools. AI is increasingly used in collection management, cataloguing, conservation diagnostics, audience research, content generation and educational mediation, reshaping the competence profiles required of curators, conservators, educators and researchers. The implications extend beyond the HR compliance issues discussed in chapter 6.7.2.3 to include algorithmic bias in collection description, the provenance and copyright of training data, the risk of AI-generated misinformation about cultural heritage, and the digital accessibility of automated services. Institutions developing employment models for the coming years should consider these shifts as part of how they define roles, training needs and career trajectories, even where — as in this model — a detailed treatment exceeds the scope.

It bears noting that the brain drain the CultHeRit project addresses is driven not only by institutional HR practices but also by macro-structural factors — notably wage differentials across the Danube Region, the chronic underfunding of the cultural sector, and the ease of intra-European mobility. The present model operates primarily at the level of the individual institution and the practices within its reach; it cannot, on its own, offset these wider economic pressures. The recommendations directed at policymakers in the analyses below should therefore be read as the necessary complement to the organisational measures proposed here. Readers are also encouraged to consult the transnational strategy developed as part of the CultHeRit project, which explicitly addresses policy-making in the CHIM sector.

Good-practice examples are provided for three of the seven categories — Recruitment and Selection, Onboarding and Orientation, and Employee Relations and Engagement — which contain the three elements selected for in-depth testing during the pilot actions (Interviewing and Assessments, Mentorship and Integration, and Employee Engagement and Satisfaction). The good-practice research was concentrated on these categories accordingly. The cases presented in these categories are intended as illustrations and sources of inspiration, not as a ranking or a standard to be replicated wholesale. Several originate in comparatively well-resourced institutions in Western and Northern Europe, and their measures cannot always be transferred directly to organisations operating under different financial, legal and staffing conditions. Readers are encouraged to adapt the underlying principles to their own context rather than reproduce specific measures, recognising that effective practice in smaller or less well-funded institutions across the Danube Region may legitimately look quite different.

Several of the debates the model touches upon — among them the political economy of cultural labour, the structural drivers of regional brain drain, the decolonisation of heritage work, and the regulatory implications of artificial intelligence in HR — are the subject of extensive and evolving research that cannot be reproduced here without exceeding the format and purpose of a practical guide. Where these debates bear directly on the recommendations that follow, the document flags them briefly and points to current literature for those wishing to engage further. It should therefore be read as a starting point for reflection and adaptation, not as a final or comprehensive treatment.

# 4 What's a Young Professional?

The following text was written by Carlotta Schiller and edited by Thomas Philipp; it draws on the definition developed during the partner meeting in Belgrade in October 2024 and clarifies the central term 'young professional' as used throughout the CultHeRit project.

The term 'young professional' typically refers to individuals who are in the early stages of their careers — recent alumni or those with a few years of work experience.

To begin with, there is no universal definition of the term 'youth'; it covers several age groups. A definition in the context of the European Year of Youth 2022 spans the age range from 15 to under 35 years old. (EUROCITIES ASBL 2022) Generally speaking, it describes the process of going from being a child to becoming an independent adult, with several milestones such as graduating from university and gaining one's first work experience. (Eurostat 2009, pp. 7, 9, 83)

The specific definition of 'young professionals' can vary, and there is not a single official source that defines this term. However, general information can be found on the websites of the European Commission and in documents related to programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Youth Report. Taking these sources into account, 'young professionals' are seen as individuals at the beginning of their careers, typically aged between 18 and 30. These individuals usually possess formal education or a university degree and seek opportunities for professional development. Programmes like Erasmus+ and initiatives aimed at promoting mobility and exchange within the EU are designed to provide young professionals with international experience, enhance their skills, and facilitate their entry into the job market.

Looking at the report Youth in Europe. A statistical portrait published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, it emerges that the age group between 18 and 34 is considered 'youth'. Overall, it should be noted that Eurostat divides the age range 15–29 into 15–19, 20–24, and 25–29. A narrower definition is used by the United Nations: when defining 'youth' in general terms, the UN refers to people between 15 and 24 years old; this age period is also used for statistical purposes. (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

The international programme Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) empowers young people to volunteer for solidarity projects while gaining experience internationally. The IVY participation policy for young people states that volunteers must be between 18 and 30 years old. (Interreg Volunteer Youth 2026) YESVolunteer, an Interreg Europe project committed to strengthening youth through civic engagement, defines its target group 'youth' as people between 18 and 30 years old. (Interreg Europe 2026)

In the application form for our project CultHeRit, the term 'young' relates to education and work. No age period is mentioned, but some indicators are given; see the excerpts:

- 'reversing migration of the highly educated young people' — 'Highly educated' could mean someone holding a Master's or PhD degree.
- 'the universities may prepare young candidates' — This could indicate someone who has recently graduated.

The following section brings together contributions, comments and contextual information provided by individual CultHeRit project partners. These inputs describe national frameworks and institutional practices concerning the understanding, recruitment and integration of young professionals in the CHIM sector:

- **Romania:**  
According to the Romanian Youth Law, young people are defined as citizens between the ages of 14 and 35. (Portal Legislativ 2006) For the CultHeRit project, Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei (National Museum for the History of Transylvania) suggests using an upper age limit of 35 years when referring to young professionals.
- **Czech Republic:**  
Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze (Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague) proposes defining young professionals as people between the ages of 25 and 35. For its pilot action within CultHeRit, the institution expects the selected young professional to be between 25 and 30 years old. At the same time, Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze notes that, due to Czech anti-discrimination legislation, it is not possible to include a specific age limit in the job advertisement.
- **Hungary:**  
In Hungary, the category of young professional is linked to the status of recent alumni or young adults. Iparművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Applied Arts) refers to a young professional as a person under the age of 25, or under the age of 30 in the case of higher education, who fulfils the conditions for employment and holds a valid START card, based on Act CXXIII of 2004. (Nemzeti Jogszabálytár 2004)
- **Croatia:**  
In Croatia, youth is defined as people aged 15 to 30. This group is described as heterogeneous and socially significant, accounting for 15.8% of the total population. Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (Museum of Arts and Crafts) notes that there is no clearly defined term corresponding to 'young professional' in the Croatian context. Within the CultHeRit project, the institution aims to employ a young person without previous formal work experience. Ideally, this person would be a recent alumni in a relevant field, entering their first professional position. (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2026; Republika Hrvatska 2023)

- **Slovenia:**

In Slovenia, most surveys define young people as those aged between 15 and 29, although some also use the age groups 15–24 or 15–34. (Mlad.si 2020; Statistični urad Republike Slovenije (SURS) 2023) There is no specific age limit or established definition for young professionals. A related reference point is the category of young researchers, who are usually employed during postgraduate studies and may apply for relevant programmes up to the age of 28, with certain extensions possible depending on prior enrolment. Within the CultHeRit project, Zavod Znanje Postojna – Notranjski muzej Postojna (Knowledge Institute Postojna – Notranjska Museum Postojna, Slovenia) plans to recruit a young professional with a Master’s degree, preferably aged up to 29. The institution also considers an upper age limit of 35 acceptable, provided that the project refers primarily to European rather than national Slovenian frameworks.

- **Austria:**

According to the Federal Youth Representation Act and the Federal Youth Promotion Act, all persons up to the age of 30 are considered young people in Austria. The term ‘young adults’ is also commonly used in this context. Within this age-related framework, young people form a highly heterogeneous group. Traditional markers of adulthood, such as having one’s own household, having completed one’s education, or having entered the labour market, are increasingly less precise, as these transitions tend to occur later in life. (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich 2026) For the position in the MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive, Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Austria) notes that a specific age range cannot be stated in the job advertisement due to anti-discrimination legislation. In institutional terms, ‘young professionals’ generally refers to recent alumni holding a Master’s degree. Previous work experience is not required, although it is considered an advantage.

In addition to national legal and institutional frameworks, educational pathways and qualification structures within Europe also influence how young professionals are understood in the CHIM sector. Due to the Bologna Process, launched in 1999, university degrees have been standardised across the European Higher Education Area. The process introduced a three-cycle system (Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctorate) to provide clarity and facilitate student mobility. The Bologna Process has restructured European higher education and has aimed to facilitate cooperation among institutions and student mobility between systems. Its effects on the depth of disciplinary training and the preparation of alumni for cultural-sector work continue to be debated within the higher-education research community.

Most students in the cultural sector complete their degree programmes between the ages of 24 and 30, depending on the duration of the programmes and whether they choose to pursue a Master’s degree. The actual age at graduation depends on when the student started their studies and whether they study full-time or part-time.

University degrees are structured as follows (full-time) (European Commission 2022):

- Bachelor's degree: 180 or 240 ECTS (1 year equals 60 ECTS), 3–4 years
- Master's degree: 90 or 120 ECTS (1 year equals 60 ECTS), 1.5–2 years
- PhD: not standardised; duration varies.

Finally, age should also be understood as a social category. Beyond biological and chronological age, sociological perspectives emphasise that age is shaped by social expectations, institutional contexts and life-course transitions. In this sense, being considered a 'young professional' depends not only on a person's age, but also on their educational pathway, career stage and position within a specific professional field.

A consequence of this national and definitional heterogeneity should be acknowledged: the operational definitions of 'young professional' applied in the CultHeRit pilot ranged from under 25 in some partner countries to up to 35 in others, and combined substantive criteria (career stage, recent graduation) with administrative ones (eligibility for specific labour-market schemes). The experiences of pilot participants are therefore comparable in broad terms but only loosely comparable in age-cohort terms. Readers of the lessons learned and the evaluation findings should bear this definitional unevenness in mind when interpreting cross-country patterns.

# 5 Key Findings from the Transnational Analysis

The following text presents a condensed and adapted version of the conclusions and recommendations of the transnational analysis, based on the report 'Transnational Analysis of the Employment Practices in the Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM) Sector in the Danube Region', conducted between April and June 2024 by the CultHeRit partner organisation Bihor County Employment Agency (AJOFM).

The research comprised three questionnaires administered to employers, alumni, and students within the CHIM sector across the eight countries participating in the project. The questionnaire for employers was completed by 308 respondents, the alumni questionnaire by 714, and the student questionnaire by 523 validated respondents. While these figures provide a substantial empirical basis for the analysis, the results should be interpreted with some caution and are not statistically representative in a strict sense, given the methodology applied and the limited number of responses.

Across all three questionnaires, a set of transversal skills emerged as central for the CHIM sector, including critical and creative thinking, communication and digital competencies. As these are best developed in practice rather than in the classroom alone, the analysis points to a stronger role for in-house training, mentoring and internship schemes for new and prospective employees, alongside volunteering and community-oriented events that bring potential future professionals into contact with institutions. Greater investment in community outreach could also help counter the widespread perception among staff that their work is insufficiently valued by society at large.

The findings also reveal a marked distance between education and the sector. More than 60% of alumni respondents had no contact with the sector before their employment, and over half of student respondents lack a clear vision of their career path, expecting their first job to last only one to three years. Almost 45% of students considered it unlikely that they would find employment in the field after graduation. These results underline the importance of closer ties between CHIM institutions and educational providers, and of more coherent communication strategies to widen institutions' reach. Notably, students appear to weigh salary somewhat less heavily than alumni in their general expectations. This should not be read as indifference to pay: when asked specifically about their ideal position, students rank competitive remuneration highly. The finding is therefore better understood not as salary mattering less, but as other factors – opportunities to acquire relevant skills, a supportive working atmosphere and prospects for development – weighing alongside, rather than instead of, fair pay. This gives employers room to compete on several fronts, while recognising that adequate remuneration remains a precondition rather than an optional addition.

In terms of competences, the quantitative research identified communication, problem management, flexibility and adaptability, and creativity as the most useful skills overall, with notable variation between heritage domains: community engagement, professional networking and social media skills for Cultural Heritage Promotion; fundraising and presentation skills for Heritage Enhancement; innovation, conservation, curatorial, managerial and funding skills for Heritage Exploitation; and digital competences together with the involvement of decision-makers and co-ownership of heritage sites for Heritage Mediation and Interpretation. The qualitative responses broadly confirmed this picture, adding leadership, fundraising, crowdfunding and crowdsourcing to the list of skills most in demand. Many of these competences require dedicated professional preparation, while others, such as management, cross-sectoral, innovation, digital and media skills, are already addressed to some extent within existing educational provision.

For young people considering the sector, the analysis recommends study in fields such as Art History, Archaeology, Anthropology or Conservation-Restoration, complemented by voluntary internships in museums to gain practical experience and build professional relationships, specialised courses and workshops in museology, and active participation in events and projects that demonstrate creativity and initiative. At the same time, several barriers persist: the high cost of education and training, particularly for those from less privileged backgrounds; strong competition for a limited number of posts; and difficulty in accessing reliable information about training and career opportunities.

Structural problems compound these barriers. A relatively low level of interest among young people, linked to limited advancement opportunities and chronic underfunding, is reinforced by the difficulty some institutions face in adopting innovative recruitment and working practices, and by training programmes that are not always aligned with younger generations' expectations. To respond, universities should offer dedicated undergraduate and master's programmes in museology and cultural heritage, integrate courses on communication skills, volunteer management and modern technologies, and collaborate closely with museums and cultural organisations to keep their curricula relevant and up to date.

# 6 Categories

The seven categories are presented below in turn. Each opens with an overview and a description of its elements; for the three categories whose elements were tested during the pilot actions, sections on lessons learned and relevant good-practice examples follow.

# 6.1 Recruitment and Selection

## 6.1.1 Overview

Effective recruitment and selection processes are crucial for attracting and retaining young professionals in the CHIM sector. This category involves identifying job vacancies, describing jobs and roles, sourcing and attracting candidates, screening and selecting the most suitable candidates, and ensuring that the hiring process aligns with organisational goals and legal requirements.

A foundational step in recruitment is conducting a thorough job analysis to determine the skills, knowledge, and abilities required for a position. This is connected with creating detailed role specifications and job descriptions, which guide the entire recruitment process. Job analysis ensures that the recruitment efforts are targeted and that the candidates possess the necessary qualifications. (Armstrong & Taylor 2014, pp. 226–228)

Sourcing and attracting the right candidates require a strategic approach to recruitment marketing. This includes utilising various channels such as job boards, social media, professional networks, and recruitment agencies. Effective employer branding is also critical as it helps in presenting the organisation as an attractive place to work. (Dessler 2019, pp. 175–177) For example, showcasing the unique opportunities within the CHIM sector can help attract passionate and skilled young professionals.

The selection process typically involves several stages, including receiving applications, initial screening, interviews, assessments, and reference checks. Structured interviews and competency-based assessments are widely regarded as effective methods for evaluating candidates' suitability for a role. (Rowold 2015, pp. 159–160) These methods help ensure a fair and objective selection process by focusing on job-related criteria. Adhering to legal and ethical standards is paramount in the recruitment and selection process. This includes compliance with anti-discrimination laws and ensuring that the selection criteria are relevant and non-discriminatory. Regular training on these aspects can help prevent biases and ensure a fair and inclusive hiring process. (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, pp. 50–52)

Advancements in technology have significantly impacted recruitment processes. The use of applicant tracking systems and recruitment software, increasingly based on artificial intelligence, can streamline the recruitment process, making it more efficient and effective. These tools help manage applications, automate communication with candidates, and provide valuable analytics for continuous improvement. (Dessler 2019, pp. 179–181)

Recruitment and selection processes should be continually reviewed and improved based on feedback and outcomes. Regularly updating job descriptions, improving assessment methods, and keeping abreast of industry trends are essential for maintaining an effective recruitment strategy. (Armstrong & Taylor 2014, pp. 230–231)

## 6.1.2 Elements

### 6.1.2.1 Job Analysis and Planning

To ensure that staffing effectively supports their missions, cultural heritage institutes and museums need to perform thorough job analysis and planning. This involves identifying and defining specific roles along with related skills, qualifications, and responsibilities, and aligning these roles with the organisation's strategic objectives. Examples range from hiring a young curator specialising in ancient Egyptian artefacts to recruiting young museum educators that engage diverse audiences to seeking a young marketing specialist to promote upcoming exhibitions on social media.

Job analysis and planning also involve considering adequate staff workload in general, which requires having enough qualified personnel. For instance, one conservator cannot manage 300 monuments, nor can a curator cover all periods and genres, nor can an art historian handle ethnology. If staffing levels are insufficient, appropriate allowances should be provided for covering vacant positions.

Starting with job analysis and planning, attention should be given to making the recruitment and selection process as diverse, equitable, and inclusive as possible. In this phase, it is therefore essential to be intentional about diversity, equality and inclusion by planning how to recruit candidates from vulnerable groups and ensuring transparency and fairness in their evaluation and selection.

This includes, for example, reaching out to potential candidates with different native languages, paying attention to the financial burden applicants may face in order to apply in the first place (e.g., for notarised documents, or legal or medical proof, etc.) or using inclusive language for various genders. It is also recommended to train the people involved in the process to avoid biases.

