

**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

Report

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I. Background and rationale

The 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 (Article 2.3) and calls on States Parties to ensure its recognition, respect, and enhancement through educational programmes (Article 14 (a)). Launched in 2017, the [programme on integrating living heritage into formal and non-formal education](#) (also referred to as ‘the living heritage and education programme’) was developed to support both safeguarding efforts and quality education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and its target 4.7.

Recognizing that cultural heritage offers context-rich, meaningful content for learners, the programme has been an intersectoral effort between UNESCO’s Culture and Education Sectors. It was first approved as a funding priority for the period 2018-2021 and then renewed for the period 2022-2025. During Phase I, technical support and awareness-raising activities were prioritized across over 80 countries, while Phase II aimed to embed this work in education systems. Recent global milestones and instruments such as the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration (2022), the Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace (2023), the Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (2023) and the Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024) highlight the mutually beneficial relationship between intangible cultural heritage and education, creating an enabling environment for future initiatives built on this synergy.

Despite substantial progress, the integration of living heritage into education systems remains limited and uneven. Many initiatives have remained isolated, without being scaled up to inform broader educational policy or institutional frameworks. There is a particular need to better engage and support non-formal education as a vector for cultural transmission. Interministerial collaboration between the culture and education sectors is still inconsistent, limiting the long-term sustainability of the programme’s achievements. Additionally, challenges persist in areas such as teacher training and the development of tools to assess learning outcomes related to teaching and learning with intangible cultural heritage, which are essential for the recognition and integration of these practices into curricula.

The Reflection meeting on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education is part of a broader process marking the conclusion of the second funding priority period. It aims to take stock of achievements, evaluate remaining gaps, and refine strategic approaches to better integrate living heritage into education. Ultimately, the goal is to position living heritage as a central pillar of transformative, inclusive, and culturally grounded education – one that promotes creativity, well-being, and appreciation of cultural diversity, while strengthening the transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage itself.

Further details on the meeting’s rationale can be found in the [background note](#) for the Reflection meeting.

I.1 Reflection process

An online questionnaire (pre-meeting survey) was circulated among the experts from the education and culture sectors attending the reflection meeting as well as UNESCO staff involved in implementing the living heritage and education programme, who were also invited to the meeting. Responses were received from 24 participants, offering valuable insights and laying a strong foundation for the next steps. The questionnaire is provided in annex 1.

The Reflection meeting on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in formal and non-formal education was convened online on 2 and 3 July 2025, bringing together 25 experts from all regions,

along with 9 UNESCO staff from the culture and education sectors and from 5 national and regional offices. The meeting served as the main platform for collective stocktaking, exchange of experiences, and identification of strategic directions for the future.

Additionally, the reflection process benefitted from input from the [Living heritage and education session of the Training programme for the global facilitators' network](#), held online on 10 July 2025. While its primary aim was to enhance participants' conceptual and practical capacities to facilitate the integration of living heritage in education, its co-creation approach stimulated rich discussions. These exchanges generated valuable reflections, many of which have been integrated into the outcomes of this process.

I.2 Meeting methodology and structure

The meeting was structured over two half-day sessions of three hours each. The first day was dedicated to reflecting on lessons learned from past experiences, while the second day focused on exploring potential future directions to further advance the work of integrating living heritage in education. Simultaneous interpretation was available in English and French.

Each session combined presentations to introduce key concepts and contextual information with interactive exercises and group discussions to encourage dialogue and peer reflection. Interactive tools such as Padlet boards and Slido live polls were used to allow participants to interact. Throughout the programme, relevant findings from the preliminary survey were presented to participants, enabling them to deepen the analysis and build on the insights already gathered.

Discussions were moderated by Vanessa Achilles, senior facilitator of the global facilitators' network.

Day 1: Lessons learned from past experiences

Following the official opening of the meeting and the presentation of the meeting objectives by the Secretariat under items 1 and 2, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Distinguished Professor and SARChI Chair: Global Change and Social Learning Systems at Rhodes University, South Africa, delivered a keynote speech on the theme "Toward transformative pedagogy: Reimagining education with living heritage". The key takeaways of the lecture are presented in Section II below.

Under item 3, experts were encouraged to present their lessons learned from a decade or more of activities connecting living heritage with various areas of education. An interactive online activity gathered the experts' initial reactions on why they valued the connection between living heritage and education.

Three case studies from Argentina, Thailand and Egypt illustrated how living heritage has been successfully integrated into formal education, non-formal education, and technical and vocational education and training, highlighting enabling factors and challenges. A summary of the three case studies is available in Annex 2.

During the discussion, both in the plenary session and in the breakout groups, experts shared their key takeaways, enabling conditions, and the challenges encountered in their support provided on integrating living heritage in education. The last section of item 3 focused on analyzing and discussing the challenges faced by the main stakeholders involved in safeguarding living heritage in education: community bearers, schools and teachers, and institutions, including museums, NGOs and cultural associations.

An analysis of the findings of these discussions is provided under Section III.

Day 2: Future directions

At the start of the session (item 4), expert participant Dr. Carrie Karsgaard provided an overview of recent global UNESCO frameworks that support the integration of living heritage into formal and non-

formal education systems. The presentation, summarized in the next section, was intended to inform the design of future initiatives by highlighting how they can be aligned with internationally agreed policy frameworks, thereby enhancing their relevance, coherence, and potential for wider uptake.

Item 5 included two case studies, one from Greece and one involving Namibia and Zimbabwe. They demonstrated how initiatives can be scaled up for increased impact and outreach. They emphasized the importance of intersectoral collaboration between culture and education authorities and other stakeholders as well as the key role of decision makers in supporting, funding and enabling these initiatives. A summary of the three presentations is available in Annex 2.

The final two sessions under item 5 were designed as interactive brainstorming exercises to help identify strategic directions for future work on living heritage and education. Discussions focused on (i) identifying gaps and opportunities – particularly in relation to priority areas and education levels, capacity-building needs, research, resource development, and the valorization of living heritage; and (ii) exploring ways to strengthen partnerships, advocacy, and knowledge-sharing.

An analysis of the meeting discussions referenced above is provided in Section III. The detailed programme of the meeting and the list of participants are available on the [dedicated website](#).

II. Conceptual foundations

II.1 Toward transformative pedagogy: Reimagining education with living heritage

The meeting keynote presentation by Dr. Heila Lotz-Sisitka outlined some conceptual foundations of integrating living heritage in education. She invited participants to reflect on how transformative pedagogy can reshape education when reimagined through the lens of living heritage. At its core, the argument emphasized that education systems must undergo deep transformation – not only to enhance learning outcomes but also to serve society and respond to a changing planet. This vision aligns with UNESCO's [Futures of Education report](#), which calls for a new social contract for education where it moves beyond its historical role of serving industrial and economic systems to instead foster peace, sustainability, inclusion, and cultural diversity. Living heritage plays a vital role in this reorientation – as a source of meaningful, contextual learning – and also benefits from it through strengthened safeguarding and intergenerational transmission.

The lecture explored how contemporary pedagogy has been shaped by three key metaphors: acquisition, participation, and knowledge creation. The acquisition model – rooted in one-way knowledge transfer – has long dominated formal education, while the participation model emphasizes inclusion and dialogue. More recently, the knowledge creation model has emerged, especially through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and the collaborative development of epistemic artefacts and practices together with learners. Efficient and meaningful learning needs all three of these learning processes functioning together. Interestingly, they are already embedded in the practices of living heritage. However, current education systems are still disconnected from the "lifeworld" of learners. This disconnect contributes to the exclusion and alienation of many students, particularly those from marginalized communities whose languages, experiences, and cultural knowledge are often devalued in education systems.

To build truly transformative education, the lecture argued for "scaling deep". This means recognizing how living heritage can enrich and expand existing pedagogical foundations by enabling epistemic justice, promoting meaning-making, strengthening learner agency, and expanding the coexistence, interaction, and interdependence of multiple ways of knowledge. On-going research supported by UNESCO is exploring how education, when connected with living heritage, could support learners to flourish within and beyond their communities, connecting them to the world while grounding them in their cultural realities. The lecture concluded by underscoring the importance of making this case more clearly and convincingly for educational actors. This includes developing assessment tools,

pedagogical language, and advocacy strategies that demonstrate how living heritage fosters collaboration, solidarity, and co-creation of knowledge, ultimately improving the quality and relevance of learning for all.

