

**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE  
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Reflection meeting on  
safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education**

**2 and 3 July 2025  
Online**

**Background**

## A. Introduction

1. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognizes the transmission of intangible cultural heritage through formal and non-formal education as a safeguarding measure under Article 2.3. In addition, Article 14 (a) calls on States Parties to ensure recognition of, respect for, and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage through educational programmes. With reference to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education, the [programme on Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education](#) was launched in 2017 under the 2003 Convention; it recognizes intangible cultural heritage (or 'living heritage') as a powerful foundation for learning. Living heritage can offer context-specific content, pedagogies, and language that enrich education and make it more relevant and meaningful for learners. In other words, grounding the learning process in the local cultural contexts of the learners can foster mutual respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.
2. In this context, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage approved in 2017 this area of work as a funding priority, covering 2018 – 2021 (Decision [12.COM.6](#)). Four years later, in 2021, with reference to the broader UNESCO Intersectoral Programme 'Learning for Diversity,' the Committee renewed this priority for a second period, from 2022 to 2025 (Decision [16.COM.12](#)). As the period is coming to a close for this funding priority 2, a reflection meeting is convened to gather contributing experts and actors to assess achievements and identify remaining gaps, while fostering knowledge exchange. The outcomes are expected to help guide future directions, extending beyond the current funding priority and contributing more broadly to this key intersectoral area of work. Please see the agenda and timetable (document [LHE/25/GLO ED/1](#)) and list of participants (document [LHE/25/GLO ED/2](#)), also available on the [dedicated webpage](#).

## B. Progress of the programme

3. UNESCO's interdisciplinary mandate in [culture and education](#) holds a broad vision of education that is both transformative and rooted in cultural diversity. With this understanding, the UNESCO Culture and Education Sectors have been advancing intersectoral cooperation at global and country levels through joint projects, meetings and knowledge sharing, anchoring the living heritage and education programme as an intersectoral priority area in UNESCO's programme. The programme on Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education has been promoting teaching and learning with and about intangible cultural heritage across all relevant educational disciplines while developing its approach over two phases corresponding to the implementation periods of the 2003 Convention's funding priority 2.

### Phase I: 2018-2021

4. In its initial phase, the programme focused on providing technical support to Member States in developing methods and tools to incorporate living heritage into education. During the first quadrennium, a wide range of projects were implemented, benefitting more than 80 countries. Awareness-raising activities and intersectoral collaboration were promoted at the national level. To facilitate knowledge sharing, UNESCO launched the [Clearinghouse on living heritage and education](#), an open-access database, featuring projects and resources on the topic.
5. Fifteen of these projects were evaluated in 2021 by UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation reported increased awareness of and respect for living heritage amongst youth and the wider community, along with a strengthened sense of identity, pride and appreciation for cultural diversity. It found that participating teachers had developed capacities and confidence to integrate intangible cultural heritage in their teaching across all subjects. One of the evaluation's key findings was that partnerships between communities, heritage bearers, and schools were

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<sup>1</sup> See documents [LHE/21/16.COM/10 Rev](#) and [LHE/21/16.COM/INF.10 Rev](#)

among the 'most rewarding features' of the projects carried out until then. It also noted that, in order to take the programme a step further, it would need to be “scaled up” – ensuring that projects do not remain isolated, but that the lessons learnt inform educational policies and become firmly embedded in education systems. In parallel, a group of 39 resource persons was [trained in 2021](#) to support the national efforts for integrating living heritage safeguarding in education.

#### Phase II: 2022-2025

6. In its second phase, in line with the findings and recommendations of the 2021 evaluation, the programme placed greater emphasis on embedding projects and activities in education systems. These priorities were outlined in the concept note presented to the Committee in 2021 '[Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education \(funding priority 2\)](#)'. It proposed combining methodological development and capacity building with strengthened inter-ministerial collaboration, advocacy, and policy development. The positive connection between education and living heritage safeguarding was supported by a favorable international policy environment shaped by recent milestones: [the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration](#) (2022), which stresses the importance of context-relevant education that incorporates cultural heritage and [the Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace](#) (2023), which highlights the essential role of living heritage in tackling the global learning crisis.
7. At the global level, the momentum saw the integration of living heritage safeguarding in major international education frameworks and initiatives, such as:
  - The [Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development](#) (2023), which highlights the role of living heritage in fostering mutual understanding, solidarity and social cohesion.
  - [The Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) (2024), which underscores the need for lifelong learning in culture and the arts across all types of educational settings, while recognizing that learning in, through and with diverse - including local and Indigenous – cultural expressions is vital for overcoming divisions and fostering mutual understanding (it promotes the integration of local perspectives in education and the active engagement of heritage bearers). Intersectoral collaboration has continued through the development of guidelines for the implementation of these key instruments.
8. At the national level, new projects adopted a more systematic approach than in the previous quadrennium, incorporating interministerial collaboration from the outset. A notable example is the project on '[Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Basic Education in Namibia and Zimbabwe](#)'. The second phase also saw new projects in the context of emergencies, such as '[Teaching and learning with living heritage in Ukraine](#)' (building on the methodology developed in the earlier project '[Teaching and learning with living heritage](#)' which was implemented in ten countries in Europe, while taking a more systemic approach).
9. A key source demonstrating the growing traction of the connection between living heritage and education among States Parties is their periodic reports. The first cycle of regional periodic reporting conducted over the past five years provides valuable data on how States have advanced in integrating intangible cultural heritage into education. The reports reveal increasing awareness of education's role in safeguarding living heritage and highlight the relevance of living heritage in delivering meaningful, contextually grounded learning experiences across all levels – from early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET), as well as various forms of non-formal education.

### **C. Challenges and opportunities**

10. Despite notable progress, most initiatives linking living heritage and education across different regions remain isolated and have yet to be scaled up within broader education systems. Many education systems have not yet fully embraced their role in safeguarding heritage or leveraging it to enhance quality education. To achieve full potential of transforming education through learning with living heritage, lessons learned from pilot projects at the local level must inform education policies and be institutionalized at national level. Additionally, greater efforts are needed in the area of non-formal education, which offers vast opportunities for learning with living heritage but remains less structured and less widely understood. Achieving stronger inter-ministerial partnerships between Culture and Education sectors is also essential to enhancing the transmission of intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its long-term contribution to quality education.
11. Emerging areas of work include teacher training and the assessment of learning outcomes related to teaching and learning with living heritage – an essential step toward securing recognition and acceptance within curriculum development processes. UNESCO commissioned the development of an assessment tool and training course, which are currently under review. In parallel, online training tools are being developed to re-package the content created during the first phase and broaden the programme's reach.
12. The ongoing process of reflection, stocktaking, and planning is not only essential for deepening the programme's impact, but also offers a valuable opportunity to refine strategies, expand good practices, and reinforce its long-term relevance and effectiveness. Ultimately, the process aims to further embed living heritage as a core component of quality, transformative education – one that nurtures learners' creativity, well-being and appreciation of cultural diversity, while strengthening the transmission and safeguarding of living heritage itself.