Leveraging modern recruitment tools, increasingly based on AI, such as ↗ [Workable](#), ↗ [Manatal](#), ↗ [Teamtailor](#) or ↗ [Tellent Recruitee](#) can enhance efficiency in this process, ensuring that positions are filled by candidates whose skills match the needs of cultural heritage institutes and museums. Institutions deploying AI-based recruitment or selection tools should verify their compliance status under the EU AI Act, which classifies such systems as high-risk (see the note on AI in HR in chapter 6.7.2.3).

Establishing a chronological outline for the entire process is essential. It is beneficial to include a tentative timeline with key milestones in the job vacancy announcement, allowing potential candidates to plan their work and lives accordingly. For EU/EEA citizens, freedom of movement applies and no additional procedural extension is required; for candidates from outside the EU/EEA, the timeline should be extended to allow for residence and work-permit procedures, typically by two to five months.

Job analysis and planning, as part of the broader HRM process, are essential components of an organisation's vision and mission planning. Cultural heritage institutes and museums must make special efforts to ensure that HRM is integrated into their vision and mission, as it plays a crucial role in their long-term success.

### 6.1.2.2 Role Specification and Job Descriptions

Creating detailed and inclusive job descriptions is crucial for setting clear expectations for potential hires. Organisation-specific working conditions should also be included as part of the job description, such as usual working hours (e.g., work weekends per month), fieldwork requirements, or typical salary ranges and benefits. The descriptions should not only define the role's responsibilities and required qualifications but should also align with the organisation's cultural and heritage goals. For instance, a job description for a curator might detail duties in researching, acquiring, and exhibiting collections, ensuring candidates are well aware of their expected contributions.

Given rapid technological, sociocultural, and demographic changes, job descriptions should be updated with new qualifications, skills, and tasks rather than copied from previous versions. This is particularly important for positions with emerging qualifications. Involving professional staff and future colleagues in this process is crucial, as they can provide insights on field developments and public needs in the CHIM sector. Their input can help incorporate essential tasks that require various abilities, such as digital literacy, proficiency in AI and VR, community engagement, or interpersonal skills.

When defining role specifications and job descriptions, existing regulatory frameworks should be considered – if available for the intended jobs. In the Czech Republic, for example, a ↗ [national qualification system exists with standards for various CHIM-related professions](#) (e.g., curators,

museum educators, conservators, etc.). These standards provide detailed guidelines on verifying qualifications, serving as an excellent tool to enhance the recruitment process.

The detailed job descriptions should be handed over to the employees as a supplement to the employment contract, agreed by the supervisor and HR department and signed by the management. It is beneficial to include a concise list of key tasks in the job vacancy announcement.

Job descriptions should always include current, relevant, and comprehensive task lists. Unless legally mandated, they should be updated frequently to reflect changes in the workplace.

### 6.1.2.3 Sourcing and Attracting Candidates

Attracting the right talent involves advertising across various platforms, including the organisation's website, social media channels, professional networks, and job boards like ↗ [LinkedIn](#), ↗ [Indeed](#), and ↗ [Glassdoor](#), as well as job boards that are more regional, domain-specific or tailored to specific needs (e.g., for Austria, ↗ [Kulturkonzepte-Jobbörse](#), ↗ [KUPF-Kulturjobs](#), ↗ [Jobs und Ausschreibungen Museumsbund Österreich](#), or ↗ [myAbility.jobs](#), for Bosnia and Herzegovina ↗ [MojPosao](#) or ↗ [Klix Posao](#), for the Czech Republic ↗ [Culturenet](#), for Serbia ↗ [Poslovi Infostud](#), ↗ [Startuj Infostud](#) or ↗ [jooble](#), for Croatia ↗ [Hrvatski zavod za zapošljavanje - Portal Burza rada](#)). This should be an ongoing effort, promoting the profession and organisation realistically to build a strong candidate pool and avoid inflating expectations. The list of platforms above is illustrative rather than exhaustive: examples are given only for some of the partner countries, and institutions should also consult equivalent sector-specific and regional channels for their own national context.

Strategies should target diverse talent pools, including recent alumni and emerging professionals, by showcasing the value of the CHIM sector, specific information about the institution, past success stories, and specific benefits for potential employees. Engaging storytelling, high-quality visuals, and virtual tours can enhance this messaging. Try to add a personal touch: for example, presentations may involve younger colleagues and highlight positive aspects such as opportunities for travel, conferences, international exposure, publications, career advancement, participation in international projects, and professional pride.

Effective sourcing also includes engaging existing staff in referral programmes to ensure a diverse and qualified candidate pool. Another effective measure is to build and foster strong partnerships with relevant organisations (e.g., universities, art initiatives, job agencies, organisations working with vulnerable groups), participate on their own initiative in career fairs and similar events, organise workshops to showcase various professions and their societal and cultural impacts to the broader public, offer open days for interested candidates, offer summer schools and comparable programmes for students or present their own organisation and the job opportunities in the CHIM sector in existing study programmes at universities.

An extensive list of such study programmes was compiled as part of the CultHeRit project for Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia and Romania; examples can also be found in the ↗ [Charter Database of the European Cultural Heritage Skills Alliance](#).

Where internships, volunteer placements or comparable entry positions are used as part of recruitment or pipeline-building, they should be paid, time-limited, structured around defined learning objectives, and supported by a designated supervisor. Unpaid or open-ended internships risk reproducing rather than addressing the social inequalities that limit access to the sector.

Internal recruitment is a viable option for sourcing new colleagues, offering advantages like familiarity and reduced onboarding efforts. However, it makes only a limited contribution to workforce diversification. Care should be taken to avoid depleting certain departments or turning them into training grounds for others, unless this is a deliberate part of the cultural heritage institution's or museum's hiring strategy.

The job vacancy announcement is often the first contact between the institution and potential employees, making it crucial for transparency. It should promote the institution as a desirable employer, communicate respect, and invite candidates to join the team. Job vacancy announcements must clearly state the job title, contract type, requirements, qualifications, and task descriptions. Include a comprehensive list of required documents (e.g., CV format, cover letter, scanned certificates, proof of education) and provide clear instructions for submission, along with a brief overview of the hiring process, a tentative timeline and – where relevant – GDPR consent. Include contact information for enquiries and relevant links, such as the institution's website, social media accounts, and other pertinent documents. For short-term or project-based positions, mention the possibility of contract extension based on factors like employee performance and available resources. This transparency can attract candidates seeking long-term employment. In some countries, vacancy announcements are legally regulated regarding format, style, and required information. If possible, avoid bureaucratic language, especially when targeting recent alumni or young professionals. If legal terminology is necessary, provide a plain language summary of key information. Do not forget to clarify whether only successful candidates will be notified and provide details on the complaint process. Briefly describe measures to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Moreover, introducing a 'Careers' tab on the organisation's website can serve as a valuable recruitment tool, providing information about job opportunities, organisational history, and benefits. It is essential to keep this information accurate and up-to-date to avoid misleading potential candidates. Some cultural heritage institutes and museums utilise a rolling CV submission, allowing candidates to upload or send their CVs at any time via a button or email. In countries without specific regulations requiring job postings on dedicated platforms, this can be an effective low-resource tool for building a candidate pool.

While recruiting young professionals often focuses on the tertiary education sector, cultural heritage institutes and museums can also play a role in introducing the field to younger audiences through age-appropriate engagement that demystifies the profession and counters stereotypes about who belongs in it. Such efforts are most appropriately framed as audience and cultural-citizenship work rather than as early career recruitment: in light of the precarious conditions still prevailing in much of the sector, actively channelling children towards CHIM careers would sit uneasily with this model's own emphasis on fair employment. Sustained engagement of this kind requires long-term commitment and should be understood as building lasting public connection to heritage.

#### 6.1.2.4 Application and Screening Process

The application and screening process should be designed to be accessible and inclusive. For example, special approaches should be implemented for individuals with specific needs. Online portals should be used for application submissions, and thorough reviews of CVs and cover letters should be conducted. Although it is common practice to request photos for CVs, it is worth considering doing without them to reduce the potential for unconscious bias based on appearance, gender, ethnicity, or age.

Keep the process as simple as possible: easy, accessible, online, low-threshold – life is fast today.

Different procedures should be applied in the application and screening process depending on the type of young professional being targeted. For example, alumni typically have little to no work history, possibly only short-term work or volunteer experience. In contrast, alumni of a technical college may already have relevant field experience or experience in a different industry.

This stage may include specialised tests and reference checks with past employers, workplace mentors, or thesis supervisors to verify candidates' backgrounds and performance, with a focus on museum-related experience.

Involving external and independent people to assess applicants can help increase applicants' confidence in the application process. The goal is to shortlist candidates whose professional values align with the cultural heritage institution's and museum's values and mission. Ensure that diversity is maintained throughout this process.

Consider establishing a reserve list in case the selected candidate cannot be hired. This proactive approach can save time. Ensure that GDPR consent covers the handling of personal contact information for this purpose. Candidates on the reserve list should receive a non-committal notification stating their status, clarifying that this does not constitute a job offer or promise. The notification should explain that they will only be contacted if needed and that they do not need to make repeated enquiries.

### 6.1.2.5 Interviewing and Assessments

Initial interviews, which may also be conducted by phone or video, assess candidates' basic qualifications and fit for the role. AI-supported tools such as [Hirevire](#), [Willo](#) or [Vervoe](#) may support initial screening, asynchronous interviews or skills-based assessments. It is also a good idea to have the candidates introduce themselves before the initial interviews in short videos they have produced themselves. Although digital tools offer great support here, it makes sense to conduct non-digital and face-to-face interviews as well, as this makes it easier for recruiters to recognise certain character traits better, communication skills, etc. In general, it is important to use a variety of methods to get the fullest possible picture of the candidates' personality and skills, which are not always necessarily closely related to the job itself. Institutions deploying AI-based recruitment or selection tools should verify their compliance status under the EU AI Act, which classifies such systems as high-risk (see the note on AI in HR in chapter 6.7.2.3).

Subsequent in-person interviews, using structured and scenario-based questions and involving multiple stakeholders such as department heads and supervisors, delve deeper into candidates' skills, knowledge, experience, and cultural alignment. These interviews can also be used to discuss details of working conditions and workplace environments (e.g., salary negotiations, clarification of special benefits, workplace equipment, etc.). Some information cannot be solicited or required during interviews and assessments, particularly for legal reasons. Therefore, an exhaustive list of protected personal information and forbidden questions should be available for interviewers and assessors. Depending on local laws, specific information may be deemed protected during the screening and evaluation of candidates to prevent bias and discrimination.

Additionally, consider using varied assessment methods to evaluate candidates' potential beyond traditional criteria. This comprehensive approach ensures that selected candidates are well-suited to the organisation's environment.

A positive atmosphere should be cultivated during the interview and assessment process. Providing applicants with a positive experience not only creates a good impression of the cultural heritage institution or museum and its staff but also increases the likelihood that candidates will accept job offers and engage enthusiastically. Moreover, a positive experience can encourage applicants to recommend the organisation to friends and acquaintances, helping attract future talent.

### 6.1.2.6 Decision-Making and Job Offer

After detailed assessments, successful candidates should be contacted in person before receiving job offers accompanied by formal letters and contracts outlining the terms of employment, salary, benefits, start dates, and other useful information. This stage confirms mutual expectations and commitments between the cultural heritage institution or museum and the new employee, ensuring a clear understanding of employment terms.

The applicants should always have the opportunity to read through the contracts at their leisure and to ask questions before signing.

Consider notifying all candidates who were not ultimately selected, as this can enhance future recruitment efforts. Candidates are more likely to reapply if their rejection is handled with kindness and empathy. This process can be streamlined by creating a template that can be personalised with a sentence highlighting the candidate's strengths and expressing hope for future applications. Additionally, unsuccessful candidates should have the option to appeal if they feel wronged. If a complaint procedure is not legally mandated, the institution should establish one.

### 6.1.3 Lessons Learned from the Pilot Actions

At the CultHeRit partner meeting in Banja Luka in April 2025, a workshop was conducted with the project partners. They were asked to form five teams of two organisations each: INP & IMM, RIPCM & UPM, MAK & IPCMS, MUO & MNIT, and IPC & ZZP. Each team was given a scenario: A cultural heritage institution or museum in their country has requested support in hiring a young professional. The teams were asked to share their lessons learned from the recruitment and selection phase of the pilot action, focusing on interviewing and assessments while also drawing on other elements of this phase where relevant.

Several themes recur across the five responses:

- The importance of a clear and well-prepared job description is emphasised by nearly all teams, as is the need to go beyond traditional recruitment channels by using social media and creative outreach strategies.
- Multiple teams recommend incorporating practical, hands-on assessment formats — such as project presentations, task-based assignments, or creative application materials like introductory videos — rather than relying solely on conventional CVs and interviews. This reflects a shared conviction that personality, motivation, and practical skills are at least as relevant as formal qualifications when hiring young professionals in the CHIM sector.
- Several teams also stress the value of responding to all applicants, including those not selected, as a matter of professional respect and future relationship-building.
- Transparency throughout the process — regarding selection criteria, timelines, and financial conditions — is highlighted as a trust-building measure.
- Finally, attention to GDPR requirements is mentioned by more than one team as a necessary consideration when handling applications and communicating results.

The individual team responses are documented below in their original form, each written as an email addressed to the requesting institution.

### 6.1.3.1 Response from INP & IMM

Dear colleagues,

We are delighted to share our insights with you on 'Interviewing and Assessment' conducted within the framework of the CultHerit programme at INP Bucharest and IMM Budapest. In the following, we will summarise our experiences regarding the 'Interviewing and Assessment' phase.

Preparations — for the institution:

- Very clear job description
- Friendly, approachable open call, informal language
- Promotion on social media — a few sentences, emphasis on visual communication
- Posters summarising the core ideas — QR code leading to the official webpage of the museum
- Frequent reposting on social media to reach a larger audience

Recruitment process:

- Required documents: CV, portfolio, extracurricular activities, 5-minute introductory video
- Due to national legislation, we were not allowed to specify the age of the applicants, but try to keep in mind that 'young' generally refers to something between 25–35

Selection:

- A short presentation video or letter of intent was required from applicants — the video is more personal
- CVs did not require photos
- After reviewing the portfolio and completing the first round, INP conducted a written exam — applicants received a short bibliography closely related to future tasks, including interpretation and use of fundamental laws connected to the profession and English tasks to demonstrate good language understanding
- IMM conducted short interviews with each suitable applicant who met the educational criteria
- We replied to those who were not hired — to motivate them to apply for future jobs

We hope you will find this email useful.

Kind regards,  
INP and IMM

### 6.1.3.2 Response from RIPCM & UPM

Dear colleagues,

We are delighted that you have reached out to us regarding the hiring of a young professional.

First, you need to ensure that you conduct a thorough job analysis and create a job description that meets your needs. The description should be the result of careful investigation and a meeting to openly discuss what is in the best interest of your institution.

The next step is the announcement: determine how long the open call will last and when it will be published. In your announcement, it should be clear what skills, qualifications, and personality traits you are looking for. Specify what the candidate can expect from the job, including the benefits.

The call or job advertisement should be shared on government employment agency portals, your institution's website, social media, and, if possible, various job offer platforms. Plan and develop a social media strategy for the best outreach, including non-traditional formats.

When you receive the CVs, conduct a negative selection first, followed by a positive selection.

Respond to every single candidate who applied, especially those who were not selected. Call or email the applicants and explain the testing process, including the schedule.

Test the applicants' skills relevant to the position (e.g., during a workshop or through assignments) and conduct an interview.

Discuss the final testing results with your team and choose the right person. Communicate your decision openly.

Consider the GDPR regulations in your country and the needs of the project, and publish the final results in an appropriate manner.

Should you need any assistance at any step of the recruitment process, feel free to contact us. We are sending you our guidebook for employing young professionals in the CHIM sector and are open to discussing the process.

Best of luck,  
UPM and RIPCM

### 6.1.3.3 Response from MAK & IPCMS

Dear colleagues,

You should have a clear vision of which position should be advertised and is needed within the institution, for example through job analysis and planning.

It is necessary to publish the announcement on social media, the website, and formal platforms. The announcement is an opportunity to be unique and stand out from other employers, and to raise awareness of the advertisement among young people and make the position interesting. The advertisement should be simple but concrete. Try something different and make a short video with an introduction — perhaps use some humour to raise awareness; maybe it will go viral.

Use the opportunity to allow applicants to include a video or something creative in their applications, as this provides a greater impression of the person and shows the applicants' effort — whether it is just a copy-paste application or whether they took their time and reflected on the job. Ask a precise question or provide an assignment they have to answer and work on.

Organise an open-door day so applicants can get a feeling for the work environment, the colleagues, and the overall vibe. Through this event, they will find out whether the job is suitable for them.

Be open-minded and get to know the applicants. Envision the applicant in the position. For example: does the position require someone communicative and extroverted, or rather introverted? Is their character suitable?

MAK and IPCMS

### 6.1.3.4 Response from MUO & MNIT

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your interest in our project. We are very happy to share our experiences with you. We had the great opportunity to apply a slightly different approach in employing our young professional than it is usually done.