II.2 Living heritage in education within UNESCO frameworks

The positive link between education and living heritage safeguarding is reinforced by a favourable international policy environment shaped by recent milestones. In her presentation, Dr. Carrie Karsgaard introduced two international instruments that offer valuable guidance for effective implementation and advocacy strategies at the intersection of culture and education. Aligning living heritage and education initiatives with the implementation guidelines of these instruments offers a strong foundation and policy legitimacy for intersectoral collaboration.

One of these key developments is the [Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Global Citizenship, Fundamental Freedoms, and Sustainable Development](#) (2023). It offers concrete guidance on how education can foster peace and promote a transformative, holistic, and society-wide approach to learning. The Recommendation calls upon States to safeguard living heritage by valuing diverse knowledge systems, expressions, and transmission methods and by promoting intercultural dialogue linguistic diversity. Living heritage is a valuable entry point for addressing the 13 technical action areas identified in the Recommendation to implement it.

Additionally, the [Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) (2024), which highlights the role of living heritage in fostering mutual understanding, solidarity and social cohesion, provides guidance on integrating culture – including living heritage – into education.

Both instruments signify a growing international recognition of the deep connections between culture and education. They are grounded in human rights and inclusive of all forms, levels, and types of education – formal, non-formal, informal, lifelong, life-wide, traditional, and Indigenous learning environments. They emphasize the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including cultural actors, and promote holistic, transformative educational practices. The 2024 Framework also encourages reflection on the role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in education and culture.

III. Analysis of meeting inputs and discussions

The information provided by experts through the pre-meeting survey, along with the insights they contributed during the meeting, have been analyzed to inform this section. To illustrate the findings, the following sub-sections feature “information boxes” with case studies and examples of good practices shared by participants.

III.1 Roles and challenges of key actors involved in living heritage and education

The following sub-section summarizes the conclusions from the discussions held under item 3.c. and presents recommendations for action.

Living heritage bearers

Heritage bearers – communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals – are at the centre of the safeguarding processes. When community knowledge, skills and practices are meaningfully integrated into formal and non-formal education, they can strengthen cultural identity, appreciation for cultural diversity, foster intergenerational learning, and deepen the learners’ connection to their contexts and communities. However, such integration also raises structural, ethical, and practical challenges that must be addressed with care and collaboration. Too often the involvement of heritage bearers in formal and non-formal education is viewed as bringing in ‘outsiders’. In reality, schools are

part of communities, and teachers, school staff, students, and their families are often active bearers of living heritage themselves. Recognizing and supporting this embedded expertise within the school community is key to building inclusive and sustainable approaches to education that leverage fully the potential of living heritage as a foundation, source and resource for learning and wellbeing.

The main challenge that bearers encountered, according to the participating experts, is that they often **feel undervalued in formal education settings**. They are sometimes treated as informants rather than respected co-educators or partners. This creates frustration and can discourage long-term engagement. Schools often struggle to create an engagement with living heritage which truly reflects the meaning and values it has in community settings. Due to limited resources and rigid classroom schedules, bearers are often only invited for brief visits or performances. This approach strips living heritage off its context, turning it into a static or symbolic activity, rather than a real-life, participatory experience. Additionally, bearers may not feel equipped with enough pedagogical skills to intervene in classrooms. In contrast, successful initiatives have emphasized co-creation, with bearers actively involved in planning and delivering lessons alongside teachers. These experiences show that respect, shared responsibility and flexibility are key to meaningful collaboration.

Another deep concern voiced relates to **cultural justice and representation**. In many contexts, formal education has historically functioned as a space where traditional knowledge systems, skills and practices have been devalued, silenced and, in some cases, even erased. This has led some bearers to question whether schools can or should play a role in safeguarding heritage – especially in cases where community-based forms of transmission are already functioning effectively schools may not be seen as efficient alternatives. In some cases, communities have contributed data and knowledge to projects, only to see the outcomes (archives, reports, tools) remain with researchers or institutions. This disconnect reinforces inequalities in knowledge ownership and could further broaden the distance between communities and schools.

The process of involving knowledge bearers in educational programmes can also reflect unequal power dynamics. Personal relationships between school staff or project coordinators and specific bearers may result in partial representation, excluding women, minority groups, and others, failing to reflect the full diversity of a communities. In multicultural societies, this raises pressing considerations: whose heritage is represented, whose voices are shared, and how gender dynamics affect living heritage and its representation, particularly given the unequal access that men and women may have to educational spaces.

Living heritage is practiced in diverse and dynamic ways within and across communities. This richness may present challenges when countries seek to integrate it into education systems, which often rely on standardized programmes and methodologies. A key tension arises: how to honour specific practices and identities of individuals and communities, while also creating approaches that are coherent and adaptable across broader education contexts?

In Lebanon, in 2019, a project aimed at introducing living heritage into schools, including Zajal poetry. However, poets were more comfortable teaching in their own ways within their local communities. Attempts to develop a specific curriculum initially met with resistance, and levels of bearer engagement varied. While some heritage bearers became active partners in co-designing educational activities, others found it challenging to adapt to a context of formal teaching structures. Nevertheless, after key adjustments were made to better align with local contexts and teaching needs, the project generated strong interest and enthusiasm from both students and teachers.

The need to find middle ground to foster the **connection between bearers and learners** was also expressed in the discussions. Bearers may worry about finding ways to engage young people with living heritage in ways that feel relevant and empowering. Many students may perceive heritage

practices as old-fashioned or distant from their interests. Yet, when equipped with tools to explore, document, and reinterpret heritage through digital technologies (including through interviews, podcasts or videos), they often develop a strong sense of engagement, connection and pride.

Key strategic considerations for successful participation of living heritage bearers in formal and non-formal education programmes include:

- Promoting inclusive, transparent processes when establishing the collaboration with bearers, reflecting community diversity;
- Supporting co-design and co-teaching between bearers and educators;
- Respecting community agency regarding the heritage and provide space for multiple interpretations of living heritage (living heritage is dynamic and cannot be ‘standardized’);
- Respecting the autonomy and knowledge systems of bearers, ensuring ethical use and return of community-generated data;
- Suggesting ways for practitioners to participate in both non-formal and formal learning settings, depending on the environment that best supports the living heritage they engage in.

In conclusion, living heritage in education cannot succeed without meaningful engagement with knowledge bearers. This means more than inviting community members into classrooms; it requires rethinking educational structures, addressing representation, and building respectful, co-creative relationships. When done well, such partnerships do not just safeguard heritage, they enrich education, foster inclusion, and affirm cultural rights.

Educators and education systems

Across regions, initiatives aiming to bring living heritage into schools and non-formal education spaces face common obstacles, particularly around teacher preparedness, curriculum rigidity, and governance.

One of the most persistent challenges, according to the discussions, is educators’ lack of a clear understanding of what living heritage entails and **how to meaningfully integrate it into their classrooms**, especially when it falls outside their area of training or experience. As a result, even motivated teachers may hesitate to engage with living heritage without strong pedagogical support. To address this, teacher training programmes would benefit from the contribution of cultural experts or anthropologists who can provide context, help clarify concepts, and give teachers the confidence to approach living heritage respectfully and accurately. This is a foundational step for meaningful integration into curricula.

In Belize, successful curriculum reform resulted in the integration of intangible cultural heritage into formal education. This effort required support from the National Institute of Culture and History in Belize to present a contextualized understanding of intangible cultural heritage to curriculum reform bodies, in connection with the concept of cultural diversity. Support to work with educators was also provided.

In places where teachers work part-time and under-resourced, the need for a structured framework and manageable expectations is particularly urgent. A promising approach is to strengthen school leadership and management teams, so that each school can **adapt and contextualize living heritage strategies** based on its resources and on student needs. National curriculum provides essential guidance for educators. However, in some countries, their rigidity may become a barrier for educators interested in exploring teaching with living heritage. In such cases, extra-curricular or non-formal education activities become an alternative entry point. However, tackling these instances does not suffice to drive systemic change.

