



From Şanlıurfa to the World: Volunteering for Heritage

In 2026, the Şanlıurfa Culture, Education, Art and Research Foundation (ŞURKAV), under the auspices of the Governorship of Şanlıurfa, brought together international volunteers, archaeologists, academics and local institutions through the “World Heritage Volunteers Awareness Camp for Protecting Values at Göbeklitepe and Taş Tepeler.”

Implemented in Şanlıurfa as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Volunteers (WHV) 2026 Campaign, under the global theme “Working on the Future,” the initiative welcomed volunteers from 12 different countries and created an international learning and exchange platform centred on cultural heritage protection, volunteering and intercultural dialogue.

12 COUNTRIES • INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING • CULTURAL HERITAGE • INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Connecting International Volunteers with World Heritage

Şanlıurfa is home to an exceptional concentration of archaeological and cultural heritage sites representing different periods of human history.

During the programme, international volunteers had the opportunity to experience this heritage directly and learn from the scientists and specialists working to research and protect it.

A major focus of the programme was the Taş Tepeler Project, coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye and supported by universities, museums and research institutions from Türkiye and abroad.

Participants visited a number of archaeological sites associated with Taş Tepeler and learned directly from excavation directors and researchers about the archaeological significance of the region, ongoing scientific studies and recent discoveries.





EXPERT SPOTLIGHT | Prof. Dr. Necmi Karul

At Karahantepe, **Prof. Dr. Necmi Karul**, Coordinator of the Taş Tepeler Project and Head of the Department of Prehistory at Istanbul University, and his team introduced participants to the importance of Taş Tepeler for understanding the Neolithic period and the scientific approach behind ongoing research.

The volunteers also received on-site information from experts at several archaeological locations, including:

- Çakmaktepe, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatma Şahin;
- Sayburç, with Prof. Dr. Eylem Özdoğan;
- Göbeklitepe, with Dr. Lee Clare;
- Yoğunburç, with Prof. Dr. Gan Caichao; and
- Sefertepe, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emre Güldoğan.

The programme also included visits to Mendiktepe and other sites connected with research on the Neolithic heritage of Şanlıurfa, providing participants with a broader understanding of the archaeological landscape of the region.

At Göbeklitepe, participants were introduced to the framework of scientific research conducted with the authorization and support of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in cooperation with relevant scientific institutions including Istanbul University, the German Archaeological Institute and the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum.



Discovering Şanlıurfa's Multi-Layered Heritage

The programme was designed to go beyond the Neolithic period and introduce volunteers to the wider cultural landscape of Şanlıurfa.

Participants visited significant heritage sites representing different historical periods, including Harran, Soğmatar, Şuayb City and the Bazda Quarries.

At Harran, Prof. Dr. Mehmet Önal, Head of the Department of Archaeology at Harran University and Director of the Harran Excavation, introduced volunteers to Harran Castle, the Great Mosque of Harran, the Harran Excavation House and archaeological research being carried out in the area.

At Şuayb City, under the direction of Assist. Prof. Dr. Seçil Çokoğullu, and at Soğmatar, under the responsibility of Research Assistant Süheyla İrem Mutlu, participants learned about current research and the cultural heritage values of the region.

The visit to the Bazda Quarries also provided an opportunity to explore the region's historical stone-working traditions and cultural landscape.





Learning about Heritage Protection through the UNESCO Perspective

Education was a central component of the initiative.

Ömer Devrim Aksoyak, Member of the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO, delivered cultural heritage training to the international volunteers from a UNESCO perspective.

The training addressed key concepts related to the 1972 World Heritage Convention, including:

- Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);
- authenticity and integrity;
- World Heritage criteria;
- tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- community participation in heritage protection; and
- stakeholder cooperation, including approaches relevant to Taş Tepeler.

Participants also took part in activities related to heritage protection, documentation and local awareness, while discussing the role of volunteering in safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations.



Beyond Archaeology: Connecting Tangible and Living Heritage

One of the defining features of the programme was its holistic approach to heritage.

ŞURKAV aimed not only to introduce volunteers to archaeological sites, but also to connect them with the living cultural traditions of Şanlıurfa.