First of all, we suggest clearly stating in the open call the kind of professional you are looking for: skills, past experiences, but also specific criteria such as age range, even if this might limit the number of applications.

Secondly, we received very good feedback from most of the candidates regarding the transparency of the entire onboarding process. However, we recommend caution with GDPR, as too much transparency may cause problems.

We also managed to apply a different approach and focus more on hands-on experience. We asked our candidate to prepare a short project, and the entire interview was based on this project. In this way, our team of specialists, which also included the future mentor, was able to better assess the connection with the potential team member — their creativity, level of involvement, and also their personality, as these characteristics are far more relevant than their knowledge of heritage legislation.

We recommend discussing the financial aspects during the interview as well, as this helps build trust between employer and future employee.

However, it was our experience that the salary is not a deal-breaking criterion, as most candidates were more concerned about the tasks and future growth opportunities.

Best of luck,  
MUO and MNIT

### 6.1.3.5 Response from IPC & ZZP

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for reaching out to us regarding your plans to hire a young professional focused on interviewing and assessments. We understand the challenges cultural institutions often face when it comes to attracting and recruiting young talent, particularly for roles that require both technical and communication skills.

We'd be glad to support your efforts by sharing our own recent experience, which proved to be both effective and inspiring.

Like many in the cultural sector, we initially found it difficult to reach young professionals through traditional recruitment channels. To overcome this, we partnered with the SkillHatch platform to launch a digital recruitment campaign using gamified, interactive challenges. These were designed to evaluate candidates' cultural awareness, communication abilities, and digital skills in an engaging way.

The results were beyond our expectations — within just ten days, we received 43 applications. Not only did many candidates demonstrate strong technical knowledge, but they also showed genuine motivation to work in the cultural heritage and museums field. The process offered applicants a meaningful opportunity to reflect on their strengths and interests through quizzes and interactive tasks.

This approach not only improved the reach and quality of applicants but also enhanced the overall candidate experience. It has since attracted international interest as a model for modern, engaging recruitment in our sector.

We would be happy to share more details with you or explore how a similar strategy might be adapted to your needs. Whether it is through helping develop assessment tools, designing a digital recruitment challenge, or simply offering feedback on your current approach — we are here to collaborate.

We are also sending you examples of our questionnaire and assessment criteria proposal.

Examples of interview/assessment questions used in our recruitment process:

- Social Media Content Proposal: What kind of Instagram content would you suggest for our history department? How would you approach creating and posting this content? What would you highlight? Would it be a one-off post or part of a recurring series? Please present a concrete example.
- Communication and Interpretation Skills: How would you explain the differences between the Karst Research Institute ZRC SAZU, the Notranjska Museum Postojna, and the Karst Museum to a family visiting the museum? Please write your explanation in English.
- Event Planning and Audience Engagement: Our museums take part in the Summer Museum Night event. In your opinion, what elements are essential to make this event attractive to different target groups? How would you organise the activities? List a few activities you think are suitable for such an occasion.

Assessment Criteria Proposal:

- Target positions: Entry-level and associate expert roles for young professionals.
- Evaluation method: Candidates will be assessed through short interviews and a review of their CVs. The assessment team will consist of professionals with experience in academia, research, and practice in the cultural heritage sector.
- Feedback method: Each candidate will receive a short written report with a star rating.

Looking forward to hearing more about your recruitment plans.

Warm regards,  
IPC and ZZP

## 6.1.4 Good Practices

### 6.1.4.1 German Museums Association: Promoting young talent in museums

On its website, the German Museums Association offers basic information and special support material on promoting young talent in museums. It operates the most important job portal in the museum sector in Germany, offers volunteers from all over Germany a working group and supports them in organising the annual Federal Volunteer Conference.



Three interviews are available on the website of the German Museums Association in which Jan Gerchow, Director of Historisches Museum Frankfurt, Kathrin Schellenberg, Deputy Director of Stadtmuseum Kassel and Andrea Rechenberg, cultural anthropologist and Museum Director of Städtisches Museum Göttingen describe how the standards for exemplary volunteering can be implemented in practice.

➤ [Interviews with museum directors on the implementation of volunteering in practice \(in German language\)](#)

In a guideline published in 2018, the German Museums Association defined quality guidelines for museum volunteering and is continuously working to ensure that these are implemented nationwide. The German Museums Association clarifies that scientific traineeships are not further training, trainee programmes or similar, but rather training in the sense of 'other contractual relationships' in accordance with the Berufsbildungsgesetz (Law for Vocational Training). This results in legally defined framework conditions for the organisation of the traineeship.

The guide names and explains these conditions, describes the objectives of the training and the associated training plans and provides a sample training contract, a sample training plan and a sample job advertisement in the appendix. It is aimed equally at museums, their sponsors, volunteers and anyone interested in volunteering.



➤ [Guideline for scientific volunteering in museums \(in German language\)](#)

## 6.1.4.2 American Alliance of Museums: Unbiased Hiring Practices

As early as 2016, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) pioneered the development and implementation of comprehensive unbiased hiring practices. These early examples of systematic approaches to reducing bias in recruitment processes remain relevant today and have been continuously refined by AAM. The approach was first tested in recruiting the Ford W. Bell Fellow for Museums & P-12 Education and has since been systematically developed across multiple recruitment processes. The goal is to attract diverse applicant pools and ensure fair evaluation of candidates based on relevant skills rather than credentials or proxy criteria.

Key elements of AAM's unbiased hiring approach included:

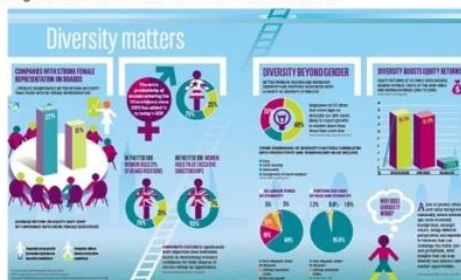
- **Blind Screening Techniques:** AAM incorporated identity-blind screening by asking candidates to omit names, addresses, school names, and graduation dates from their cover letters and CVs. While approximately one-third of candidates fully complied with this request, the practice helped reviewers remain more neutral in their evaluations. For certain positions, AAM had also conducted blind evaluations of work samples, with reviewers scoring submissions without knowing which applicant created which work until after all scores were submitted.
- **Skills-Focused Job Descriptions:** Rather than relying on credentials like specific degrees or years of experience, job descriptions focused on demonstrated skills needed to perform the work. AAM eliminated assumptions about educational requirements and used software like Textio to identify and remove gender-coded language from job postings. The organisation has moved away from industry jargon and acronyms that might discourage applicants with relevant transferable skills from other sectors.
- **Challenge-Based Evaluation:** Instead of relying solely on CVs and traditional interviews, AAM created opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their abilities through practical challenges. These included work samples, presentations, role-playing scenarios, or specific tasks that directly related to the position's responsibilities. This approach provided hiring managers with concrete evidence of candidates' capabilities beyond what credentials suggest.
- **Structured Interview Process:** AAM used standardised interview protocols, asking the same questions in the same order to each candidate, with the same team member asking each question. Interviewers took notes in real time, and candidate discussions compared responses to the same questions rather than conducting overall debriefs on individual candidates. This structure minimised the influence of personal impressions and ensured consistent evaluation.

- Collaborative CV Review: Two hiring team members independently reviewed all CVs and identified their top candidates before meeting as a group to create a consolidated list. The organisation has developed CV review protocols that help teams identify and manage their individual biases, agreeing not to use any single factor as the primary reason for eliminating candidates and avoiding internet searches about applicants during initial screening.
- Transparent Communication: Job postings included salary ranges, closing dates, and clear instructions on what to include in applications. This transparency managed candidate expectations and improved the quality of applications received.



### Why blind hiring?

Unconscious or implicit bias refers to the preferences, aversions and overall beliefs about individual or group difference that we aren't actively aware of. [We all have them](#). Factors like non-white-sounding names and shared academic pedigree can engender unintended bias responses in the interview process. Even things like shared extracurricular activities can create [implicit class bias](#), as interests like sailing, polo, and classical musical performance can signal subtle cues about taste and access to wealth.



Several industries and fields have applied various strategies for reducing the impact of this bias in the hiring process. The Boston Symphony Orchestra famously inaugurated [identity-blind auditions in 1952](#) to increase gender diversity in their overwhelmingly male ranks. Performers were asked to audition behind a screen with their shoes removed. This produced great results: women made nearly half of the candidates who advanced beyond the first round in the process. Today, the tech sector is applying software innovations including natural language processing and artificial intelligence to address the issue of unconscious bias in the hiring process. Companies like [Textio](#) use algorithms to assess gendered and age-ist language in the position descriptions. In addition to addressing diversity issues in the training pipeline, Silicon Valley is also [looking to software](#) to help make the application review process more equitable. In the spirit of experimenting together, CFM is partnering with GapJumpers to help museums address unintended bias in our field. I believe that the future of museum work depends on the future of museum workers—and that future must be an equitable one.

AAM's recruitment goal connected directly to the organisation's strategic plan focus on diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion: to attract the most qualified candidates and broaden the diversity of applicant pools. While the process required more time and effort than traditional approaches, AAM reported that it has generated higher-quality candidate pools, provided valuable learning experiences for both staff and applicants, and contributed to changing organisational mindsets about recruitment practices.

### ➤ [10 Things We've Learned About Unbiased Hiring Practices at AAM](#)

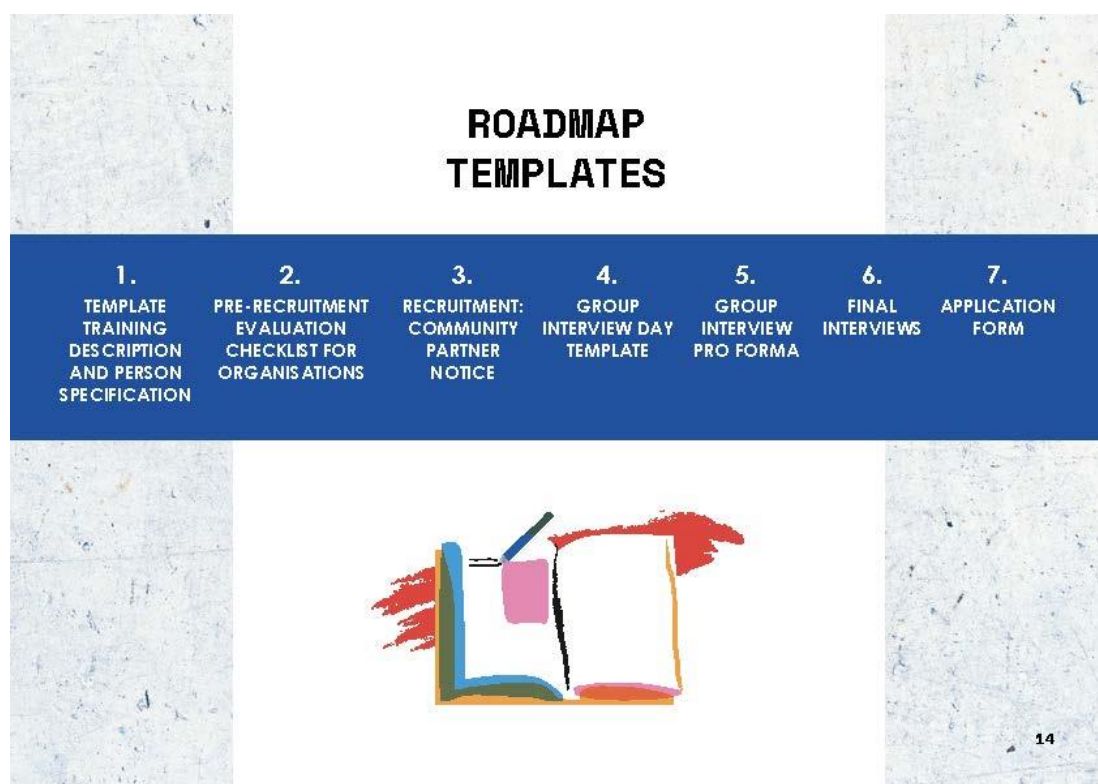
### 6.1.4.3 British Museum: Positive Action Recruitment Roadmap

Between 2016 and 2019, the British Museum developed a comprehensive positive action recruitment model as part of its Learning Museum programme, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The programme worked with 19 partner museums across the UK to recruit diverse young people for year-long traineeships. The approach was designed to recruit people with passion and potential above qualifications and experience, specifically targeting young people aged 18-24 who might not have considered a museum career. The published roadmap document also includes a series of practical templates to support the recruitment process.

The model follows a four-phase approach:

- In the first phase, organisations prepare through health checks and staff training, develop community partnerships with shared agendas such as employment programmes and youth organisations, and define communication strategies using diverse channels beyond traditional job boards including social media, flyers, and community gatekeepers. This phase requires significant lead time for partnership building.
- The second phase involves scheduling multiple taster days to accommodate different availabilities, running accessible and engaging activities showing what museum work entails, promoting through community partners, and following quickly with group interviews to maximise conversion. The group interview day forms the centrepiece of the approach, typically running from 10:30 to 16:00. It comprises a sequence of practical activities—including ice-breaker exercises, object handling tasks, gallery-based design challenges, and visitor scenario discussions—through which candidates demonstrate competencies across social behaviour, communication, and practical performance. Staff members are each assigned a small number of candidates to observe, completing simple assessment matrices after each activity and compiling scores in a group interview pro forma at day's end. The tone throughout is designed to be as fun, non-intimidating and supportive as possible
- The third phase involves structured individual interviews with standardised questions, focusing on recognising potential and behaviours rather than just existing skills, maintaining relationships with unsuccessful candidates through signposting to other opportunities, and documenting and sharing learnings to evaluate and refine the approach.
- The fourth and final phase emphasises creating a lasting legacy: producing evaluation reports to inform future recruitment, sharing experiences across the sector through conferences, events, and publications, and nurturing community partnerships beyond the recruitment process, recognising that even relationships that do not generate direct applicants provide valuable contacts and support wider museum initiatives.

The documented benefits are substantial. For applicants, the approach provides awareness of opportunities they wouldn't otherwise know about, increased confidence in professional environments, more positive perceptions of museums, and opportunities to demonstrate abilities beyond what CVs show. For organisations, it delivers stronger community relationships, fresh ideas and perspectives, new skills from diverse backgrounds, changed perceptions about young people, experience recruiting for behaviours and potential, and increased diversity on teams. For the sector long-term, it contributes to a more diverse workforce, better community connections, new ideas to keep the sector relevant, and experience and skills from other industries.



➤ [Positive Action Recruitment Roadmap for the museum sector and beyond](#)

# 6.2 Onboarding and Orientation

## 6.2.1 Overview

Onboarding and orientation are critical processes that help new employees acclimate to their roles and the organisational culture. These processes ensure that new hires are well-prepared, integrated, and equipped to contribute effectively from the start. Onboarding encompasses pre-boarding activities, orientation programmes, training on organisational policies and procedures, and mentorship for integration. The objective is to make new employees feel welcome, reduce their time to productivity, and increase their engagement and retention rates.

Pre-boarding sets the stage for a successful onboarding experience. This phase includes administrative tasks such as completing paperwork, setting up IT access, and preparing the workspace. It also involves initial communication that introduces the new hire to the organisation's culture and values. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) note that pre-boarding activities can significantly reduce new hire anxiety and make them feel valued even before they start their first day (pp. 264–265).

Orientation programmes are designed to introduce new hires to the organisational culture, structure, and their specific roles. Dessler (2019) emphasises that effective orientation programmes go beyond the basic introduction to organisation policies and procedures. They should also provide a comprehensive overview of the organisation's history, mission, and values, and include interactive sessions where new employees can meet their colleagues and start building relationships (pp. 202–204).

Training on organisational policies and procedures is an essential part of the onboarding process. This training ensures that new employees understand the organisation's rules, compliance requirements, and operational standards. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) highlight the importance of making this training comprehensive and interactive to enhance understanding and retention (pp. 266–267). Armstrong and Mitchell (2019) add that aligning training with strategic objectives helps new employees understand their roles in achieving the organisation's goals (pp. 21–22).

Mentorship programmes are vital for the successful integration of new hires. Assigning a mentor provides new employees with a go-to person for questions and guidance, helping them navigate the organisation more effectively. Mitchell and Gamlem (2022) point out that mentors play a crucial role in making new hires feel connected and supported, which can significantly enhance their job satisfaction and performance (pp. 85–87). Rowold (2015) emphasises that mentorship fosters professional development and facilitates a smoother transition into the organisation (p. 160).

Continuous support and feedback during the onboarding process are crucial for ensuring new hires are adapting well and meet performance expectations. Regular check-ins between new employees and their supervisors or mentors help address any challenges early on and provide opportunities for additional training or support. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) suggest that ongoing feedback and support are essential for maintaining high levels of engagement and productivity among new hires (pp. 267–268).