In light of discussions, another significant challenge for education stakeholders is **political instability** the frequent turnover of decision-makers, which can undermine the continuity of long-term initiatives. In some contexts, the politicization of cultural narratives further hinders curriculum development, as competing visions of national identity influence which living heritage is represented. These shifting dynamics make it even more difficult for educators to navigate institutional changes and adapt their teaching accordingly.

To encourage and support education actors in embedding living heritage in education systems, the following steps could be taken:

- Training, supporting and guiding educators for them to understand concepts related to living heritage;
- Ensuring school-level leadership is empowered to adapt initiatives to local realities;
- Designing or transforming curricula to allow educators to integrate living heritage;
- Creating flexible learning models that combine formal, non-formal, and informal approaches to education;
- Encouraging and strengthening partnerships between culture and education actors so that educators feel more supported.

Educators are key to successfully integrating living heritage into education systems, but they need clearer guidance, stronger support, and greater flexibility to navigate institutional constraints and bring living heritage meaningfully into their teaching. Their work should be supported by cultural experts, grounded in community engagement, and aligned with policy to ensure long-term impact and scalability.

Cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organizations and cultural institutions such as museums, foundations, and community-based organizations often take the role of innovators, mediators, and facilitators in connecting communities, heritage bearers, educators and learners around the theme of living heritage. Yet, their contributions are frequently constrained by structural, political, and institutional challenges. Much of their work takes place within non-formal education settings with the boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal education being increasingly fluid and interconnected. NGO initiatives often operate across the boundaries of different educational settings, working with schools while not being part of the formal curriculum or supporting community-based transmission that complements both formal and informal learning. This fluidity presents both an opportunity and a challenge: while it allows for flexibility and innovation, it also poses challenges regarding recognition and policy alignment.

The role and recognition of NGOs in the field of education vary significantly across countries. In many contexts, NGOs are valued as essential partners, particularly where they fill gaps left by under-resourced public systems. However, where curriculum development and educational oversight are highly centralized, NGOs may encounter challenges in gaining full acceptance from government stakeholders. In some instances, restrictions on NGO activities can limit their ability to collaborate fully with governmental and international organizations, thereby affecting their participation in educational initiatives.

In countries with frequent leadership changes and shifting political priorities, NGOs can provide stability and ensure ongoing project continuity, including in living heritage and education. However, their activities – such as teacher training, workshops, or cultural events – may be met with hesitation from education authorities. This is often due to a **lack of clear policy frameworks for NGO involvement** in education, limited understanding among policymakers about the value of their work,

and weak coordination between ministries, particularly education and culture. As a result, NGOs are often seen as implementing partners rather than co-designers of education policies and practice. NGOs may find themselves in a challenging position: while their work may align with cultural policy goals, they frequently lack the access or mandate to influence education systems directly.

In Uganda, the NGO Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) collaborated with the National Curriculum Development Centre to integrate cultural heritage, including living heritage, into the updated secondary school Social Studies curriculum. Although the project faced challenges due to the rigidity of the curriculum and limited recognition among some policymakers and educators of culture's relevance to contemporary development, CCFU's provision of content and teacher training enabled its successful implementation.

Museums and other cultural institutions can take the role of neutral and connecting spaces to bring together bearers and schools. They face, however, a unique set of challenges when engaging with living heritage and education. Many museums operate through permanent exhibitions, which are not easily adapted to reflect the evolving, dynamic nature of living heritage. This raises a critical issue of how museums can embrace more participatory and adaptive models that reflect community practices and knowledge. Some institutions, such as museums run by NGOs, lack clear guidance and institutional support.

To strengthen the role of NGOs and cultural institutions in living heritage and education, several steps can be taken:

- Encouraging museums and cultural institutions to adopt participatory and flexible exhibition models that reflect the evolving nature of living heritage;
- Recognizing the valuable role and long-term contribution of NGOs and cultural institutions by including them as equal partners in co-developing and implementing living heritage and education initiatives;
- Developing materials or guidelines to help them raise awareness among policymakers about the educational value of living heritage;
- Developing clear guidelines and resource to support NGOs' involvement.

NGOs and cultural institutions are valuable partners in bringing intangible cultural heritage to life in educational settings. However, their roles must be better recognized, structured, and supported within national systems. With clear policy alignment, stronger institutional cooperation, and adequate resources, these actors can play a transformative role in connecting communities, learners, and heritage across both formal and non-formal education spaces.

III.2 Core areas of action

Community participation and engagement

While learning is often associated with formal schooling, it extends far beyond the walls of the classrooms. Communities and their cultures play a vital role in shaping educational processes, reflecting a broader understanding of learning as a holistic, lifelong, and community-rooted experience. The transmission of intangible cultural heritage within communities is not only a form of education; it also serves as a powerful means of strengthening cultural identity and continuity. This community-driven transmission bridges generational divides and embraces the diversity of cultural experiences and worldviews. When living heritage is recognized as a pathway to learning across disciplines, the active participation of communities helps ensure that the respective knowledge and practices are transmitted in a respectful and contextually meaningful way. Such engagement can empower vulnerable populations, contribute to improving livelihoods through vocational pathways, and foster mutual respect in culturally plural societies.

However, a number of structural, social, and pedagogical barriers may hinder this engagement. Firstly, knowledge holders can face difficulties in sustaining youth's interest, particularly as traditional forms of transmission compete with digital technologies. Practitioners may feel unprepared to communicate their knowledge in formats or languages adapted to the school context. Moreover, the transmission of living heritage is often context-bound and can lose its meaning when transposed into formal school environments without proper adaptation. In many cases, knowledge bearers are invited into classrooms without adequate preparation or dialogue, which can lead to misunderstandings or disengagement from students.

The geographical dispersion of communities, combined with varying literacy levels, makes the logistics and coordination of education initiatives more challenging and underscores the need for accessible, multimedia-based learning resources. The question of representation also emerges: who speaks for the community in these educational initiatives? Given the complexity and diversity of communities, ensuring inclusive participation can be challenging. Likewise, determining which elements of a community's heritage to include in educational programmes – given the vastness and varying degrees of sensitivity when relating to certain living heritage elements – requires careful, culturally sensitive negotiation. Additionally, logistical barriers, such as travel permissions and coordination between schools and community spaces, add to the practical challenges of facilitating land-based or experiential learning rooted in living heritage.

To address these challenges, several key areas for action emerge.

- Foremost is the need to formally **recognize and valorise** living heritage bearers if and as appropriate, not only as transmitters of knowledge but as educators in their own right. This recognition can take multiple forms: from certification and capacity-building initiatives to community-designed modes of celebration and acknowledgment.
- **Co-creation** is essential; education initiatives should be built in genuine partnership with communities, allowing them to lead the identification of relevant heritage elements and the modes of transmission that best reflect their values and pedagogies.
- Projects that center on **youth participation** – such as digital storytelling or intergenerational workshops – can reinvigorate transmission processes, while also fostering youth leadership and innovation.
- Special attention must be paid to culturally grounded communication strategies that align with the learning preferences of different age groups, including in Indigenous and minority communities where listening, observation, and silence are integral components of knowledge acquisition.
- Ethical principles of safeguarding living heritage must underpin all efforts, ensuring community consent, cultural sensitivity, and acknowledgement of the dynamic, evolving nature of heritage.

Ultimately, the integration of living heritage in education should not be confined to adding content into curricula. It should encourage a shift in educational paradigms – toward pluralism, mutual respect, and recognition of community knowledge systems as essential to a richer, more inclusive understanding of learning and human development.

Governance, policies and structure of education systems

Governance, policies, and institutional structures create the condition and environment in which education systems are shaped, reformed, and sustained. They influence not only priorities and resource allocation but also the level of openness to new ideas and approaches, such as integrating intangible cultural heritage into education. The inclusion of living heritage in formal and non-formal learning depends heavily on the awareness, interest, and capacity of policymakers and decision-

makers, as well as on the coherence and adaptability of existing policy frameworks - conditions that can be challenging to navigate if there is insufficient commitment or alignment.