International participants experienced the traditional sira gecesi, one of the city's long-standing cultural practices, and were introduced to Şanlıurfa's music, oral traditions, social interaction and local gastronomy.

By bringing together the ancient tangible heritage of Göbeklitepe and Taş Tepeler with cultural traditions that continue to be practised today, the programme demonstrated that heritage protection is not limited to monuments and archaeological sites. It also involves communities, memories, traditions and cultural practices.

Exploring Urban Memory

The programme also addressed the importance of urban and architectural heritage.

During a photographic presentation at Reji Church, historical and contemporary photographs of Şanlıurfa were presented to the volunteers.

Through "before and after" images, participants explored changes in the city's historical fabric, traditional architecture and urban structure, while discussing the importance of protecting cultural heritage in rapidly changing urban environments.

This activity encouraged volunteers to understand cultural heritage not only through archaeological excavation sites but also through urban memory, architecture and the living city.



Strengthening the Role of Local Institutions

Throughout the programme, participants were introduced to ŞURKAV's work in protecting, promoting and sustainably transferring Şanlıurfa's cultural, artistic, historical and archaeological values to future generations.

The initiative also highlighted the importance of partnerships between local institutions, national authorities, universities, international organizations, researchers and volunteers.

Through the programme, ŞURKAV demonstrated how a locally rooted institution can act as a bridge between Şanlıurfa's cultural heritage and international networks, while creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and cooperation.

Partnership for Cultural Heritage

The project was coordinated by the Governorship of Şanlıurfa and ŞURKAV, with contributions from a broad network of institutions and experts, including:

- Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye;
- Istanbul University;
- Harran University;
- German Archaeological Institute;
- Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum;
- Archaeological Research Center of the National Cultural Heritage Administration of China;
- UNESCO Headquarters;
- Turkish National Commission for UNESCO;
- researchers involved in the Taş Tepeler Project; and
- excavation directors and scientific experts working across the region.

This multi-stakeholder approach brought archaeology, living culture and international volunteering together within a common framework.



The Impact of Volunteering

The programme created an opportunity for volunteers from different countries to learn directly from scientists, visit cultural heritage sites in their original context and experience Şanlıurfa's living traditions.

By participating in cultural heritage education and awareness activities, volunteers developed a deeper understanding of the shared responsibility involved in protecting heritage.

They also became important carriers of this knowledge beyond Şanlıurfa, taking the experiences, stories and lessons they gained during the programme back to their own countries and communities.

Through this international exchange, the initiative aimed to contribute to greater global visibility for Göbeklitepe, Taş Tepeler and Şanlıurfa's wider cultural heritage.



A Shared Responsibility for the Future

The World Heritage Volunteers programme in Şanlıurfa demonstrated the power of volunteering as a tool for education, intercultural dialogue and cultural heritage protection.

By bringing together scientific knowledge, international volunteering, local participation, cultural exchange and heritage conservation, the initiative created a platform where participants could both learn from the past and contribute to the future of heritage protection.

For ŞURKAV, the experience also demonstrated the value of international cooperation in connecting local cultural heritage with global audiences and strengthening awareness of the responsibility shared by institutions, communities and individuals.

From the Neolithic heritage of Göbeklitepe and Taş Tepeler to the living traditions of Şanlıurfa, the programme delivered one central message:





Cultural heritage belongs to humanity, and protecting it for future generations is a shared responsibility.

Key Facts

Project	World Heritage Volunteers Awareness Camp for Protecting Values at Göbeklitepe and Taş Tepeler
Programme	UNESCO World Heritage Volunteers (WHV) 2026 Campaign
Theme	Working on the Future
Location	Şanlıurfa, Türkiye
Lead institution	Şanlıurfa Culture, Education, Art and Research Foundation (ŞURKAV)
Under the auspices of	Governorship of Şanlıurfa
International participation	Volunteers from 12 countries
Main focus areas	Cultural heritage protection, volunteering, archaeology, intercultural dialogue, local participation, living heritage and awareness-raising
Key heritage areas	Göbeklitepe, Taş Tepeler, Karahantepe, Çakmaktepe, Sayburç, Yoğunburç, Sefertepe, Mendiktepe, Harran, Soğmatar, Şuayb City and Bazda Quarries

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Working on the Future

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