## 6.2.2 Elements

### 6.2.2.1 Pre-boarding Activities

New hires should receive a comprehensive pre-boarding packet that includes essential documents such as contracts, tax forms, benefits enrolment documents, and relevant policies (e.g., document containing a summary of the requirements, code of ethics, DEI policies, health and safety regulations, etc.). Additionally, role-specific materials like job descriptions, organisational charts, and key project outlines should be included. To make the experience more personal, consider adding items that reflect the cultural heritage institution or museum, such as a welcome letter from leadership, an overview of the institution’s mission and values, and a brief history or special exhibit highlights. The job handover process should be facilitated through structured onboarding meetings with the direct supervisor, covering role expectations, workplace culture, and initial tasks.

This phase also includes collecting all legally required documents to establish the employment relationship, such as proof of education, language proficiency, and, in some cases, a criminal record check or medical examination. Additionally, job-specific requirements, like proof of experience working with children or relevant certifications, should be gathered.

If the cultural heritage institution or museum can hire foreign employees, it is crucial to begin pre-boarding early, particularly when a work permit is required (e.g., for non-EU citizens in an EU country). The pre-boarding package should include relevant information, guidelines, and templates for those cases. A dedicated HR contact should have a strong understanding of national immigration laws and EU mobility regulations.

## 6.2.2.2 Orientation Programmes

Orientation programmes are designed to integrate new employees into the organisational culture and introduce them to the cultural heritage institution's and museum's mission, values, policies, and operating procedures. These programmes are most effective when conducted comprehensively, with a mentor or coach providing guidance.

The first day or week at work is crucial, particularly for young individuals transitioning from school or university to work. Making new employees feel welcome is essential for building a strong working community. Orientation programmes should include tours, introductions to key personnel, and greetings from directors, managers and supervisors.

Additionally, orientation may feature short training sessions to help new hires understand their roles and the broader context of their work in the cultural heritage institution or museum. Mentors or coaches can lead these sessions, while gamification elements – such as interactive games, mazes, or treasure hunts – can make the process engaging and efficient. Gamification can serve as a substitute for a human mentor in certain justified cases to enhance efficiency and conserve resources. However, it should be used sparingly and thoughtfully for specific aspects of onboarding. While fostering independence and proactivity is important, relying solely on technology can lead to confusion, prolong onboarding, and hinder integration.

Also think about including elements focused on helping new hires adapt to the cultural nuances of the region and the specific heritage sector environment.

It can also be helpful to leverage digital tools and platforms to enhance the onboarding experience, especially in a transnational context, e.g., through webinar tools like ↗ [ClickMeeting](#), ↗ [LiveWebinar](#) or ↗ [Livestorm](#).

As part of the onboarding process, it is important to define the nature of work as precisely as possible and to identify all relevant gaps in the young professionals' education together with them (e.g., due to missing courses during their studies). The main aim is to discuss the state of different skills that are needed (e.g., technical skills in architecture, design, construction, crafts, etc., or soft skills like communication with a wide range of stakeholders). This makes it possible to define individual training and further education needs right from the start, which can then be covered as part of the professional development and training programmes.

Do not forget to collect feedback from new hires on the orientation programmes to make continuous improvements.

### 6.2.2.3 Training on Organisational Policies and Procedures

Specific and intensive training tailored to individual roles, such as using curatorial software, managing the museum shop system, or gaining knowledge about the organisation's history, helps new employees become productive and integrated members of the team. This training ensures that new hires are well-prepared to meet their responsibilities and contribute to the cultural heritage institution's and museum's goals. Training material should also be made available online, e.g., manuals or short videos via the intranet. Gamification can be of use here as well.

Extra attention should be paid to the introduction of organisation-specific policies that are particularly important to the cultural values of the organisation, such as diversity and inclusion policies. Instead of just handing out these policies, an interactive format, for example in the form of a short workshop, would be preferable.

### 6.2.2.4 Mentorship and Integration

Assigning mentors or buddies to new hires facilitates a smoother transition into the cultural heritage institution's or museum's unique culture. They can also play an important role in supporting new employees with legal, labour market, social or cultural challenges, especially if the new employees come from abroad. This mentorship aids in quicker integration, helping new staff build professional relationships and understand informal norms and expectations. In order to become familiar with the various departments and activities in the cultural heritage institution or museum, it makes sense to arrange individual inductions into the various areas of responsibility and jobs.

Not all professional work requires close guidance, as the goal of mentorship is to foster independent competence in the mentee. Gamification can be a valuable tool in this process, with digital mentors providing knowledge and testing through quizzes, multiple-choice tests, mix-and-match games, crosswords, and treasure hunts. However, it is essential not to leave new employees alone with just a computer, as this does not constitute good mentorship. Regular check-ins and positive feedback are crucial, even during gamified learning.

Mentors or buddies should be conscientious, hard-working confidants, having the empathy and patience to impart knowledge and skills to newcomers. They should receive additional remuneration, as mentoring constitutes extra work.

Cultural heritage institutes and museums should also consider developing specialised joint training programmes for mentors, equipping them with the skills to effectively guide new recruits. This could include providing a mentor starter toolkit that contains resources, best practices, and tools to facilitate the onboarding and orientation process and enhance mentor-mentee relationships.

## 6.2.3 Lessons Learned from the Pilot Actions

At the CultHeRit partner meeting in Bucharest in June 2025, mentors and young professionals from the partner institutions gave presentations on their experiences with mentorship programmes during the pilot action. The presentations were structured around four themes: challenges faced by mentors, recommendations from mentors, challenges faced by young professionals, and support needed by young professionals. The following sections summarise the contributions by theme, drawing on the perspectives shared by individual partners.

Several themes emerge consistently across the four sections. Time — both its scarcity for mentors and the time young professionals need to adapt — is the single most frequently cited challenge on both sides. Closely related is the importance of clear communication: mentors and young professionals alike point to gaps in information sharing, unclear expectations, and insufficient structures for regular exchange. A second recurring theme is the tension between guidance and autonomy — young professionals value close support but also need space to develop independence, while mentors must balance structured oversight with trust. Both groups emphasise that mentorship works best when it is recognised as a two-way process, with mentors learning from young professionals as well. On the institutional level, the absence of formal frameworks, dedicated resources, and adequate equipment is repeatedly identified as a barrier. At the same time, the personal quality of relationships is consistently highlighted as the decisive factor that enables successful integration despite structural shortcomings.

### 6.2.3.1 Challenges Faced by Mentors

Mentors across the partner institutions identified a range of challenges in supporting their young professionals during the pilot action:

- Lack of time is the most frequently cited challenge. Mentors struggle to balance mentoring responsibilities with their regular professional duties, limiting opportunities for structured guidance and regular exchange.
- Coordinating schedules and aligning different work timelines between mentors, young professionals, and other departments proves difficult in practice.
- Several institutions report the absence of formal guidelines, regulations, or rulebooks for mentorship, making it harder to establish consistent practices and expectations.
- Inadequate workplace equipment — such as missing computers or dedicated workstations — creates practical obstacles for young professionals.
- The distinction between serving as a general institutional mentor and as a department-specific supervisor is noted as a source of ambiguity.
- Young professionals' unfamiliarity with complex administrative procedures, particularly in public institutions, requires significant time and patience from mentors.

### 6.2.3.2 Recommendations from Mentors

Mentors offered recommendations at both the institutional and personal level:

- Make time for regular, dedicated exchanges with the mentee — weekly or as needed — focused on current tasks, goals, challenges, and interests.
- Approach mentorship with patience and openness. Young professionals need time, structure, and trust to develop; immediate results should not be expected.
- Recognise mentorship as a two-way process: young professionals bring fresh perspectives, digital skills, and new ideas that mentors and institutions can learn from.
- Prepare not only the new employee but also the existing team for the integration, particularly when the position is newly created within the institutional structure.
- Give mentees real responsibility — ownership of tasks, reports, or project elements — to foster accountability and engagement.
- Embed mentorship into institutional programming with clear frameworks, time allocations, and dedicated resources, rather than treating it as a one-off activity.
- Include mentorship in national and institutional cultural policies, and ensure funding schemes provide time compensation for mentors and fair payment for mentees.
- Support the development of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills alongside professional and technical competencies.

### 6.2.3.3 Challenges Faced by Young Professionals

Young professionals reported challenges related to both institutional conditions and personal adaptation:

- Adapting to a new working environment, pace, and institutional culture — particularly when coming from a different sector — requires significant adjustment time.
- Understanding internal hierarchies, administrative procedures, and one's own position within the institution is a recurring difficulty, especially in public administration contexts.
- Communication gaps between departments, lack of internal information-sharing systems, and insufficient access to online tools or storage create practical barriers.
- Several young professionals report inadequate equipment, unclear expectations, and a lack of structured introduction to institutional procedures and visual or communication standards.
- Balancing different task areas — such as educational programmes, public relations, and content creation — within the same role is experienced as demanding, particularly the constant switching between different modes of work.
- Finding a balance between working independently and working closely with the mentor is identified as a challenge: some feel too closely associated with the mentor and struggle to establish their own professional identity.

- Limited financial resources and tight timelines constrain creative output and the quality of deliverables.
- External challenges, such as public scepticism towards cultural heritage work, add an additional layer of difficulty for some young professionals.

### 6.2.3.4 Support Needed by Young Professionals

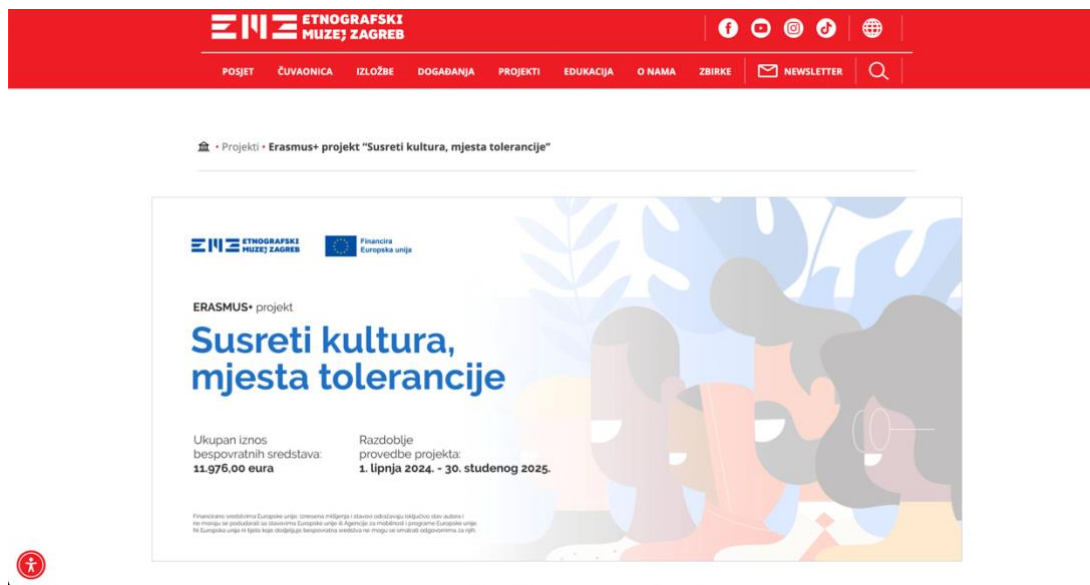
Young professionals articulated what forms of support they value most and what they still need:

- Clear instructions and well-defined expectations are named as the most important form of support, particularly for those who are new to the sector or institution.
- Continued patience and openness from mentors and colleagues in accommodating the young professional's learning process is highly valued.
- Trust and the gradual assignment of greater responsibility — including space to figure things out independently — are identified as particularly motivating.
- Regular, constructive feedback is appreciated as a tool for self-assessment and professional growth, helping young professionals recognise and develop their strengths.
- Emotional and personal support from mentors and colleagues — the sense of having someone in one's corner — is consistently described as a decisive factor for wellbeing and integration.
- Practical support in the form of timely provision of materials, clear timeframes, and adequate planning is needed to enable quality work.
- Institutional advocacy for the young professional's role and contributions within the wider organisation is identified as an area where more support is still needed.

## 6.2.4 Good Practices

### 6.2.4.1 Ethnographic Museum Zagreb: Job-shadowing in Erasmus+ project 'Encounters of Cultures, Places of Tolerance'

The Erasmus+ Short-Term Mobility Projects scheme (Key Action 1 – KA122-ADU) supports projects lasting between six and eighteen months that enable organisations in the field of adult education to organise learning mobilities abroad. The scheme is open not only to adult education providers in the narrow sense, but also to other organisations active in the field of adult education, such as libraries, museums, cultural and community centres, and volunteer organisations. For staff and other persons regularly involved in the organisation's core activities, eligible mobility formats include courses and training, job shadowing, and teaching or training assignments abroad. The scheme is intended to support skills development, international exchange, and the organisational development of participating institutions.



➤ [Erasmus+ Short-term projects for mobility of learners and staff in adult education \(KA122-ADU\)](#)

Between June 2024 and November 2025, the Etnografski muzej Zagreb (EMZ) was implementing an Erasmus+ KA122-ADU project entitled 'Susreti kultura, mjesta tolerancije' (Encounters of Cultures, Places of Tolerance), with the museum itself serving as project organiser. The project comprised six job-shadowing mobilities at partner museums in Finland, Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands, with each participant spending five working days embedded in the host institution and observing the day-to-day work of museum professionals.

The project had a clearly defined competence development aim: to design innovative educational programmes that promote cultural diversity, tolerance and awareness of current social challenges, with a view to positioning the museum as a recognised site of intercultural dialogue and learning. Mobility destinations were chosen strategically to match identified learning needs, specifically in the area of communicating difficult and contested heritage with diverse visitor groups.

In 2024, two mobilities were completed. A museum educator visited the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren, Belgium (9–13 September 2024) — itself a major reference point in current debates on the decolonisation of European museums and the restitution of cultural property —, with the explicit goal of learning new methods of communication, presentation and interpretation of difficult heritage. A second educator spent a week at the Helsinki City Museum in Finland (27 October – 3 November 2024), focusing on good practices for communicating contested historical topics to visitors, drawing on that museum's long-standing open approach to controversial themes.

➤ <https://emz.hr/projekti/erasmus-program-susreti-kultura-mjesta-tolerancije>

## 6.2.4.2 Art Fund: Going Places Mentoring Toolkit

Going Places is a programme run by Art Fund, the UK's national art charity, made possible with support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The programme aims to engage underrepresented and underserved audiences with museum collections through collaborative touring exhibitions and public programmes. As part of Going Places, Art Fund commissioned independent consultants to develop a dedicated Mentoring Toolkit, published in November 2024, to support all participants considering entering into a mentoring relationship within the programme.

While the toolkit was developed in the specific context of a collaborative exhibition project, its content is largely generic and directly transferable to other mentoring contexts, including the onboarding and integration of young professionals in the CHIM sector. It is explicitly designed to be adapted: the toolkit introduction states that the templates and processes included are intended to support the development of other organisations' own mentoring programmes and experiences.

### Escalation process

It is helpful for mentoring programmes to have an agreed escalation process to follow should mentees disclose information that raise concerns about their welfare. The following is the agreed escalation process for the Going Places mentoring scheme.

You might wish to create a similar process for your mentoring programme.

Image caption: Student Art Pass Photoshoot, Design Museum, 26 June 2024, © Hydar Dewachi / Art Fund 2024


Going Places Mentoring Toolkit

**Going Places mentoring programme agreed escalation process**

There are specific circumstances where we may be required to escalate information disclosed in mentoring sessions.

These are as follows:

- If there is reason to believe a mentee may be at serious risk of harm. Unless the situation is an emergency, mentors will always try to discuss this with the mentee before escalating the issue.
- When mentors are legally bound to disclose personal information - for example, if a criminal offence has been disclosed, under a Court Order, or under a general law such as the Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Act.
- If there is a concern about a mentee's wellbeing - in cases where they are not at serious risk of harm. In such cases, mentors will raise these concerns immediately with the Art Fund Going Places Project Manager and mentee's line manager. Mentors will always try to discuss this with the mentee before escalating the issue.



➤ [Going Places Mentoring Research and Toolkit for museum professionals](#)

The toolkit covers the full arc of a mentoring relationship. It opens with a conceptual grounding, drawing on the definition of mentoring by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) as a learning relationship involving the sharing of skills, knowledge, and expertise through developmental conversations, experience sharing, and role modelling—framed as an inclusive, two-way partnership for mutual learning. It then outlines the benefits of mentoring for both parties, noting that mentors do not need to hold more senior roles than mentees, as long as they possess relevant skills and knowledge and the characteristics required to mentor effectively. A central component of the toolkit is the mentoring agreement template, which guides mentor and mentee through establishing shared goals, agreeing on the practicalities of their sessions (frequency, format, online or in-person), clarifying confidentiality, and defining a no-fault exit process should the relationship not prove productive. The toolkit also includes an escalation process for situations where a mentee’s welfare gives cause for concern, as well as an emergency contact form—elements that reflect a duty-of-care approach particularly relevant when working with younger or more vulnerable professionals.