A recurring challenge lies in the interest or understanding among decision-makers – ranging from policymakers and curriculum developers at the national level to school managers at the local level – regarding the educational value of intangible cultural heritage. In many cases, education departments do not perceive living heritage as a strategic priority and as a result do not design educational frameworks that give it visibility. Living heritage’s potential to support creativity, social cohesion, or critical thinking is overlooked, and living heritage is often seen as symbolic, peripheral, or relevant only for language minorities or rural communities. This contributes to a disconnect between curriculum content and the lived cultural realities of students and their communities.

This is exacerbated by a high turnover among ministry staff and local officials, which disrupts continuity and hampers long-term engagement. In some contexts, political resistance further complicates efforts to advance heritage-inclusive education. Shifts in political priorities, in leadership, or unstable governance structures can stall or reverse progress, creating a disconnect between national rhetoric and local implementation.

Even where policies supportive of culture in education exist, implementation often lags behind. In many cases, there is a disconnect between legislative intentions and pedagogical practice with new education policies failing to trigger the systemic shifts needed for sustainable integration of living heritage. Efforts to scale up pilot initiatives can fall into a logic of replication rather than thoughtful adaptation, overlooking contextual differences and unresolved challenges.

Another persistent barrier is the fragmentation between institutions. Ministries or Departments of Education and Culture frequently operate in silos, with minimal communication or coordination. This leads to overlapping efforts and missed opportunities for synergy. Despite initiatives attempting to bridge this gap, the lack of structured mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaboration remains a serious impediment. In addition, policy frameworks often fail to account for the role of communities and knowledge bearers in education. The top-down structure of many education systems creates limited space for community participation, informal learning models, or pedagogical approaches rooted in lived cultural experience.

The following action can address the challenges:

- **Building awareness and interest among policymakers** and education leaders about the educational value of living heritage.
- Targeted capacity-building programmes for officials in both the education and cultural sectors to **generate political will** and shift institutional mindsets.
- **Strategic advocacy**, supported by **leveraging international frameworks**, countries’ success stories, and the backing of UNESCO and other organizations to help influence national agendas and rally support from parliamentary bodies, ministerial departments, and local governments. Engaging school principals and local education leaders is also crucial, as their support often determines whether living heritage initiatives take root in schools.
- **Policy frameworks** that acknowledge living heritage as an integral component of education – both in curriculum and pedagogy – and outline pathways for its inclusion across formal, non-formal, and informal settings.
- **Coordination between ministries and sectors** supported through interministerial working groups, shared action plans, and formal channels of communication.
- The appointment of dedicated focal points for culture and education at both national and local levels to facilitate alignment, support monitor implementation, and promote knowledge

sharing. These focal points, drawing on inputs from universities, communities, and NGOs, could convene regularly to collaboratively develop solutions, track progress, and promote the scaling of promising practices.

Expected results of action at this level include the formal integration of living heritage – or broader culture and arts education – into curricula and teacher training, the promotion of instruction in local languages, and the encouragement of context-sensitive pedagogy that draws on the content and methods of living heritage practices.

Local-level policies and structures also have a critical role to play. Heritage centres, cultural clubs, and community-led initiatives serve as practical entry points where students can interact with living heritage and heritage bearers. Investing in these platforms – not only through policy but also through financing, labelling, and formal recognition – can help bridge the gap between schools and communities, and act as laboratories for educational innovation.

Finally, the international landscape offers a favourable context to advance initiatives that bridge living heritage and education. The supportive role of international organizations such as UNESCO provides legitimacy, technical guidance, and a platform for mobilizing global experience. Countries can build on this momentum by committing to national reforms in the context of implementing the international frameworks, thereby engaging in peer learning, and gaining access to shared expertise, capacity-building resources, and international recognition.

Curriculum, pedagogies and learning experiences

Curriculum and pedagogies are central pillars of both formal and non-formal education systems. They determine what is taught, how it is taught, and what values and knowledge are privileged. While curricula articulate educational standards and desired outcomes, pedagogies determine the modes of teaching and learning that bring these aims to life. Together, they can reinforce standardized models or support more inclusive, contextual, and culturally grounded education. Intangible cultural heritage has often found space to thrive when integrated in specific subject areas – such as music, dance, arts, and crafts – but remains largely peripheral in formal education at large. Some Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes have linked traditional knowledge and skills – such as boatbuilding or traditional culinary practices – to improving livelihoods, employability and sustainable development. In higher education, new degree programmes dedicated to living heritage have been established.

Innovative approaches have emerged that go beyond teaching *about* intangible cultural heritage, using it instead *as a pedagogical vehicle* to bring real-world, locally relevant learning into the classroom. Some institutions have experimented with alternative learning environments rooted in Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems, confirming a broader potential: intangible cultural heritage should not be viewed merely as content to be added into existing frameworks – it can inform how we **rethink and transform curriculum and pedagogy** altogether.

But despite promising initiatives, numerous challenges continue to hinder the meaningful integration of living heritage into curricula and pedagogical practice. At the institutional level, education systems are often resistant to change, shaped by established structures and political priorities that may emphasize standardization without seeing the contribution of local knowledge and practices. Living heritage is still in many educational systems associated solely with issues like mother-tongue instruction or relegated to cultural extra-curricular activities. Even where there is openness, space within the curriculum is limited, and pressure to meet existing benchmarks leaves little room for innovation. These structural constraints are compounded by deep-rooted epistemic inequalities.

Time and resources are major constraints, both in the design of curricula and in the implementation of initiatives. Many promising efforts rely on volunteerism, short-term pilot projects, or extracurricular

activities. While these demonstrate strong local interest and creativity, they often lack sustainability and institutional support. The challenge of coordinating between schools, communities, and other institutions – each with their own calendars and priorities – also makes it difficult to build lasting partnerships. In this complex landscape, there is a need for systemic change:

- Rather than simply “adding” living heritage into existing structures, a more transformative approach is needed – one that reimagines curriculum and pedagogy through the lens of cultural relevance, relational learning, and community engagement.
- In addition to encompassing policy frameworks, ensuring that intangible cultural heritage is treated as a core component of education requires **curriculum guidelines and sustained advocacy**.
- Efforts should explore diverse options to identify the most suitable approach in each context: intangible cultural heritage can be taught as a subject in its own right, embedded within existing disciplines (e.g., linking traditional knowledge to climate education), or approached through pedagogy that centres students’ lived experiences and community ties.
- Opportunities can arise during curriculum revision cycles, when new content and approaches can be proposed.

In British Columbia, Canada, where some curricula are grounded in the First Peoples’ Principles of Learning, which represent an attempt to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within First Nations societies. They have been developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee, a policy and advocacy organization that represents and works on behalf of First Nations in the province. This is a powerful example of how education systems can be reshaped around Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems.

Strengthening integration into non-formal education is equally important.

- Community-based learning environments – such as Indigenous learning centres or local heritage initiatives – can offer models that are more adaptable and inclusive than in formal education systems.
- **Recognizing and supporting these spaces and facilitating connections** with schools and higher education institutions can help bridge existing gaps and foster mutual respect between knowledge systems.

In some cases, it may be more effective in the short term to work outside the formal education system, such as through community-based programmes. These approaches can offer greater flexibility than formal curricula and may provide space for diverse pedagogical perspectives rooted in community knowledge systems. However, it is important to consider their long-term sustainability for integration with wider educational ecosystems.

Learning environments

The concept of learning environments lies at the core of meaningful and inclusive education, especially when engaging with living heritage. However, mainstream education systems continue to privilege formal classroom settings as the primary locus of learning, often overlooking the critical role played by non-formal and informal education spaces – such as ritual sites, cultural and natural landscapes, community gathering places, and even museums and cultural centres – in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. Given that living heritage is deeply embedded in specific cultural, social, and geographic contexts, efforts to teach or learn about it outside of these environments can risk reducing its relevance and meaning. To support effective learning with living heritage, it is essential to expand our understanding of where and how learning takes place, and to

invest in more flexible, context-sensitive, and community-rooted learning ecosystems. Rather than attempting to fit living heritage into the more rigid frameworks of formal schooling, education systems would benefit from **adapting to the dynamic, experiential, and community-based nature of living heritage**.

Formal curricula may overlook cultural activities, such as attending a storytelling vigil, participating in a local ceremony, or visiting an artisan's workshop, as legitimate educational experiences. These moments, which offer opportunities for knowledge transmission and intergenerational exchange, are not always recognized as part of formal instructional time. As a result, local knowledge may risk being even further devalued, and opportunities for community-based and place-specific learning diminished.