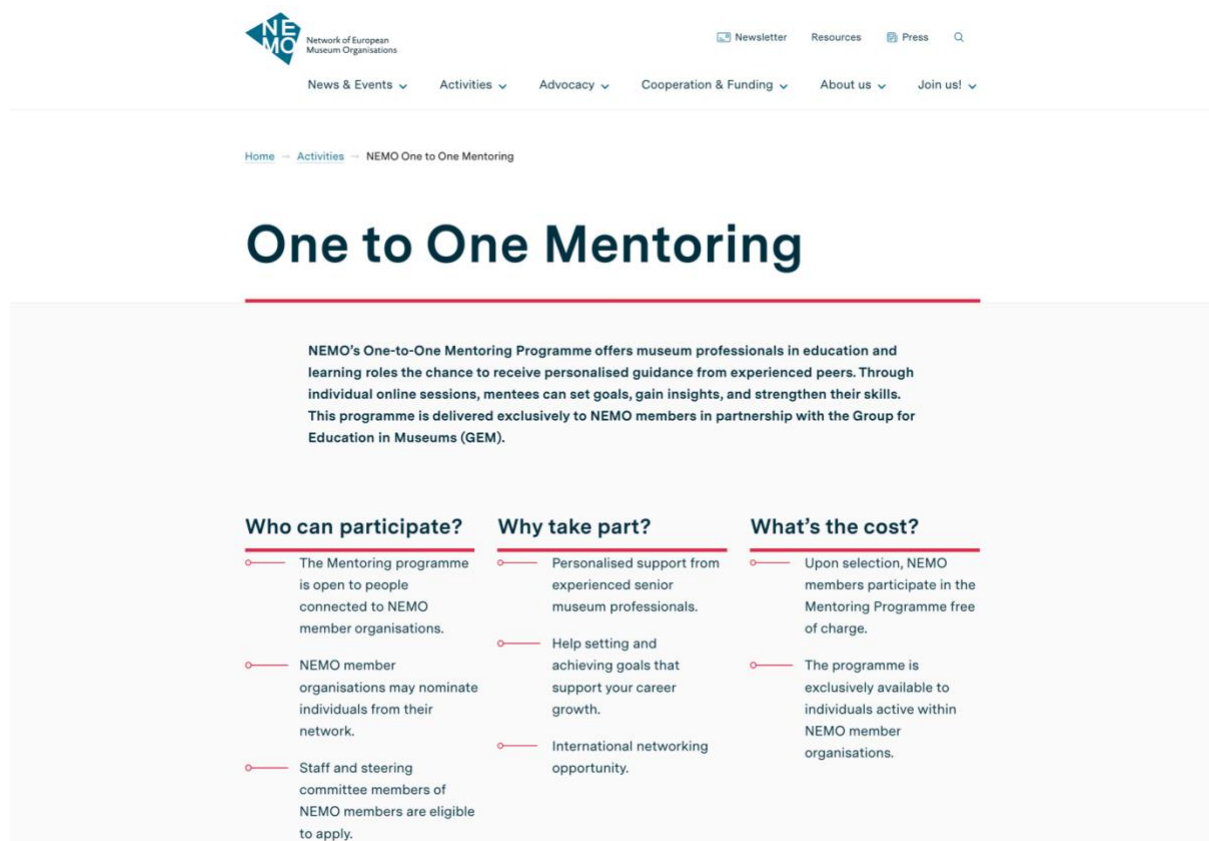
Further sections address goal-setting, recommending the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timed), and provide structured ideas for opening, ongoing, and closing sessions. The qualities and skills of a good mentor are described in practical terms: building trust, being curious about the mentee, knowing when to give advice and when to listen, letting the mentee lead the relationship, and celebrating successes.

### 6.2.4.3 NEMO / GEM: One-to-One Mentoring Programme

Dedicated mentoring programmes for professionals in the CHIM sector remain relatively rare at the individual institutional level. Few institutions have the capacity, staff base, or resources to establish and sustain structured mentoring arrangements internally, particularly for younger or early-career professionals. In practice, it has been sector-wide and cross-institutional initiatives — operating at the level of professional associations and networks — that have done most to make mentoring systematically available across the field, e.g., the ‘Mentoring for All’ programme run by the Museums Association (UK), which supports museum professionals at all career stages through cohort-based, one-to-one mentoring over twelve months; or the Creative Mentorship for Young Professionals Programme as part of the EU-funded ‘Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans’ project, targeting early-career professionals in the cultural and creative sectors across the Western Balkans.

A widely recognised good practice for the structural support of mentoring in the museum sector is the One-to-One Mentoring Programme offered by the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) in partnership with GEM – the Group for Education in Museums. NEMO is an independent network of national museum associations representing the museum community of the member states of the Council of Europe – including the national museum associations of most of the CultHerit partner countries. NEMO’s activities include advocacy, knowledge exchange, and a range of training and professional development offers for museum professionals connected to its member organisations.

Since 2023, NEMO has offered a dedicated One-to-One Mentoring Programme in partnership with GEM – the Group for Education in Museums, a UK-based membership network of museum and heritage learning professionals. The programme has grown steadily since its launch and is currently in its seventh edition. Five mentees are supported in each programme cycle, with two cycles running per year. Each cycle runs over approximately four months and is conducted entirely online, removing barriers of geography and travel that might otherwise limit access to professional mentoring support across Europe.



The screenshot shows the NEMO website's 'One to One Mentoring' page. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Newsletter, Resources, Press, News & Events, Activities, Advocacy, Cooperation & Funding, About us, and Join us. Below the navigation, the breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Activities > NEMO One to One Mentoring'. The main heading is 'One to One Mentoring'. A summary paragraph states: 'NEMO's One-to-One Mentoring Programme offers museum professionals in education and learning roles the chance to receive personalised guidance from experienced peers. Through individual online sessions, mentees can set goals, gain insights, and strengthen their skills. This programme is delivered exclusively to NEMO members in partnership with the Group for Education in Museums (GEM)'. Below this, there are three columns of information:

- Who can participate?**
  - The Mentoring programme is open to people connected to NEMO member organisations.
  - NEMO member organisations may nominate individuals from their network.
  - Staff and steering committee members of NEMO members are eligible to apply.
- Why take part?**
  - Personalised support from experienced senior museum professionals.
  - Help setting and achieving goals that support your career growth.
  - International networking opportunity.
- What's the cost?**
  - Upon selection, NEMO members participate in the Mentoring Programme free of charge.
  - The programme is exclusively available to individuals active within NEMO member organisations.

➤ [One to One Mentoring](#)

The programme is open to staff and steering committee members of NEMO member organisations, including national museum associations and their affiliated institutions. Applications are submitted in response to open calls, in which candidates are asked to articulate their professional development priorities and personal goals. Based on this information, each selected mentee is carefully matched with a suitable mentor drawn from GEM's network of experienced senior museum professionals. The matching process is designed to align the mentor's expertise with the specific needs and development priorities of the mentee, rather than following a generic pairing logic.

The mentoring relationship itself consists of two to three individual online sessions per cycle, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The programme is explicitly mentee-led: it is the mentee who sets the agenda, defines the goals, and takes responsibility for scheduling sessions and preparing for them. The mentor's role is to provide a confidential and supportive space, drawing on their professional experience to offer tools, perspectives and encouragement, while empowering the mentee to find their own solutions and directions. Mentors are expected to listen actively, identify patterns in the mentee's situation, and share relevant experience without imposing prescriptive advice.

The NEMO One-to-One Mentoring Programme represents a directly accessible and practically tested model for how sector-level organisations can facilitate structured mentoring for museum professionals across national boundaries, with modest resource requirements and a clear focus on individual, goal-oriented development. However, with only ten mentees supported per year, the programme's reach is necessarily limited.

# 6.3 Performance Management and Development

## 6.3.1 Overview

Performance management and development are integral to fostering a productive and engaged workforce within any organisation. This category focuses on aligning individual performance with organisational goals, enhancing employee skills, and ensuring long-term career growth and organisational sustainability. Performance management is a systematic process that involves setting clear performance standards, developing employee capabilities, and providing continuous feedback. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) describe it as an ongoing cycle of planning, monitoring, reviewing, and rewarding employee performance. This continuous process ensures that employees understand their roles and expectations, which align with the organisation's strategic objectives (pp. 334–335).

A crucial aspect of performance management is the establishment of performance standards and expectations. These standards act as benchmarks for evaluating employee performance. Setting clear, achievable, and measurable goals helps employees understand what is expected of them and how their work contributes to the organisation's success. This alignment between individual and organisational goals is essential for maintaining motivation and engagement.

Professional development and training programmes are fundamental components of performance management. These programmes aim to enhance employees' skills and knowledge, thereby increasing their effectiveness and productivity. Dessler (2019) emphasises the importance of ongoing training and development in adapting to technological advancements and changing job requirements (pp. 292–293). Effective training programmes should be tailored to the specific needs of the organisation and its employees, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Career pathing and succession planning are also vital for organisational development. Career pathing involves creating clear pathways for employee advancement within the organisation, which can improve job satisfaction and retention. Succession planning ensures that the organisation is prepared for future leadership needs by identifying and developing potential

leaders. Rowold (2015) highlights the importance of aligning career development opportunities with the strategic goals of the organisation to ensure a steady pipeline of qualified leaders (p. 214).

Continuous feedback and coaching are essential for effective performance management. Regular feedback helps employees understand their strengths and areas for improvement, enabling them to make necessary adjustments to their performance. Coaching, on the other hand, provides ongoing support and guidance, helping employees to develop their skills and achieve their career goals. According to Mitchell and Gamlem (2022), a feedback-rich environment fosters open communication and trust, which are critical for employee engagement and development (pp. 123–125).

A practical caveat for the partner-country context. Most CHIM institutions in the Danube Region operate within public-sector employment frameworks, in which formal appraisal mechanisms, performance pay and career progression are often regulated by law or collective agreement rather than set at institutional level. Several elements described in this category – for instance 360-degree feedback, structured performance reviews, and merit-based career advancement – assume an organisational autonomy that public-sector institutions may not have. Where this is the case, the underlying principles (regular dialogue, transparent expectations, professional development opportunities) can usually still be applied, but their formal expression should be adapted to the legal and cultural specificities of the institution’s employment framework.

## 6.3.2 Elements

### 6.3.2.1 Setting Performance Standards and Expectations

Setting clear performance expectations aligned with the cultural heritage institution’s or museum’s strategic objectives is essential. It is crucial to communicate expectations, evaluation criteria, and performance improvement measures transparently, as well as details on compensation, career advancement, benefits, and inclusion initiatives. Performance goals, such as curating a major exhibition within a year, should be established to guide employees’ efforts and track their progress, eventually in combination with special benefits to become effective. Bear in mind that performance standards and expectations can only be set and successfully enforced if the organisation’s management has the resources for meaningful rewards.

To achieve goals at both individual and team levels, fostering collaboration and avoiding unhealthy competition is key. Performance management should also encompass fostering a productive error culture and ensuring transparency within the organisation, as these factors contribute to fostering a work environment where employees feel encouraged to innovate and continuously improve without fear of negative repercussions.

### 6.3.2.2 Professional Development and Training Programmes

For young employees in particular, it is important to get to know the organisation they work for step by step, which is why the focus should be on a cautiously developing transfer of knowledge. This includes, for example, preparing them for various projects, but not entrusting them with the management of main projects too early.

Ongoing professional development opportunities, including workshops and conferences, enhance employees' skills pertinent to their roles in the cultural heritage sector. This includes specific training in conservation techniques, language skills, digital skills, historical research, intercultural exchange, research management, or exhibition design. It is also important to offer training programmes for personnel interests that are not necessarily related to the work itself. Of course, this can be challenging especially for small and medium-sized cultural heritage institutes and museums to achieve independently, which is why shared programmes, such as those provided by museum associations or interest groups, should be utilised.

Providing access to online courses and professional development resources supports continuous learning. Establishing mentorship and coaching programmes for emerging leaders, offering on-the-job training, and identifying high-potential employees for future leadership roles are crucial for nurturing talent.

The further development of employees in their specialist area also includes support in tertiary education aspects, for example through support for Master's and PhD studies or in combining professional and academic careers. This requires the appropriate flexibility and willingness on the part of the employer.

Performance improvement programmes ensure continuous growth, while recognising and rewarding outstanding performance motivates employees. Cross-training opportunities for front-of-house staff and professional development workshops on cultural heritage and museum best practices are essential for operational excellence.

Enhancing cross-cultural understanding and effectiveness through specific training is vital for employees working in diverse environments. Leadership and management training, including inclusive leadership, team management, and conflict management, are key components. Exchange programmes with other international institutions in the CHIM sector, along with technology platforms for delivering, tracking, and managing training programmes, ensure comprehensive development opportunities.

### 6.3.2.3 Career Pathing and Succession Planning

Career development programmes outline potential career paths within the departments, within the whole cultural heritage institution or museum and within the broader cultural heritage field, helping employees advance their careers. It is important to show young professionals both short- and long-term development opportunities from the very beginning, addressing various aspects such as salary, training opportunities, career advancement, work-life balance, and individual career goals.

This planning involves identifying key roles, developing specific skills, preparing for leadership transitions, and securing successor staffing to ensure organisational stability. An important role in career planning is played by offering permeable and varied activities, for example through classic measures such as job rotation within the organisation or even between several organisations.

### 6.3.2.4 Continuous Feedback and Coaching

Developing performance evaluation systems that reflect employees' unique contributions to the organisation's mission and cultural objectives is crucial. Cultural heritage institutes and museums should establish regular feedback and survey mechanisms to gather valuable employee insights, encourage continuous improvement, and ensure alignment with organisational goals.

Formal systems for evaluating and documenting employee performance, such as performance appraisals, are essential for managing overall performance. In this context, addressing underperformance involves conducting regular reviews to assess progress towards goals and provide feedback, such as quarterly reviews with curators on exhibition development. Implementing a 360-degree feedback system for museum leadership, where they receive confidential, anonymous evaluations from colleagues, ensures comprehensive assessments.

Regularly soliciting and acting on employee feedback improves the workplace and prevents frustration. Implementing regular performance reviews with constructive feedback supports continuous growth and satisfaction within the cultural heritage institution or museum.

# 6.4 Compensation and Benefits

## 6.4.1 Overview

Compensation and benefits are vital components of an organisation's human resource management strategy. They play a crucial role in attracting, retaining, and motivating employees. An effective compensation and benefits strategy not only ensures fair remuneration but also enhances job satisfaction and loyalty among employees. Compensation encompasses all forms of financial returns and tangible benefits that employees receive as part of their employment relationship. This includes base salary, wages, bonuses, and incentives. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), compensation can be divided into direct financial payments (wages, salaries, incentives, commissions, and bonuses) and indirect payments (benefits such as pensions, health insurance, and paid time off) (pp. 369–370). Establishing competitive and fair pay structures is fundamental to ensuring that employees feel valued and are motivated to perform their best.

It should be acknowledged that the working conditions this model seeks to improve are shaped by structural features of cultural labour that individual institutions can mitigate but not fully resolve. A substantial body of research has shown how the cultural and creative sectors combine high intrinsic motivation with chronic precarity, and how appeals to passion and vocation can serve to normalise low pay, unpaid work and job insecurity. Institutions applying this model should therefore remain alert to the risk that engagement, wellbeing and 'meaningful work' measures come to substitute for, rather than complement, fair remuneration and stable contracts. A deeper engagement with this literature would be valuable for anyone developing sector-wide employment policy (see McRobbie 2016; Banks 2007, 2017; Gill & Pratt 2008; Kim et al. 2020; Ettarh 2018).

Effective salary and wage administration involves setting competitive and equitable pay rates that reflect the value of the job and the skills and experience of the employees. Mitchell and Gamlem (2022) emphasise the importance of conducting regular salary surveys to ensure that pay rates are aligned with market standards and are competitive enough to attract talents (pp. 162–163). Additionally, Armstrong and Mitchell (2019) suggest using job evaluation methods to determine the relative worth of jobs within the organisation, ensuring internal equity and fairness (pp. 39–40).

Benefits are a critical part of the total compensation package and can significantly impact employee satisfaction and retention. Benefits can include health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, and other perks that enhance employees' quality of life. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) highlight that benefits not only meet employees' personal needs but also promote loyalty and reduce turnover (pp. 382–383). Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, flexible hours, and job sharing, have become increasingly important. These arrangements help employees achieve a better work-life balance and can lead to higher productivity and job satisfaction (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, pp. 190–191).

Employee recognition programmes are essential for acknowledging and rewarding employees' contributions, thereby boosting morale and productivity. Recognising employees can take many forms, from formal awards and bonuses to informal praise and thank-you notes. Dessler (2019) suggests that a well-structured recognition programme can lead to increased employee engagement and retention by making employees feel valued and appreciated (pp. 512–513). Retention strategies should focus on understanding the factors that drive employee satisfaction and addressing any issues that may cause employees to leave. Mitchell and Gamlem (2022) advocate for targeted retention strategies, such as re-recruiting top performers and providing opportunities for career development, to keep valuable employees within the organisation (pp. 144–145).