Bringing living heritage into formal learning environments also presents practical and institutional challenges. Organizing activities or inviting knowledge holders on the school premises involves planning and logistical arrangement. Furthermore, institutions operating under governmental frameworks may face limitations in hosting community-based programmes. In contrast, civil society organizations and community-led cultural institutions often have greater autonomy and flexibility, allowing them to co-design and co-manage culturally grounded educational experiences with the communities concerned. Harnessing possibilities for learning with living heritage requires a broad and **inclusive conception of learning environments**.

Museums, cultural centres, heritage sites, and ritual spaces play important roles in providing opportunities for learning with living heritage; they should be acknowledged as integral rather than peripheral. Community-based, experiential, and intergenerational learning represent valuable and complementary forms of education. Non-formal education environments play a significant role in reaching diverse and often underserved groups – including rural youth, adults, and marginalized populations. Efforts to support these environments through appropriate institutional and financial resources can enhance their educational objectives while contributing to the safeguarding and transmission of living heritage.

Development of teachers, educators and educational personnel

Teachers and education personnel are key actors in integrating intangible cultural heritage into education. However, a widespread and persistent challenge is the absence of both initial and in-service training on this subject. Many educators, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, have limited or no exposure to initiatives that integrate living heritage in education or demonstrate their relevance. Teacher education programmes do not systematically include components that address local knowledge systems, participatory pedagogies, or community engagement strategies, and even less frequently incorporate living heritage integration.

Structural limitations within school systems exacerbate these gaps. Teachers frequently lack the time, support, or incentives to innovate or collaborate on pedagogical improvements. Even when teachers are motivated, they are often constrained by limited access to quality training materials, funding, and institutional backing. Furthermore, artists, cultural practitioners, and knowledge bearers invited to schools are often unprepared for the educational setting, which may lead to superficial encounters rather than deep, pedagogically meaningful exchanges.

Capacity development is also challenged by the short-term nature of funding, political turnover, and lack of continuity in training efforts. Existing trainings incorporating living heritage are fragmented or pilot-based, with limited mechanisms to scale up successful models or sustain them over time.

Actions regarding teachers, educators and educational personnel development include:

- Prioritizing teacher training, including providing **localized, hands-on training modules** co-designed with communities and living heritage practitioners, which support culturally

responsive and participatory pedagogies. Training should not only enhance teachers' content knowledge but also develop skills in collaboration, reflection, and ethical engagement with heritage bearers. **Regular in-service professional development**, supported by user-friendly materials such as lesson plans, video resources, case studies, and model activities, can significantly empower teachers in this regard.

- Building **partnerships among educators and communities**. Joint training initiatives can help prepare both teachers and cultural practitioners to work together more effectively. For example, instead of merely inviting a storyteller to perform, students could co-select stories from the community repertoire, followed by guided classroom discussions to deepen understanding and reflection.
- Helping educators understand the links between intangible cultural heritage and global citizenship education (GCED), education for sustainable development (ESD) and social and emotional learning (SEL). These frameworks offer natural entry points for living heritage education, especially in fostering identity, empathy, resilience, and intercultural dialogue.

Teaching materials and resources

A repeated observation is the lack of adequate teaching materials and resources connected to living heritage in education contexts. In consequence, educators often feel unequipped, both in terms of time and tools, to develop contextually relevant resources themselves.

Another recurring issue in education is the predominance of educational materials shaped by dominant political, religious, or historical perspectives, neglecting diversity. These materials may intentionally or unintentionally marginalize or misrepresent the cultural realities of some communities. This can result in feelings of cultural exclusion and underrepresentation among learners, and in some cases, discourage learners from connecting with their own heritage. Practices that discourage the use of local or “home” languages by learners, including penalties for using Indigenous languages, have contributed to a disconnection from local cultures across generations. Integrating living heritage into education emerges as a response to this alienation, yet this is difficult when the learning materials themselves remain rooted in external or outdated epistemologies.

- A **diverse, flexible, context-relevant and collaborative ecosystem of educational resources** is required to respond to multiple contexts and needs. These include educational materials developed in local languages; content in school textbooks related to living heritage; audiovisual didactic materials including podcasts, documentaries, and multimedia modules; digital storytelling and creative media to bridge traditional knowledge and contemporary ways of expression.
- The dissemination, customization or development of **tools or frameworks building on the "lessons learned" from existing projects** can help support implementation across various levels – from international and national bodies to schools and community learning spaces.
- The methodology of **co-creation** – involving educators, community knowledge holders, youth – has been strongly favoured to develop materials. This participatory approach redefines what counts as knowledge, who holds it, and how it is valued in education systems. It promotes learner-centred pedagogy, recognizing youth as active bearers of cultural knowledge. It also fosters the creation of communities of practice that involve educators, learners, families, and cultural practitioners as equal stakeholders.

III.3 Cross-thematic contributions

Below is a selection of discussed thematic areas that are relevant to living heritage, for which the integration of living heritage and education can serve as a cross-cutting enabler.

Digital technologies, artificial intelligence and living heritage and education

The rapid development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of education and cultural transmission, generating both significant opportunities and complex challenges. Within the field of intangible cultural heritage, AI offers promising tools for documenting, safeguarding, and sharing living practices across diverse geographies and cultural contexts. Its potential to do so – especially through digital archiving, fostering local languages and creative expression – should not be underestimated. Moreover, integrating living heritage into education could help equip learners with the critical thinking and ethical awareness necessary to navigate an increasingly AI-driven world. This includes the ability to question who creates, curates, and distributes cultural content, and how such content is used, interpreted, or commodified.

Nonetheless, the application of AI in educational and cultural contexts must be approached with caution. Living heritage is dynamic, relational, and deeply rooted in community life. It cannot be reduced to datasets or algorithms without the risk of distortion or erasure. There is growing concern that AI systems, which rely heavily on online data, tend to replicate existing biases and gaps – especially in relation to historically marginalized cultures and regions where colonial legacies and other power structures have long undermined traditional knowledge systems. Without proper safeguards, AI could misrepresent, appropriate, or invisibilise practices that fall outside dominant cultural frameworks.

These risks highlight the urgent need to prioritize the protection of community rights, ensure the informed consent of knowledge holders, and actively avoid the reinforcement of cultural hierarchies or stereotypes. Any use of AI in living heritage education must be grounded in ethical reflection, with a commitment to inclusive representation and equitable knowledge sharing. In this context, living heritage and education has a critical role to play:

- Embedding **ethical literacy and cultural sensitivity** into AI-related curricula – not only to teach students how to use technology responsibly, but also to connect technological innovation to the "lifeworld" of communities. The richness of everyday cultural experience cannot be captured solely through technological tools; it must also be lived, shared, and understood within its own social and cultural logic. Education systems should therefore offer meaningful alternatives to purely tech-driven approaches, ensuring that digital innovation enhances rather than replaces community-based learning.
- Allowing communities and living heritage bearers to **engage more proactively in global conversations about AI**. As AI becomes more deeply present in educational systems, it is essential to ensure that diverse, localized cultural narratives are not only safeguarded, but actively integrated into the design and deployment of AI tools – so that these technologies reflect the realities of the people they are meant to serve, rather than overwrite them.

Sustainable livelihoods and technical and vocational education and training

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) offers a natural entry point for teaching traditional skills, crafts, and knowledge systems that are part of a community's living heritage. However, it is often too narrowly focused on labour market outcomes. Teachers and school managers face pressure to deliver vocational training that is immediately applicable and financially viable, leaving little space for reflection on cultural value or historical context. Yet, vocational training can be both economically relevant and culturally meaningful. Promising examples have shown that when learners understand the cultural significance of their craft, they gain not only technical expertise but a deeper sense of identity and purpose.

A key challenge is to **strike a meaningful balance between practical skill-building and value-building**:

- Integrating cultural content emphasizing the value of heritage in fostering creativity, innovation, and stronger community ties into vocational curricula alongside practical training can enhance students' understanding of their craft and the connection to their community. Such an approach can also attract young people who might otherwise view traditional skills as outdated or irrelevant, revitalizing interest in crafts and knowledge systems that are at risk of being lost. Storytelling, engagement with heritage practitioners, or site-based learning can support such approach.