However, it is clear that the following strategies, programmes and measurements cannot be implemented uniformly across all countries due to varying legal frameworks.

## 6.4.2 Elements

### 6.4.2.1 Salary and Wage Administration

Competitive salary structures and attractive benefit packages, including merit-based pay raises and bonuses for outstanding performance, are crucial for recruiting and retaining talent in the CHIM sector. This includes experience-based salaries, health insurance, paid time off, and special employee perks. Cultural heritage institutes and museums must ensure their compensation aligns with standards in other sectors – despite the awareness that the situation in the entire cultural sector is precarious, along with all the challenges it entails.

A note on the structural conditions of pay in the sector. In most partner countries, salaries in CHIM institutions are set by public-sector pay scales or collective agreements rather than by individual organisations. Lasting improvement in remuneration therefore depends on sector-wide negotiation and on the funding decisions of public authorities, not only on institutional practice. Recommendations to align pay with other sectors should be read with this in mind: institutions can advocate, document gaps, and use the room for manoeuvre they have, but cannot resolve sectoral underpayment on their own. A second caveat applies to performance-related pay: research on motivation in mission-driven and creative work indicates that financial bonuses can in some cases crowd out intrinsic motivation rather than reinforce it. Merit-based mechanisms should therefore be used selectively and combined with non-financial forms of recognition, particularly where institutional values rest on vocational engagement (see Frey 1997; Banks 2017).

The requirements of young professionals need to be considered separately, while taking into account the limited possibilities the CHIM sector has to offer and legal regulations that exist (e.g., collective agreement regulations, labour law regulations, social insurance regulations). However, even under difficult budgetary conditions, cultural heritage institutes and museums should always ensure good and fair employment conditions. This implies that the specific needs of the CHIM sector must always be considered. For example, if not required by law, remuneration and benefit packages for fieldwork, as well as the terms and frequency of renegotiation, should be clearly defined. Good and fair employment conditions also require that atypical employment arrangements (e.g., part-time or short-term contracts) should be offered only at the employee's request. Cultural heritage institutes and museums must keep an eye on the bigger picture too: a hire-and-fire approach, combined with atypical employment relationships, will significantly reduce the sector's attractiveness, especially for young skilled workers.

Steps should be taken to ensure equal pay for equal work between all genders in the CHIM sector. Here it makes sense to draw on relevant EU strategies and initiatives. For example, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) includes the right to equal pay among its 20 principles. Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that 'equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work, and pay'. The EU Directive on Pay Transparency focuses specifically on this issue, advocating pay transparency as a key measure to achieve equal pay for equal work.

Regularly reviewing benchmarking studies can help maintain competitiveness with similar roles in other fields.

Professional payroll administration, using appropriate systems, should be standard in the CHIM sector, even for smaller organisations.

## 6.4.2.2 Work Flexibility and Environment

Flexible work arrangements cater to diverse employee needs, promoting a balanced and inclusive work environment, including ergonomic considerations.

It is advisable to experiment with various working time models that accommodate employees' diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, and life stages, as far as this is legally and organisationally possible. Options such as four-day weeks, hybrid working hours, trust-based working time, self-managed annual leave, flexible time-off or remote-working hours accommodate different lifestyles and work preferences. Enabling various customised working time models is very desirable, but should remain manageable. Always take into account the individual wishes of employees (e.g., right to opt-out) and not disadvantage colleagues who do not have the opportunity to take advantage of such benefits due to their work (e.g. because of shift work, or because they cannot work from home).

Work flexibility also includes opportunities to temporarily change workplaces within the organisation or even outside and abroad, in collaboration with other cultural heritage institutes and museums (e.g., research days to go visit other cultural heritage institutes or museums).

For employees with younger children, suitable offers are important to support them with childcare (joint afternoon care with other organisations, possibility to bring children to the workplace, etc.).

Ensuring the safety of employees, especially those working with potentially hazardous conservation materials or in historic buildings with unique challenges, is paramount.

Given the growing importance of digital skills, special technologies, tools and platforms relevant to cultural heritage work become more and more important. Implementing a supportive environment through digital technologies, tools and platforms enhances work processes and communication. Many young professionals are confident and willing to experiment with new digital tools. It should not be assumed, however, that age alone guarantees digital proficiency – digital skills vary widely between individuals and are best supported rather than presumed (see Bennett, Maton & Kervin 2008).

A supportive environment should also reflect macro-level developments on which the individual organisation has little influence. One example of this is the adaptation of workplaces and working conditions to changing climatic conditions. This could mean placing increased emphasis on adequate air conditioning in workspaces, allowing employees to move to alternative work locations during extreme heat, or reducing the number and frequency of work assignments during the summer months.

### 6.4.2.3 Employee Recognition and Retention Strategies

Recognition programmes celebrate employee achievements, enhancing morale and engagement. Acknowledging employee contributions through initiatives like staff appreciation events fosters a positive work environment.

Offering comprehensive benefits packages contributes to job satisfaction and long-term employee retention. These packages can include tailored health plans, cultural perks like free entries for family members, and opportunities for research, publication, and international cultural exchanges. Efficient benefits management is crucial, with workshops to ensure employees understand their options.

Work-life balance initiatives are vital for the CHIM sector, especially for young professionals who highly value this aspect. Programmes supporting physical and mental well-being, such as gym memberships, mental health days, and wellness workshops, recognise the potential risks of specific stressors in the cultural heritage sector. Policies and guidelines promoting a healthy work-life balance, ergonomic workplaces, healthy diets, regular breaks, stress reduction offers, or measures against burn-out and mental health issues are essential for maintaining employee well-being and preserving employability.

A simple, honest conversation between a direct supervisor and an employee is a powerful, no-cost retention measure – especially if held frequently. It's crucial when a typically satisfied and high-performing employee shows signs of dissatisfaction or frustration. Sometimes, a small change, like updating equipment, providing a development course, or adjusting fieldwork travel, can make a difference. This approach shows the employee their value and the management's willingness to accommodate within reasonable limits. However, making unrealistic promises should be avoided, as they can exacerbate issues rather than resolve them.

# 6.5 Employee Relations and Engagement

## 6.5.1 Overview

Employee relations and engagement are pivotal aspects of human resource management that focus on fostering a positive work environment, enhancing employee satisfaction, and addressing workplace conflicts effectively. This category includes strategies and practices aimed at maintaining harmonious relationships between employees and management, ensuring high levels of engagement, and resolving conflicts through mediation and other techniques.

Employee engagement is a measure of how committed and connected employees feel towards their organisation. Engaged employees are more likely to be productive, innovative, and loyal, contributing to the overall success of the organisation. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), engagement can be driven by various factors including job challenge, autonomy, variety, feedback, and opportunities for development (pp. 197–198). Effective leadership and a supportive work environment also play crucial roles in fostering engagement. Effective HR strategies should focus on creating a culture where employees feel valued, recognised, and empowered to perform their best (Armstrong & Taylor 2014, pp. 202–203).

Research by Mitchell and Gamlem (2022) indicates that organisations that prioritise employee engagement tend to see lower turnover rates, higher productivity, and improved customer satisfaction. They highlight that engagement is not merely about employee happiness but about creating conditions where employees can thrive and contribute meaningfully to the organisation's goals (pp. 91–93).

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable, but how it is managed can significantly impact organisational health and employee morale. Effective conflict resolution involves identifying the root causes of disputes, addressing them constructively, and implementing solutions that satisfy all parties involved. Mediation is a key technique in conflict resolution, where an impartial mediator helps the disputing parties reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Rowold (2015) emphasises the importance of having structured conflict resolution processes in place. These processes should include clear policies, training for executive leaderships on conflict management, and access to professional mediators when necessary (p. 201).

The effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies is enhanced when organisations foster a culture of trust and respect. This involves ensuring that employees feel safe to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation. Providing regular training on communication and interpersonal skills can also help prevent conflicts from escalating and promote a collaborative work environment.

## 6.5.2 Elements

### 6.5.2.1 Employee Engagement and Satisfaction

Promoting a workplace culture that values engagement and communication enhances employee satisfaction. Open communication channels, regular staff meetings, and an open-door policy help address employee concerns promptly. Conducting annual employee engagement surveys and organising team-building activities for various departments strengthen the sense of community and teamwork (e.g., joint city trips, joint leisure activities, weekly lunch together, celebrating holidays ...). Maybe a 'starter pack' for new hires would be a good idea here.

Encouraging social and cultural events where all team members feel valued, involving employees in community outreach projects, and integrating sustainable practices into operations are crucial in the CHIM sector. This can also include supporting bottom-up initiatives that originate from the employees themselves and are implemented by them outside of regular working hours (e.g., non-commercial, voluntary and community-building activities). These projects, practices and initiatives foster teamwork, camaraderie, and a sense of purpose beyond the workplace.

Employee engagement and satisfaction in cultural heritage institutes and museums can also be increased by focusing on inclusion. Fostering empathy and understanding is best achieved through direct engagement and cooperation with associations representing disabled people and other groups concerned, for example through joint workshops or shared activities. Approaches that rely on simulating impairments should be treated with caution: disability research indicates they can reinforce stereotypes and pity rather than dismantle them, whereas lived-experience and participatory formats tend to be more effective (see Nario-Redmond, Gospodinov & Cobb 2017). Organising sensitivity days that include their participation in workshops or joint lunch breaks may enhance understanding.

Cultural heritage institutes and museums should devise measures to support employees based on their life situations, as partly regulated by law (e.g., pregnancy, parental leave, disability). Additional initiatives, such as family-friendly policies and child-friendly spaces, can enhance support but must balance the diverse needs of all employees to prevent dissatisfaction and resentment.

Regularly revising tasks and responsibilities is advisable, ideally in both one-on-one meetings and team settings. This should include discussing preferences for travel and participation in conferences, seminars, and fieldwork, as these may change due to life circumstances (e.g.,

parenthood, caregiving, chronic illness, or changes in disability status). Such a transparent process fosters fairness and promotes a democratic workplace, where decisions are made collaboratively through open discussions.

Employee satisfaction should also take into account that it is not just about the young professionals alone, but also about the mentors who take care of them. It is therefore important to also attach appropriate importance to the satisfaction (and compensation) of mentors, as this can have a major impact on the general well-being of young professionals.

### 6.5.2.2 Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Effective conflict resolution processes address disputes and concerns fairly and transparently, respecting diverse perspectives and promoting a harmonious work environment. For cultural heritage institutes and museums, it is crucial to implement such processes to manage inevitable conflicts arising from differing demands and interests (e.g., curators, exhibition designers, public relations workers, and art educators).

It is also advisable to make use of external specialists here, such as psychologists for support in individually challenging situations or coaches for conflict resolution in specific cases. This can also include coaching for directors, managers and supervisors to help them recognise early signs of disgruntled employees, preventing conflicts that may poison the work atmosphere.

Conflict resolution also applies to external conflicts with individuals or groups outside the organisation. Cultural heritage institutes and museums should therefore develop strategies to help new recruits effectively handle external pressures, such as avoiding bribes, responding to threats, or managing political influence. Effective recruitment planning and policy development (e.g., a code of ethics) can help alleviate these pressures.

It is essential for directors and managers of cultural heritage institutes and museums to maintain honest and constructive relationships with workers' organisations, such as unions, councils or interest groups. This collaboration can help prevent misunderstandings and antagonism while fostering mutual respect and allyship, crucial for improving working conditions and overall organisational performance.

Crises can strain organisational connections and foster conflict in cultural heritage institutes and museums, such as those caused by natural disasters like earthquakes, flooding, or wildfires. Crisis management measures should aim to calm and guide employees through turmoil. Post-crisis periods often introduce uncertainty, anxiety, and conflict, making proactive measures essential. Effective Disaster Management Plans (DMP) should address these issues through risk analysis, vulnerability assessments, response plans, and mitigation strategies.

## 6.5.3 Lessons Learned from the Pilot Actions

At the CultHeRit partner meeting in Prague in February 2026, a workshop was conducted with the project partners on the element ‘Employee Engagement and Satisfaction’ within the category ‘Employee Relations and Engagement’. Partners were asked to form three teams of three organisations each: IMM & INP & ZZP, MNIT & MUO & IPCMS, and UPM & RIPCM & MAK. Drawing on evaluation results from the pilot action — specifically responses to the question ‘What do you think was the most impactful or memorable initiative or experience related to employee engagement and satisfaction for the young professional during their time at your institution?’ — each team was asked to formulate seven key recommendations to be shared with other organisations in the CHIM sector. Given the nature of the topic, several recommendations also touch on the closely related element ‘Employee Recognition and Retention Strategies’ (chapter 6.4.2.3), reflecting the natural overlap between engagement and recognition in practice.

Several themes recur across the three sets of recommendations. All teams emphasise the importance of treating young professionals as equal and respected members of the team, not as subordinates or temporary additions. Celebrating achievements — whether large milestones or small completed tasks — is highlighted by all three groups as a meaningful driver of engagement. Multiple teams stress the need to give young professionals genuine responsibility, trust, and autonomy, including involvement in complex projects and decision-making processes. The value of professional development opportunities and the recognition of competencies gained during employment are mentioned repeatedly. Two teams also point to the importance of adapting communication to different backgrounds and personality types, and of maintaining openness to what young professionals themselves bring to the institution. Finally, attention to wellbeing — through flexible working arrangements, mental health awareness, and genuine personal support — emerges as a cross-cutting concern.

### 6.5.3.1 Recommendations from MNIT, MUO & IPCMS

- Do not be condescending or patronising towards young professionals; do not take them for granted.
- Teamwork and inclusion from the start are crucial.
- Provide all necessary tools, resources, and support for their professional growth.
- Normalise taking a mental break if you feel overwhelmed during your work time (scheduled breaks excluded).
- Celebrate small achievements with your colleagues and team.
- Give young professionals the freedom, opportunity, and trust to participate in large, complex, or important projects.

### 6.5.3.2 Recommendations from IMM, INP & ZZP

- Celebrate completed tasks — the opening of an exhibition, the conclusion of a restoration or research project, or even a small everyday achievement. It depends on the team; some colleagues do it regularly, others do not.
- Do not leave young professionals in uncertainty about their future career perspective. Help them recognise the competencies they have gained and make them aware of what they have achieved.
- Provide joint networking events and meetings with colleagues, peers, and other institutions — not only domestically but also internationally. Facilitate the exchange of experience.
- Reduce strict hierarchies. Organise events and opportunities where young professionals can be meaningfully involved.
- Be open to learning from young professionals, for example in the area of digital skills.
- Adapt your communication to colleagues with a different background. Consider whether you need to explain tasks in greater detail, as they may understand them differently. Additionally, be attentive to different personality types, such as introverts and extroverts.
- Take personal circumstances into account. Provide flexible working hours. This is a challenge for both sides; the solution is to plan and communicate in advance. At the beginning, rather than offering a full remote-working arrangement, consider offering the possibility to work at different hours.

### 6.5.3.3 Recommendations from UPM, RIPCM & MAK

- Young professionals should be treated equally and with the same respect as other members of the team.
- Young professionals should be seen and heard, and they should be included in decision-making processes.
- Young professionals should be trusted and given the chance to solve problems independently.
- Young professionals should have the opportunity to celebrate successes after completing projects or important tasks.
- Young professionals should have opportunities to develop their strengths and explore special interests through learning and research.
- Institutions should show genuine interest in young professionals' wellbeing and provide support in times of need.

## 6.5.4 Good Practices

### 6.5.4.1 Jewish Museum Vienna: Social Active Day

In July 2024 the Jewish Museum Vienna, in collaboration with Wien Holding, organised a Social Active Day as part of their #JMWCares initiative. The event, linked to the exhibition 'Who Cares? Jüdische Antworten auf Leid und Not' ('Who Cares? Jewish Responses to Suffering and Distress'), involved museum staff acting as companions for residents of the Maimonides Centre, the only Jewish retirement home in Austria, during a trip to the Vienna Prater. The residents enjoyed rickshaw rides while museum staff powered the pedalling. The day concluded with relaxation exercises and a social gathering over coffee and cake.



➤ [https://www.jmw.at/museumsblog/news\\_detail?j-cc-id=1719945562328](https://www.jmw.at/museumsblog/news_detail?j-cc-id=1719945562328) (in German language)

Barbara Staudinger, Director of the Jewish Museum Vienna, emphasised the importance of this outing in strengthening connections with elderly residents and highlighted the museum's commitment to fostering a peaceful, respectful community in Vienna. Kurt Gollowitz, CEO of Wien Holding, echoed this sentiment, praising the initiative's focus on improving the quality of life for participants and reinforcing the value of social engagement through cultural projects.

The #JMWCares programme, along with the 'Who Cares?' exhibition, includes various social initiatives, such as collaborations with humanitarian organisations, workshops, and volunteer events. Through these activities, the Jewish Museum Vienna demonstrates how cultural institutions can play a pivotal role in raising awareness and contributing to social responsibility.