In Catamarca, Argentina, traditional weaving using vicuña fibre is incorporated into technical and vocational education and training programmes. More than 400 artisans were trained between 2024 and 2025, and over 140 received diplomas through partnerships with Catamarca University and local institutions. The initiative also includes capacity-building in digital literacy, entrepreneurship incubators, job training, and participation in international fairs. It contributes to community livelihoods in the province while ensuring long-term transmission and cultural continuity. See annex 2.

- **Promoting formal recognition of traditional skills** and knowledge within national qualifications frameworks, including for apprenticeships and non-formal education systems, can help validate and sustain these practices.
- Engaging employers and industry actors to recognize the value of living heritage-based skills is also essential to creating viable employment opportunities. When living heritage is recognized as a driver of innovation and opportunity for the economy, vocational training can become an attractive pathway for livelihoods and living heritage safeguarding.

Living heritage and education in emergency situations

In contexts marked by conflict, displacement, or climate-induced disasters, the integration of living heritage into education takes on an urgent dimension. While much of the discussion around living heritage and education assumes relatively stable systems, countless children today are growing up amid destroyed schools, fractured communities, and the loss of cultural bearers. In such environments, both formal and non-formal education can become lifelines – not only for learning, but for healing, identity reconstruction, and resilience. Intangible cultural heritage can offer **vital emotional and psychological support** to trauma-affected populations, particularly youth. It helps restore a sense of continuity, dignity, and belonging.

Yet, the complexity of actors and instability in emergency settings makes systematic action difficult. Existing efforts – such as ‘Teaching and learning with living heritage’ in Ukraine, which enhanced awareness of living heritage among Ukrainian school children, or ‘Safeguarding Sudanese Living Heritage’ in Egypt, which supports displaced Sudanese students in Cairo by grounding education in shared cultural practices, demonstrate the power of intangible cultural heritage to create safe, meaningful spaces for learning, even under challenging conditions. However, these kinds of initiatives remain rare, under-documented, and are often short-term. There is a critical need to strengthen research, guidance, and support for living heritage and education in emergency situations, ensuring that displaced and traumatized communities are not further cut off from their cultural roots.

III.4 Cross-cutting areas of action

Partnerships and interinstitutional coordination

The integration of living heritage into education demands a rethinking of partnerships – moving beyond the traditional government-led model to **embrace a wider intersectoral constellation of stakeholders** such as museums, cultural centres, NGOs, local authorities, and international bodies, as well as community-led groups.

A recurring issue is that ministries of education and culture often operate in isolation, with little cross-sectoral coordination. The lack of structured collaboration between ministries, and between ministries and other stakeholders, undermines holistic and sustainable implementation. UNESCO National Commissions were identified as strategic hubs for partnership coordination. Their neutrality, stability, and convening power position them well to connect ministries, NGOs, and international partners. Strengthening their action and resources could enhance their ability to serve as long-term facilitators for living heritage in education.

Non-formal education settings – such as community museums, youth clubs, and cultural centres – have more flexibility to engage with living heritage in participatory and context-sensitive ways. They enable experiential learning and intergenerational dialogue. These spaces are also well-suited for involving marginalized groups, including rural youth and adults excluded from formal schooling.

In contexts where government engagement is weak or inconsistent, NGOs often play a leading role. They are typically more agile, better connected to local communities, and experienced in co-developing curricula and learning materials that reflect diverse cultural perspectives. **Strengthening the role of NGOs** in national education strategies – through capacity-building, funding, and formal partnerships – could significantly expand the reach and depth of living heritage and education programmes. Yet many NGOs remain excluded from implementation processes or UNESCO-related initiatives. Participants stressed the need to respect NGOs as equal partners, not just implementers, and to create structured mechanisms for their engagement – particularly through better coordination with UNESCO offices and National Commissions.

Museums and cultural institutions often operate at the intersection of government and community. Many benefit from a degree of institutional independence, well-established education departments, and public trust, enabling them to bridge efforts across sectors. Their ability to engage in both formal and non-formal educational settings makes them valuable actors in connecting policy, practice, and community-based knowledge. **Community-led institutions** offer valuable models that can inform and inspire initiatives by other stakeholders. For example, Indigenous and land-based education systems provide rich pedagogical insights rooted in environmental stewardship, oral traditions, and social cohesion – principles that can meaningfully enrich broader educational programmes.

However, building effective partnerships is not without challenges. In many countries, power imbalances, lack of coordination, and weak institutional memory hinder progress. Without shared strategies, information-sharing, or systems for peer learning, efforts remain fragmented and hard to scale. **Mapping existing initiatives and actors** is a first step toward harmonizing efforts and ensuring mutual visibility. .

Research, data and assessment

The role of research in advancing the integration of living heritage into education is central to strengthening its pedagogical, cultural and social relevance. However, this domain remains underdeveloped and fragmented. A more robust and collaborative research ecosystem – grounded in interdisciplinary methods and community-centred principles – offers immense potential to deepen understanding, improve practice, and ensure the long-term sustainability of living heritage in educational contexts.

Researching living heritage is a vast and complex endeavour because of the diversity of its forms across cultural and geographic contexts. In some areas, the absence of structured, large-scale data collection – particularly multilingual documentation – hampers the recognition and transmission of these practices. There is also a clear need for deeper inquiry into how intangible cultural heritage intersects with global challenges such as climate change, conflict, and peacebuilding. Identifying traditional practices of environmental stewardship or conflict resolution, for instance, could enhance

both the relevance of curricula and the visibility of heritage as a vehicle for learning. There is also a growing call to examine the interactions between living heritage and other systems of knowledge – particularly Western science – as a pathway toward a pluralistic approach to learning.

Mapping and synthesizing practices and terminologies is crucial to building a cohesive body of knowledge on this topic and inspire opportunities for replication, peer learning and strategic alignment. There is a variation in terminology linked to initiatives connecting living heritage and education across regions, e.g. "intercultural education" in Latin America or "Indigenous knowledge systems" in Africa, whose objectives may align with living heritage-related education, which sometimes hampers their identification as such. Additionally, few of these experiences have been systematically documented, assessed or made visible beyond their immediate context.

Moreover, the disconnect between policy frameworks and ground-level practices is further exacerbated by the lack of assessment tools to measure the educational, cultural or social impact of these initiatives. This raises broader issues about the suitability of current assessment mechanisms and the need for tools that reflect both community perspectives and educational goals.

A major opportunity lies in **expanding participation in knowledge production** in the field of intangible cultural heritage and education. Too often, research is designed and conducted solely by academics, with limited engagement of teachers, youth, and heritage bearers. Yet these actors hold essential experiential knowledge that could strengthen the relevance and impact of research findings. Teachers, in particular, are well-placed to document, reflect on, and systematize their pedagogical practices. Supporting advanced studies and action-research opportunities for educators would empower them to act as researchers of their own classrooms, feeding back insights into teacher training and curriculum design. Similarly, youth participation in research – especially through student-led, digital or artistic methodologies – can shed light on how learners experience and make meaning through living heritage in education. Community bearers, meanwhile, should not only be informants but co-researchers in efforts to document and analyse traditional learning systems, exploring both their tensions with and contributions to formal education. This demands **methodological innovation in research approaches** that resonate with the learning mechanisms of communities as well as long-term **funding for collaborative research**.

Financing initiatives

Sustainable integration of living heritage into education faces persistent and significant financial challenges. Across contexts, one of the most pressing issues is the absence of dedicated funding streams for living heritage related activities within the education sector. Most national and institutional budgets do not include specific financial provisions for the kinds of programming needed to meaningfully engage students with community knowledge systems. As a result, schools and educators often lack the resources to invite knowledge bearers – such as artisans, storytellers, musicians, and ritual specialists – or to organize cultural events, site visits, and hands-on workshops that are essential to the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. This financial gap undermines the core educational value of living heritage, particularly its emphasis on intergenerational learning, experiential practice, and community participation. Many promising initiatives rely heavily on short-term grants, in-kind exchanges, or the voluntary contributions of communities, which may not be sustainable in the long term. These constraints are even more acute in Indigenous, rural, or marginalized communities, where traditions may be strong but public education systems often operate under standardized, industrial funding models that are ill-suited to culturally responsive, place-based learning.

Some creative solutions have been tested to overcome these limitations. **Partnerships between cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, and local associations** have offered temporary solutions, allowing educators and communities to pool resources and in-kind contributions

for living heritage education. Nonetheless, these efforts cannot substitute for systemic change. To ensure that living heritage has a lasting place in both formal and non-formal education, it is crucial for states and institutions to **establish stable, long-term funding mechanisms**. This includes creating specific budget lines for living heritage in education at the national level and allocating resources to schools for regular collaboration with practitioners. Financial support should also be extended directly to communities so that they can develop and lead their own safeguarding-related educational initiatives. In parallel, public education systems must make room for more flexible approaches that recognize the costs of outdoor learning, travel, culturally specific materials, and the fair compensation of knowledge holders. Furthermore, increased support for media, museums, and cultural collection centres can bolster the visibility of living heritage within broader society, serving as vital links between formal and community-based education. Funding scholarships and training opportunities for teachers and cultural mediators is also key to building the human capacity required for this work.

Knowledge-sharing and networking

There is growing recognition of the need to move beyond isolated efforts and create spaces – both digital and physical – where practices, resources, and ideas can be exchanged, contextualized, and co-developed to help shape education systems that are more connected to the lived experiences and identities of learners and communities.

Knowledge sharing in the field of living heritage and education serves multiple purposes. It lets practitioners, educators, and cultural actors benefit from each other's experiences, avoid duplication of efforts, and build on tried and tested methods. Exchanging strategies, materials, and project documentation – at international, national or local level – enables stakeholders to discover new ways of adapting living heritage-based learning to their own cultural and institutional realities. Knowledge sharing also highlights the value of living heritage in education by combining evidence and experiences that show its impact on learner engagement, identity, and community cohesion. Such exchanges also promote mutual recognition of learners, teachers, and communities as knowledge co-holders.

A variety of mechanisms are currently used to share knowledge on living heritage and education: diverse information retrieval mechanisms, participation in events such as conferences and capacity-building as well as formal and informal networking, for instance between teachers, schools, cultural bearers, NGOs and researchers during projects, research, or community-based initiatives.

Repositories and platforms such as the [UNESCO Clearinghouse on living heritage and education](#), and the [periodic reports on the implementation of the 2003 Convention](#), provide an overview of policy developments and project results.

There is a need to build more open, accessible and multilingual digital tools and platforms where communities, educators, students, policymakers and institutions can document and share their experiences with living heritage. This could include interactive repositories of curricular materials, manuals, multimedia resources, case studies as well as policy documents. Such platforms could have an international, regional, or national scope and must also address linguistic diversity and user-friendliness, especially for rural or marginalized communities. The integration of AI tools – while promising – will only be meaningful if diverse content is first collected and available in multiple languages. Regular updates about new tools, methodologies, or research findings would ensure that actors remain informed and engaged.

Networking offers an effective strategy for scaling up knowledge sharing and building collective capacity. Teachers, heritage practitioners, youth, researchers, NGOs, and policymakers each bring distinct yet complementary perspectives. Creating peer networks and communities of practice enables these actors to collaborate, exchange challenges and solutions, and co-create resources and

strategies. Initiatives that bring educators and knowledge bearers into the same training or project frameworks have demonstrated the benefits of mutual learning and co-construction.

Regional forums, bilateral exchanges, and webinars can serve as effective mechanisms to connect actors across borders while still maintaining a strong local anchoring. At the local or community level, even simple tools, like a WhatsApp group, should not be overlooked and can serve as repositories of practice, offering inspiration and building a sense of shared purpose. **Youth involvement in these networks** is particularly important: their contributions – as learners, communicators, and digital creators – help diversify how knowledge is expressed and disseminated. To be effective, networking must be inclusive and intentional, supported by structured opportunities for engagement. Building these ecosystems will also require UNESCO and other international actors to promote more systemic approaches – linking intangible cultural heritage and education with global priorities to allow the networks to gain both visibility and strategic relevance.

Communication about living heritage and education

For living heritage to be meaningfully and sustainably integrated into education systems, it is essential not only to generate knowledge through research, participation and co-creation processes, but also to communicate about that knowledge and that approach effectively. The argument that living heritage enhances the quality of education must be clearly articulated, evidence-based, and adapted to a range of stakeholders – from policymakers and education officials to cultural actors, teachers, parents, and learners. This task is particularly urgent in countries where school systems are rigidly structured and resistant to pedagogical innovation. In such contexts, it is crucial to demonstrate the mutually beneficial relationship of living heritage and education.

A key challenge is the lack of a shared language between the culture and education sectors, or between the government, civil societies and knowledge holders. Concepts, priorities, and terminologies often differ, creating disconnects even when goals overlap. Bridging this gap requires the **use of shared language and the development of tailored communication strategies** to the values and constraints of each sector. To this end, communication efforts must be supported by capacity-building for culture and education actors. Efforts must enable them to confidently and effectively advocate for the positive and two-way living heritage and education connection, while enabling them to **understand and convey the contribution to global goals** such as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Global Citizenship Education (GCED), and inclusive, equitable learning.

Communication strategies should intentionally **target a diverse audience**, engaging formal institutions as well as civil society, youth organizations, media, and non-governmental actors. Youth participation is especially critical – not only as learners and heritage bearers but also as communicators. **Empowering youth to co-design digital media campaigns**, storytelling initiatives, and creative outreach strategies ensures that messages resonate across generational and cultural lines. In parallel, strengthening the **capacity of journalists and media professionals** to understand and report on the connection between intangible cultural heritage and education can help shift public discourse and build broader societal support.

Ethical approaches must underpin all communication efforts. Representations of living heritage must respect community values, avoid cultural appropriation, and ensure informed consent. This is particularly important when working with youth and marginalized communities, whose stories and knowledge should be represented with care and agency.

Finally, a more **proactive and coordinated approach** is needed to communicate progress in the field. Updates on tools, policy developments, pilot projects, and research findings should be disseminated systematically, with clear links to broader UNESCO frameworks and platforms – such

as Greening Education, the Global Education Monitoring Report, and the Culture|2030 Indicators. Strengthening these synergies not only amplifies the message but positions living heritage as a dynamic and cross-cutting contributor to quality education and sustainable development.

III.5 Conclusion

The integration of living heritage into education can only thrive when diverse actors – living heritage bearers, educators, learners, cultural institutions, NGOs, policymakers, and communities – engage as equal partners. In line with the UNESCO Culture and arts education framework (2024), success requires inclusive decision-making processes, mutual respect, supportive policy environments, and sustained resources. It also requires coordinated action across partnerships, research, financing, knowledge-sharing networks and communication, ensuring that bearers of living heritage as knowledge holders and educators jointly shape learning processes.

To move beyond isolated initiatives, approaches must be systemic, ethically grounded, and rooted in community agency and intergenerational transmission, reflecting the Framework’s emphasis on learner-centred, culturally responsive, and rights-based education.

Scaling up and “scaling deep” ensures that successful practices not only expand in reach but also enrich and transform existing pedagogical approaches across education systems and societies. Such transformation contributes directly to global priorities for culture, education and sustainable development. When these conditions are met, living heritage and education reinforce each other: safeguarding living heritage while strengthening education, enhancing cultural identity and mutual respect, fostering resilience and inclusion, and guaranteeing the right to culture and education for all.

Through its programme on Safeguarding living heritage in formal and non-formal education, UNESCO plays a catalytic role in advancing these objectives. It fosters international cooperation, provides policy guidance and technical support, develops practical methodological tools and assists Member States in implementing policies and programmes that demonstrate the positive and transformative link between heritage and education. Through this continued engagement, UNESCO ensures that living heritage is safeguarded and continues to enrich lifelong learning opportunities for all, worldwide.

IV. Proposals for future action

Building on the analysis of experts’ contributions in Section III, this section presents proposals for future action to strengthen the safeguarding of living heritage in education. These proposals aim to guide collaboration, capacity development, and policy dialogue within and beyond UNESCO’s networks, supporting both the scaling up and the deepening (‘scale deep’) of successful approaches.