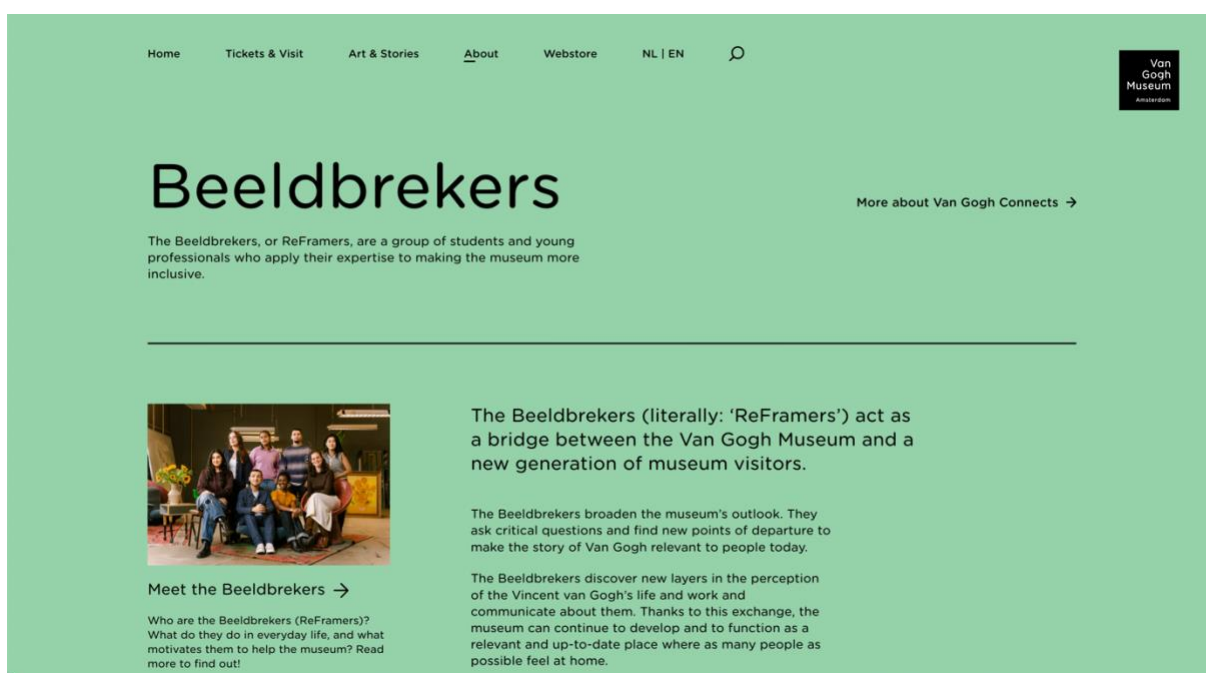


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## 6.5.4.2 Van Gogh Museum: Van Gogh Connects

The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, home to the world’s largest collection of works by Vincent van Gogh and one of the 25 most visited art museums globally, has developed an inclusive approach to audience and staff engagement. In 2017 it launched ‘Van Gogh Connects’, a multi-year research and learning trajectory aimed at making the museum lastingly relevant to young Dutch adults with a bicultural background — the largest age group in Amsterdam, yet one for which visiting the museum was not yet a reflex. Funded by Fonds 21 and supported by American Express, the programme set out to develop forty pilot activities over four years, working directly with the target group and monitoring progress through impact studies conducted by the Impact Centre Erasmus at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

What makes ‘Van Gogh Connects’ particularly relevant to employee engagement and satisfaction is its deliberately integrated design. Rather than treating audience development and internal organisational culture as separate concerns, the programme pursued its goals simultaneously from four angles: HR, Marketing, Hospitality, and Education & Interpretation. The internal dimension was not an afterthought but a structural component of the programme from the outset, reflecting the museum’s recognition that an inclusive institution cannot limit inclusivity to its public-facing activities.



The screenshot shows a website page with a green background. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links: Home, Tickets & Visit, Art & Stories, About, Webstore, and NL | EN. A search icon is also present. The Van Gogh Museum logo is in the top right corner. The main heading is 'Beeldbrekers' in large black font. Below it, a sub-heading reads 'More about Van Gogh Connects →'. A paragraph explains: 'The Beeldbrekers, or ReFramers, are a group of students and young professionals who apply their expertise to making the museum more inclusive.' Below this is a horizontal line. On the left, there is a photo of a group of people sitting on a bench. Below the photo is a link 'Meet the Beeldbrekers →'. To the right of the photo, there are two paragraphs of text. The first paragraph states: 'The Beeldbrekers (literally: ‘ReFramers’) act as a bridge between the Van Gogh Museum and a new generation of museum visitors.' The second paragraph explains: 'The Beeldbrekers broaden the museum’s outlook. They ask critical questions and find new points of departure to make the story of Van Gogh relevant to people today.' The third paragraph states: 'The Beeldbrekers discover new layers in the perception of the Vincent van Gogh’s life and work and communicate about them. Thanks to this exchange, the museum can continue to develop and to function as a relevant and up-to-date place where as many people as possible feel at home.'

➤ [Van Gogh Museum: Beeldbrekers](#)

A central element of this internal dimension is the Beeldbrekers (ReFramers) programme. Between 2017 and 2025, over fifty young adults – students and young professionals – participated in this trajectory, acting as a bridge between the museum and a new generation. The Beeldbrekers apply their expertise to making the museum more inclusive: they ask critical questions, discover new layers in the perception of Van Gogh’s life and work, and communicate about them. This exchange enables the museum to continue developing as a place where as many people as possible feel at home. The programme has since been structurally embedded in the museum’s Education and Interpretation department, alongside the vocational programme ‘Your Story, My Story’, the ‘Vincent on Friday’ events, and outreach projects co-created with a wide network of partners ranging from educational institutions to social organisations.

Running in parallel with ‘Van Gogh Connects’, the museum established an inclusive employership programme focused on the internal workforce. A baseline measurement was conducted to gauge staff demographics and attitudes towards an inclusive workplace climate, followed by a follow-up measurement after eighteen months. The museum reported a significant positive improvement in the perception of inclusivity and a more diverse workforce composition. Among the activities deployed, the introduction of Verbinders (Connectors) – staff members who act as internal ambassadors for inclusivity – was perceived as one of the most effective measures. Thematic Friday afternoon sessions on topics such as colonialism, language, and image creation in art provided spaces for open internal dialogue. The results of this iterative process – measuring, adjusting, re-measuring – have been documented in academic publications, including an article in ‘The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum’ and a chapter in a doctoral dissertation at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

➤ [Van Gogh Connects](#)

### 6.5.4.3 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum: 10 Ideas for a Caring Museum

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated a full programme year (2022–2023) to the topic of mental health. During this ‘Year of Mental Health’, the museum invited visitors, academics, artists and humanitarian practitioners to explore the issue of care – for oneself and for others – with the explicit aim of transforming knowledge into action and creating a stigma-free space for talking about mental health. The results of this process were distilled into a publicly available toolkit entitled ‘10 Ideas for a Caring Museum’, written by museologist Marzia Varutti in close collaboration with the museum’s staff and published in 2023.



➤ [Toolkit: 10 Ideas for a Caring Museum](#)

What distinguishes this toolkit is its consistent dual focus: it addresses the well-being of visitors and of employees as inseparable dimensions of a caring institution. Its central premise is that museums should begin by taking care of their own staff, thereby empowering them to contribute to the well-being of visitors and society at large.

Several of the ten ideas contain practical measures directly relevant to employee engagement and satisfaction in the CHIM sector. These include:

- working with healthcare organisations to identify psychosocial risk factors specific to museum staff,
- offering voluntary training during working hours in emotional competence, mindfulness and empathy,
- creating physical spaces and dedicated ‘well-being breaks’ for informal staff encounters, sometimes in the presence of trained professionals,
- publicly celebrating the often-invisible emotional labour of front-of-house staff and sharing positive visitor feedback internally,
- introducing ‘caring work schedules’ that include a right to disconnect outside working hours and recuperation plans for overtime, and
- providing a monthly time allowance for employees to experience the museum’s galleries as visitors, possibly accompanied by a family member, as a way of strengthening their connection to the institution.

The toolkit was developed in the specific context of a museum whose core mission – the history of humanitarian action – naturally connects to psychosocial support and resilience. Yet its authors explicitly designed the ten ideas as transferable measures, inviting other institutions to apply, adapt and expand on them.

Alongside the toolkit, the museum organised a series of five thematic public conversations in collaboration with the Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies, bringing together experts from across the humanitarian, academic and healthcare sectors. The toolkit constitutes a concise, practice-oriented and freely accessible resource for any cultural heritage institution or museum seeking to embed employee well-being into its organisational culture.

➤ [Musée International de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge](#)

# 6.6 Separation and Exit Processes

## 6.6.1 Overview

Separation and exit processes are essential HR functions that ensure the smooth transition of employees out of the organisation. Effective management of these processes helps maintain positive relationships with departing employees, protects organisational knowledge, and provides valuable insights for improving workplace practices. It should be borne in mind that staff retention is not an end in itself: a degree of mobility – between institutions, sectors and countries – can be healthy for individuals and for the field alike. The aim of the measures described here is to ensure that those who leave do so by choice and on good terms, and that departure reflects opportunity rather than the absence of viable conditions to stay.

Offboarding is the process of managing the formal exit of an employee from an organisation. This includes several administrative tasks such as ensuring the return of company property, revoking access to IT systems, and completing final payroll processes. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) emphasise the importance of a structured offboarding process to safeguard the organisation's assets and data while ensuring compliance with legal requirements (pp. 309–310). Additionally, clear communication about benefits continuation is critical during offboarding. (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, pp. 276–277)

Exit interviews are conducted to understand the reasons behind an employee's departure and to gather feedback on their experience with the organisation. These interviews provide insights into workplace issues that may not be apparent to executive leadership. According to Dessler (2019), exit interviews should be conducted in a manner that encourages honesty and should focus on trends rather than individual complaints (pp. 346–347). Summarising and analysing the data from exit interviews can reveal patterns that inform retention strategies and organisational improvements (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, pp. 276–277)

Maintaining relationships with former employees can be beneficial for organisations. Post-exit follow-up, such as conducting surveys a few months after departure, can provide additional insights into the employee's experience and reasons for leaving once they have had time to reflect. This information can be crucial for making necessary adjustments to improve employee retention (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, pp. 105–106). Furthermore, developing corporate alumni programmes helps in keeping former employees engaged, which can lead to rehiring opportunities and enhanced employer branding. (Mitchell & Gamlem 2022, p. 277)

## 6.6.2 Elements

### 6.6.2.1 Offboarding and Clearance Procedures

Supportive offboarding processes ensure that departing employees leave on good terms, with proper recognition and support for their next steps. The process may vary based on the employee's position, job description, and tasks, but it typically involves a set of tasks and procedures that should be standardised and written down within the cultural heritage institution or museum.

Accurate final pay calculations are one of the most important tasks during offboarding. Ensure all final pay and accrued benefits, such as unused annual leave, are calculated and paid accurately. Processing final payments and benefits promptly is essential.

Smooth transitions of responsibilities to other or new employees through proper documentation and compliance with legal requirements prevent operational disruptions during staffing changes. It is advisable to ensure a standardised procedure for the handover process and to prepare a comprehensive handover package, including workflow diagrams, templates for handover forms, handover checklists, and handover protocols. This will help avoid gaps, misunderstandings, missing documentation, or unassigned tasks. Some examples of what to consider in smooth transitions: guiding the employee in creating an inventory of equipment, files, and documents, setting up email forwarding and scheduling account deactivation, deactivating remote access, verifying the functionality of returned tools and equipment, securing membership credentials and contacts for associations or networks, or retaining specific personal information for ongoing needs (e.g., curator's contacts for reprinting a catalogue).

Implementing strong offboarding programmes improves the overall transition for both sides. This includes structured exit interviews, timely notifications to staff and clients, and an appreciative goodbye.

Provide a letter of recommendation upon request, following established cultural heritage institution or museum policy, with a standard reference letter format outlining the position held and dates of employment.

Additionally, offering support for employees transitioning to new jobs, such as resume writing and job search assistance, can help them move forward confidently. These efforts contribute to a positive departure experience, reflecting well on the cultural heritage institution or museum and maintaining a good relationship with former employees.

### 6.6.2.2 Exit Interviews and Feedback Collection

Conducting exit interviews collects valuable feedback on the employee experience, aiding in organisational improvement and understanding the reasons behind departures. These interviews provide insights into areas for enhancement, such as challenges faced by specific roles (e.g., interviewing a departing curator to understand their unique challenges).

Gathered feedback should be used to identify and implement improvements, and shared with relevant stakeholders to inform decision-making and foster a more positive work environment. This process helps cultural heritage institutes and museums refine their practices, ultimately leading to a more supportive and effective organisation.

### 6.6.2.3 Post-exit Follow-up

Maintaining relationships with former employees, e.g., through alumni networks, and recognising their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage field, fosters ongoing connections and potential future collaborations or re-hires – according to the motto ‘You always meet twice in life’. It should be noted that maintaining relationships with former employees involves additional work and that there may be restrictions (e.g., in the Czech Republic it is not permitted to keep lists of former employees without their written consent for data protection reasons).

Applicable in the EU and for EU citizens and residents, a general GDPR consent template can be created to enable continued communication with an employee after their departure. The template should be specific, listing particular events and initiatives, such as celebrations or network meetings, and asking if the employee wishes to receive updates or job opportunities. While it may seem tedious, this process helps define and clarify the future relationship.

Sending invitations to events like exhibition openings, book launches, institutional celebrations, and public meetings demonstrates ongoing appreciation for departing employees' contributions. These events also provide a valuable opportunity to rekindle collegial relationships and explore future collaboration possibilities.

Contact with retired colleagues can also be a good source of knowledge transfer to young professionals. Retired colleagues can teach them about the history of the cultural heritage institution or museum and the principles of working in the CHIM sector.

# 6.7 Policy Making and HR Administration

## 6.7.1 Overview

Policy making and HR administration are essential functions that ensure an organisation operates smoothly, complies with legal requirements, and effectively manages its human resources. This category involves the development and implementation of HR policies, ensuring legal compliance and reporting, and leveraging HR information systems for better decision-making and operational efficiency.

Developing and implementing HR policies involves creating a structured approach to managing people within an organisation. These policies provide guidelines for behaviour, set expectations, and outline procedures for various HR functions such as recruitment, performance management, and employee relations. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) emphasise the importance of aligning HR policies with the overall strategic goals of the organisation and ensuring they are communicated effectively to all employees (pp. 509–510). Policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant and effective in addressing the evolving needs of the organisation and its workforce.

Ensuring legal compliance is a critical aspect of HR administration. Organisations must adhere to a wide range of labour laws and regulations, including those related to employment rights, health and safety, and equal opportunity. Compliance with these laws helps prevent legal disputes and promotes fair treatment of employees. Dessler (2019) highlights the importance of understanding and adhering to legal requirements to avoid costly litigation and maintain a positive organisational reputation (pp. 530–531). Regular audits and training programmes for HR staff can help ensure that the organisation remains compliant with all applicable laws and regulations.

The use of HR Information Systems (HRIS) has transformed how organisations manage their HR functions. An HRIS integrates various HR processes such as recruitment, payroll, performance management, and employee records into a single system, making it easier to manage and analyse data. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) describe the implementation of HRIS as a strategic move that enhances data accuracy, streamlines HR operations, and supports data-driven decision-making (pp. 525–526). HR metrics and analytics are crucial for measuring the effectiveness of HR policies and practices. These metrics can include time to fill positions, employee turnover rates, and cost per hire. Using data to drive decisions helps HR professionals identify trends, improve processes,

and demonstrate the value of HR initiatives to organisational leaders (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2019, pp. 21–22).

## 6.7.2 Elements

### 6.7.2.1 Policy Development and Implementation

An important part of policy development concerns the creation of ethical guidelines for cultural heritage institutes and museums. Such a code of ethics outlines the acceptable and appropriate behaviour of employers and employees, serving as a guide for ethical decision-making in the workplace. By establishing clear standards based on key values such as integrity, respect, compliance, responsibility, and professionalism, it fosters trust with stakeholders, enhances employee morale, and mitigates legal risks. A well-designed code of ethics reflects the organisation's mission, helping staff navigate external pressures while promoting leadership and social responsibility.

Developing and implementing policies that support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) enriches the workplace and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to representing different groups of people. For instance, your organisation could consider a DEI policy focused on ensuring women's safety by securing workplaces from their perspective. This might include reassessing and improving safety in fieldwork locations, such as construction sites (restoring and conserving buildings) or archaeological sites (surveying and excavating in remote areas like caves, gorges, and canyons). Measures should adapt to available resources and identified risks, such as better lighting, surveillance, security personnel, panic buttons, support from male colleagues, or self-defence training. Such policies may be legally guided and should involve women's safety experts to ensure effectiveness and resource efficiency.

Beyond gender and women's safety, several further dimensions of diversity warrant explicit attention in a CHIM context, and particularly in the Danube Region. Roma communities, the largest ethnic minority across the region, remain persistently underrepresented in cultural heritage institutes, their collections and their programmes. LGBTIQ+ inclusion, class diversity and the support of first-generation professionals from less privileged educational backgrounds, the rights of migrant workers within and beyond the EU, and accessibility for disabled colleagues that goes beyond physical access are equally integral to a serious DEI strategy. These dimensions intersect in practice: a young Roma woman entering the sector encounters a different set of obstacles than her counterpart from a majority background, and effective DEI work recognises these intersections rather than treating each category separately. Sector-specific resources are available to support more comprehensive approaches, including guidance from ICOM and NEMO and the work of professional networks on Roma participation in cultural institutions.

Two further dimensions deserve specific mention. The recognition of care responsibilities — for children, ageing relatives, partners with chronic conditions — is an important inclusion factor in a workforce that is disproportionately female and in which invisible care work tends to be unevenly distributed. And the situation of staff in rural or peripheral locations, where many CHIM institutions in the Danube Region are based, brings its own constraints around access to training, professional networks and career development that institutions and policy actors should consciously address.

However, simply writing these policies is not enough. Cultural heritage institutes and museums must integrate these policies into their organisational structure and culture through a detailed strategy with step-by-step measures. Establishing an employee resource group for diversity and inclusion initiatives can support this process.

Additionally, it is essential to publicise the strategy and its implementation through campaigns, social media, and events. Providing training on diversity and inclusion for both employers and all employees is also crucial for fostering an inclusive environment.

Include change management strategies to help your organisation and employees adapt to new policies and procedures effectively.

Compliance with labour laws and regulations is crucial for HR administration. Cultural heritage institutes and museums must ensure they have adequately skilled staff to handle these matters, ensuring the organisation operates within legal frameworks and protects both the organisation and its employees.

If your organisation repeatedly wishes to adopt certain policies but is hindered by legal constraints despite having the resources, it is time to join or start initiatives to change the regulations. While this can be time-consuming and demanding, successful efforts are well worth it.

### 6.7.2.2 HR Information Systems, Metrics and Analytics

Using metrics and analytics to inform HR decisions enhances strategies, ensuring the organisation remains adaptable to changing sector needs and employee expectations. For effective implementation, cultural heritage institutes and museums should utilise Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) apps like ↗ [Personio](#), ↗ [TalentHR](#), or ↗ [BambooHR](#) to organise and manage people-related data. These and similar apps are also suitable for smaller cultural heritage institutes and museums.

Internally, HRIS can track and analyse data on employee performance, attendance, and engagement, as well as manage payroll and benefits administration, employee feedback and reporting, compliance and risk management, and recruitment and onboarding processes. Externally, HRIS can predict trends such as labour market, educational, and recruitment trends,

helping cultural heritage institutes and museums identify potential HR issues before they become problems. Thus, HRIS enables organisations to stay adaptable to evolving needs and trends in the CHIM sector.

### 6.7.2.3 Digital Tools and AI Technologies in HR Administration

Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in HR administration streamline and automate routine tasks, enhancing efficiency and accuracy. By implementing digital tools and AI technologies, HR processes can be significantly improved. These advancements allow for more strategic decision-making, reduce administrative burdens, and provide a more personalised employee experience.

Digital tools and AI technologies are now used at every stage of the HR process, from recruitment and selection to performance management and development to separation and exit processes. Examples of their application in the CHIM sector can be found in the respective categories of this guide. Additionally, general digital administration offers benefits such as using shared drives for HR-related files, arranging digital signatures on certain contracts, and making mass modifications to data for security purposes.

A note on artificial intelligence in HR. The AI-based tools referenced throughout this guide can increase efficiency, but their use in recruitment, selection and performance evaluation is now expressly regulated within the European Union. Under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689), AI systems used for these purposes are classified as 'high-risk' and entail obligations including risk management, data governance, bias testing, transparency towards candidates and meaningful human oversight. These obligations fall on deployers as well as providers, and can reach institutions outside the EU whose systems affect people within it. Implementation is being phased in, with key obligations for stand-alone high-risk systems currently expected to apply from August 2026 (with potential transitional extensions for certain frameworks reaching into 2027). Institutions in the CHIM sector should therefore treat any AI hiring tool as a matter of legal compliance, not merely of convenience, and should not rely on vendors' compliance assurances without independent verification (see Regulation (EU) 2024/1689).

# 7 Key Findings from the Evaluation of the Pilot Actions

The CultHeRit pilot actions were accompanied by a structured evaluation, coordinated by KUPF OÖ and conducted between January and December 2025. Ten partner institutions across eight Danube Region countries participated in the evaluation. It drew on regular online questionnaires administered to four respondent groups: young professionals and mentors/trainers, who took part in all five rounds, and colleagues/teammates and main responsible project partners/HR managers, who were surveyed in three rounds.

A note on interpretation. The evaluation draws on a small and purposive sample – ten institutions and the young professionals, mentors and colleagues directly involved in the pilot actions. Its findings are therefore qualitative and illustrative rather than statistically representative, and the twelve lessons below should be read as experience-based guidance distilled from a specific set of cases, not as generalisable evidence for the sector as a whole. Their value lies in the consistency with which certain themes recurred across very different institutional and national contexts.

Five evaluation rounds were conducted in total: in January, March, May, September, and December 2025. Each questionnaire combined a set of fixed questions, repeated across all rounds to enable longitudinal comparison, with a varying set of questions adapted to the current stage of the pilot actions. The questions were closely aligned with the categories and elements of the transnational employment model, with particular emphasis on the three elements selected for intensive testing. Findings were shared with the partners on an ongoing basis throughout the pilot phase and discussed at project meetings in Banja Luka, Bucharest, Postojna, Linz, and Prague.

The following 12 lessons learned are drawn from across all five evaluation rounds and all four stakeholder groups, and are intended as practical guidance for institutions in the CHIM sector.

**1. Innovate the recruitment process.** Young professionals rated their recruitment experience overwhelmingly positively, highlighting regular communication throughout the process and innovative approaches — such as open-door days and multi-stage evaluations — as particularly effective. Colleagues observed that the recruitment processes used in the pilot actions differed markedly from their own hiring experiences, noting a shift towards skills-based evaluation and broader interview participation. These findings suggest that institutions benefit from rethinking established hiring routines when seeking to attract young professionals.

***'The MAK also made an effort to address the target group on social media (they shot a cute reel / TikTok for the call for applications).'** (Young Professional)*

**2. Ensure role clarity from the outset.** Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities was identified as a key factor for successful early integration. Where strong initial orientation and collaborative discussion about tasks and expectations took place, young professionals reported higher satisfaction and faster adaptation. In newly created positions, some degree of role ambiguity was experienced — though in several cases this was framed positively as a developmental opportunity rather than a deficit.

***'As this position has never existed in this Institute before, I feel that I have freedom to create it in the best way that suits my previous knowledge and experience.'***  
***(Young Professional)***

**3. Plan for the theory-practice gap.** All young professionals identified significant differences between their academic preparation and the realities of institutional work. Administration, bureaucracy, interpersonal dynamics, and resource constraints were areas where universities had not prepared them. Institutions should anticipate this gap and build early orientation around practical institutional knowledge rather than assuming sector-specific readiness.

***'A huge part is also the SOCIAL and communication aspect of it, that I personally could never learn from my studies ... Collaboration is key, learning to support people and allow them to support you is KEY.'*** ***(Young Professional)***

**4. Integration succeeds through daily practices.** The most effective integration happened through inclusive everyday interactions — morning coffee routines, informal conversations, shared meals, involvement in cross-departmental tasks — rather than through formal programmes alone. Creating a culture where the young professional is treated as a full team member from the outset proved decisive.

***'The team has been extremely open and welcoming and I think that the overall attitude from all of my colleagues encourages me to ask questions and clarifications in times of uncertainty.'*** ***(Young Professional)***

**5. Recognise mentorship as a two-way process.** Across all five evaluation rounds, both mentors and young professionals consistently reported mutual learning. Mentors gained fresh perspectives, digital skills, and renewed reflection on their own practice; young professionals gained guidance, institutional knowledge, and confidence. Institutions benefit most when they frame mentorship as professional exchange rather than one-directional instruction.

***'I have gained a different perspective on young people and their field of work, their problems in the work process, and also my role as a supervisor.'*** ***(Mentor)***

**6. Allocate dedicated time for mentoring.** Time constraints were the single most frequently cited challenge by mentors across all evaluation rounds. Without formal recognition and dedicated time allocation within regular working hours, mentoring depends entirely on individual commitment and risks being squeezed out by other responsibilities. Institutional policies should establish mentoring as a recognised part of the mentor's professional duties.

*'The organisation does not recognise mentoring as an additional responsibility performed during regular working hours. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a policy that clearly defines the role of the mentor, as well as the amount of time that should be allocated for working with the young professional.'* (Mentor)

**7. Formalise mentoring frameworks.** The absence of handbooks, guidelines, role definitions, and structured goal-setting for mentorship was repeatedly identified as a barrier. Institutions benefit from clear frameworks that define the mentor's role, establish regular check-ins, and set shared expectations — while leaving enough flexibility for the relationship to develop organically.

*'There is no regulation at the Institute that governs mentorship, nor has the practice of mentorship existed previously.'* (Mentor)

**8. Balance guidance with autonomy.** Young professionals valued close support but also needed space to develop independence, take ownership of tasks, and find their own professional identity. The most successful mentoring relationships evolved from directive early guidance towards increasing autonomy and shared decision-making over time.

*'Finding a balance between working independently and together with my mentor; I think I'm too often associated with just working with her and I don't have a voice of my own.'* (Young Professional)

**9. Celebrate achievements — including small ones.** The absence of recognition moments was explicitly identified as diminishing the impact of otherwise meaningful work. Celebrating completed projects, successful events, or everyday accomplishments fosters motivation and a sense of belonging. This need not be formal; it needs to be genuine and consistent.

*'There are no clear moments of celebration of a completed deadline ... there is not really a set time to look back and celebrate and appreciate the work we have done.'* (Young Professional)

**10. Attend to work-life balance and wellbeing.** Normalisation of overtime, inflexible working arrangements despite stated flexibility, and insufficient attention to mental health emerged as recurring concerns. Institutions that actively supported sustainable working conditions — including genuine flexibility, transparent workload management, and openness to personal circumstances — achieved higher engagement and satisfaction.

*'A lot of older people at my institution, even my mentor, have this mentality that 'overworking is normal', or they have no clear boundaries between personal life and the workplace. This is something that can easily transform into a toxic environment for anyone, but especially for a young person.'* (Young Professional)

**11. Give young professionals real responsibility and a voice.** Young professionals who were trusted with meaningful tasks, included in decision-making, and given visibility within the institution reported the highest levels of engagement and professional growth. Those who felt confined to routine or administrative tasks, or whose contributions went unacknowledged, were more likely to express frustration — even when other aspects of the experience were positive.

*'Just this week, I made a bold suggestion, which my mentor immediately understood. He supported me in front of the manager and the deputy director. The same day, we got the green light and I started working on it. I was very happy!'* (Young Professional)

**12. Address employment uncertainty early and honestly.** As the pilot action approached its conclusion, contract uncertainty negatively affected motivation, engagement, and performance in several cases. Institutions should communicate openly about employment prospects, avoid leaving young professionals in prolonged uncertainty, and — where retention is intended — signal this clearly. The evaluation demonstrated that young professionals are willing to commit long-term where they see genuine career pathways, stable conditions, and institutional investment in their development.

*'The institution seems to see itself mainly as a stepping stone, not as a place that wants to build long-term relationships with young staff.'* (Young Professional)

# 8 Manifesto of Young Professionals in the CHIM Sector

Following a project partner meeting in Bucharest in June 2025, the young professionals involved in CultHeRit developed a document outlining ten key parameters for good and attractive working conditions in the CHIM sector, addressing issues ranging from weak legal protection and low salaries to unclear career pathways, work-life balance issues, time-management constraints, and a general lack of trust in young professionals as agents of change. Representatives of the partner institutions then provided feedback on these parameters and discussed them with the young professionals at a follow-up meeting. Based on these reflections, the young professionals produced the following manifesto during a peer-review session held in Linz in December 2025.

## **Manifesto of Young Professionals in the CHIM Sector**

by Dorotea Aščerić, Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić, Danica Čolakov, Andra Comiati, Sara Đumić, Tereza Hrdlička, Vital Jurca, Erika Nagy, Richárd Morvai Rác, Dalma Pszota, and Jenny Unterkofler

As young professionals working in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums, we envision a sector that is fair, future-oriented, and capable of supporting diverse career paths. Drawing on our experiences in the CHIM sector and our collective vision, we formulate the following 10 principles.

### **Legal Protection: Equal rights, equal futures!**

We believe that legal protections should be applied equally across all Danube Region countries, ensuring equal legal status and fundamental labour rights for young professionals. Permanent employment opportunities empower young professionals, build trust, and encourage long-term commitment to the sector. By ensuring access to sick leave, annual leave, and social security, institutions provide us with the foundation to plan our lives, start families, and invest in our futures. Stable employment is not a privilege — it is a prerequisite for a thriving cultural heritage sector!

### **Fair Salaries: Value our work, invest in culture!**

Culture deserves recognition as a vital sector — not just in words, but in budgets. We call on institutions to advocate for adequate funding at all levels and to offer competitive salaries that reflect the value of our work. At the same time, we are ready to contribute: by developing innovative products, services, and strategies that generate additional revenue. A sector that values its professionals attracts and retains the talent it needs to flourish!

### **Open Doors: Create access, discover potential!**

In a sector with few positions and high competition, transparency is essential. We call for open, merit-based hiring processes where qualifications and motivation determine outcomes. Internships and entry-level programmes should be promoted among students and alumni, providing pathways into the profession. When access is fair and visible, institutions gain not only new talent but also fresh perspectives and renewed energy!

### **Career Pathways: Don't give us limits — we'll cross them or leave!**

Young professionals need to see a future in the sector — not uncertainty. We ask institutions to define and communicate clear pathways for professional growth, from entry-level roles to leadership positions. Regular evaluations, transparent promotion criteria, and mentorship programmes help us understand what is possible and how to get there. Show us the way, and we'll make it a highway!

### **Feedback Culture: Don't leave us guessing. Feedback nurtures our growth!**

In many cultural institutions, giving feedback is still an underdeveloped skill, and many feel unprepared to do so. We want structured support — workshops, guidance from experienced mentors, and open project meetings — so that everyone can grow confident in providing constructive, regular feedback. The CHIM sector should lead by example, becoming a model of transparent, two-way communication where learning and evolving together is part of the workplace culture!

### **Creative Innovation: Embrace digital culture, empower new roles!**

We live in a digital era, and cultural institutions must evolve accordingly. We call for the recognition and integration of modern roles — digital curators, marketing specialists, video producers, and creative technologists — as essential parts of institutional structures. By connecting heritage with gaming, design, and interdisciplinary arts, institutions can reach new audiences, improve accessibility, and unlock new forms of engagement. Let us bridge tradition and innovation together!

### **Work-Life Balance: Work smart, live well!**

We demand clear universal rules around breaks, overtime, hybrid or remote work, and flexible hours, combined with transparent task management and project tracking tools. This allows everyone to plan their days sustainably. Clearly communicated annual leave policies and regular, structured team meetings help us prioritise tasks and manage workloads realistically. By defining roles, tasks, and deadlines clearly, cultural institutions can create a predictable yet flexible environment that supports both productivity and a healthy work-life balance!

### **Clear Rules: Structure enables creativity!**

Transparent procedures are the foundation of fair and efficient workplaces. We ask for accessible, well-documented guidelines — practical handbooks that clarify responsibilities, communication channels, and expectations. Systematic transparency, including shared meeting notes and regular updates, ensures that everyone can navigate the institution confidently and contribute their best. At the same time, we value openness towards neurodiversity and an awareness of mental health, recognising that different minds contribute different strengths!

### **Hands-On Experience: Let us learn by doing!**

You do not gain enough experience from a book alone — you gain it through on-site work, hands-on engagement with collections, or fieldwork at heritage sites. We call on institutions to give young professionals meaningful access to collections, archives, and heritage sites. Working alongside experienced colleagues on real projects is how expertise is built and passion is deepened. Do not confine us to digital tasks and administrative work. Let us engage directly with the cultural heritage we are here to protect and promote!

### **Trust in Youth: Fresh perspectives drive progress!**

Knowledge doesn't always come with age — it comes with curiosity, openness, and new perspectives. We bring technological fluency, communicative agility, and a willingness to act. Rather than seeing us just as disruptors, see us as integrators: ready to adapt to existing structures and hierarchies while contributing positively to institutional development. Give us responsibility, include us in decision-making, and let our actions demonstrate our value. Trust grows through collaboration — let's build it together!

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