IV.1 Scale up proven approaches

Leverage methodological knowledge, tools, and experience to expand the practical integration of living heritage into formal education systems. The focus is on implementation, capacity building and community engagement, and replication of effective practices.

- Recognize capacity-building as a critical condition for scaling living heritage education initiatives:
 - Disseminate the UNESCO online course ‘Transforming learning with living heritage’ as well as the course on ‘Bringing heritage to the classroom’ among education specialists, students of culture and education, teacher-training institutions to build their knowledge on the topic and orient them towards practical approaches.
 - Train and equip teachers and educators to teach *with* living heritage. This can include: integrating intangible cultural heritage in teacher education curricula; linking training to global education priorities such as Global citizenship education, Education for

sustainable development and Social and emotional learning, promoting joint learning opportunities for educators and practitioners; fostering local communities of practice; and co-developing teaching materials with educators, youth, and knowledge holders.

- Offer targeted training and peer learning opportunities on priority topics such as living heritage and education in emergencies, teaching and advocating for living heritage at higher education levels, fostering positive interactions between education actors and communities, and navigating intersections between intangible cultural heritage and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.
- Identify teachers, school principals, civil servants across all levels, NGOs, community organizations and facilitators as ambassadors or champions to scale initiatives and ensure sustainability.
- Support community members, especially tradition bearers, to acknowledge and assert the value of their knowledge.
- Provide seed funding and technical guidance to develop heritage education hubs (e.g., cultural clubs, local museums, community centres) linked to schools.
- Explore pathways for formal recognition or certification from educational authorities of living heritage-based transmission and educational practice, supporting institutionalization and wider uptake of successful approaches.

IV.2 Enhance conceptual knowledge, methodologies and research

Strengthen understanding, evidence-based research and methodological approaches on living heritage and education to guide policy, practice, and advocacy.

- Generate and systematize data on living heritage and education initiatives, including on learning outcomes, community engagement, and programme impacts, to support research, assessment and evidence-based policy guidance.
- Foster intersectoral dialogue to adapt language, terminology and arguments to different contexts and stakeholders (e.g., culture, education, public sector, civil society), recognizing that each field has its own key concepts that must be connected and translated across sectors to support shared understanding and action.
- Collaborate with higher education and research institutions to analyse outcomes and lessons learnt, and develop evidence-based messages that support advocacy and inspire new initiatives.
- Develop assessment approaches and tools to evaluate the benefits and learning outcomes of integrating living heritage in education, for learners, communities, and societies
- Clarify and articulate the cross-cutting role of living heritage and education via workshops or reflection papers (i) within areas such as education for sustainable development, global citizenship and peace education, (ii) in less developed areas such as non-formal education, cultural institutions, technical and vocational education and higher education and (iii) in thematic areas developed under the Convention such as urban contexts, emergencies, foodways, climate change and artificial intelligence

IV.3 Facilitate policy integration and stakeholder engagement

- Provide technical guidance to States Parties and communities on accessing existing resources and methodologies.

- Support policy-making efforts to include living heritage in national education strategies. This can include organizing regional and national multi-stakeholder consultations, favouring inclusive policy-making models that support community and bearer participation and acknowledge the importance of informal learning spaces, and developing practical guidelines.
- Build understanding and commitment among education sector officials and encourage the establishment of interministerial task forces.

IV.4 Operationalize living heritage in non-formal education and cultural institutions

Building on the Programme's achievements in formal education:

- Create and support peer learning networks and platforms to share best practices and innovative approaches that connect non-formal and formal learning, fostering a more holistic education ecosystem.
- Raise awareness for the availability of UNESCO experts and facilitators, as appropriate, to provide hands-on support, build local capacity, and guide the effective implementation of initiatives.

IV.5 Integrate living heritage into technical and vocational education and training

Promote the inclusion of community-based transmission of knowledge and skills in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), ensuring that living heritage practices are recognized as valuable forms of learning and skills development.

- Integrate community-based knowledge and skills into TVET curricula. Collaborate with heritage bearers to develop learning modules and refine competency frameworks.
- Strengthen instructor and heritage bearer capacity. Develop joint training programmes and resources that enable TVET instructors and heritage bearers to co-deliver courses, share expertise, and mentor learners in culturally grounded skills.
- Implement and scale pilot projects that combine skills training with cultural immersion and community engagement – especially in handicrafts, construction, textiles, food production, and sustainable tourism. Identify and document good safeguarding experiences and educational practices, including through the dedicated UNESCO Article 18 platform, while highlighting their positive social, cultural, and economic impact.

IV.6 Strengthen communication; networking and advocacy

- Engage UNESCO teams and partners to collaboratively review, reflect on, and advance specific initiatives .
- Maintain and expand the UNESCO Clearinghouse as a central source of information and resources on living heritage in education, and actively promote its use to larger audiences.
- Disseminate evidence-based messages on the benefits and approaches to integrate living heritage into education – notably in the context of the UNESCO Culture and arts education framework (2023) – and use them to shape advocacy materials and communication campaigns targeting stakeholders across the culture and education sectors, as well as media outlets.

V. Annexes

Annex 1: Pre-meeting survey questions

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Name
2. Country / region
3. Which UNESCO region(s) does your engagement in connecting intangible cultural heritage and education primarily relate to?
4. In your work to connect intangible cultural heritage and education, what forms and areas of education have you supported or focused on?
5. What role(s) have you ensured in the context of these initiatives?

SECTION B: INITIATIVES, OUTPUTS AND SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

6. What kind of initiatives have you supported or developed in relation to safeguarding living heritage through formal and non-formal education?
7. Have any of the initiatives you have supported or developed led to the creation or implementation of any of the following outputs?
8. Who were the main participants and contributors involved in these initiatives?
9. What short-term changes or effects have you observed as a result of the initiatives you have contributed to?
10. Describe the main positive outcome(s) or changes you have observed (for learners, teachers, institutions, or communities). What conditions enabled this success? Do you think it can be replicated /scaled up?
11. Have any of the initiatives you contributed to helped shape or influence national education policies or curricula?
12. What challenges have you faced in your work on integrating living heritage into education and how have you overcome them (or not)?

SECTION C: REFLECTIONS ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS

13. What opportunities do you see for fostering work in this key intersectoral area, and what specific recommendations would you propose?
14. Based on your experience, insights, and understanding of UNESCO's work on Safeguarding living heritage in formal and non-formal education, which forms and areas of education should be prioritized in the region/country where you have worked?
15. Which partnerships should be prioritized to strengthen efforts?
16. What kind of support or resources would further strengthen your efforts on integrating living heritage into education?

SECTION D: KNOWLEDGE-SHARING

The Clearinghouse on living heritage and education (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/clearinghouse-education>) is a UNESCO initiative to consolidate and share knowledge, examples and tools on intangible cultural heritage and education.

17. How do you currently find and share knowledge related to living heritage and education?
18. What improvements could strengthen the knowledge-sharing process to better support your work and that of others at the intersection of living heritage and education?

Annex 2: Summary of case studies presented during the reflection meeting

These are summaries of the five cases presented below correspond to the meeting Items 3.b. and 5. a.

Crafting change: Fostering community-based development through culture-related TVET and employment in Argentina – Alcira Sandoval (UNESCO Office in Montevideo)

This project aims to empower local communities by integrating intangible cultural heritage into sustainable livelihoods, technical and vocational training, and lifelong learning. Focused on traditional weaving using vicuña fibre, the project revives and promotes key heritage practices such as the *Chaku* (a sustainable shearing ritual), natural dyeing techniques, and ancestral weaving methods. More than 400 artisans have been trained, and over 140 have received formal diplomas in weaving through partnerships with Catamarca University and local institutions. The initiative also includes capacity-building in digital literacy, entrepreneurship incubators, job training, and participation in international fairs – ensuring artisans can access broader markets and receive recognition for their craft. The documentation of oral traditions, such as the natural dyes catalogue, is also central to ensuring long-term transmission and cultural continuity.

The project's success lies in its community-driven approach, official recognition of traditional knowledge, and alignment with the government's employment strategies. It faced several logistical and administrative challenges. Catamarca's vast geography and the remote location of communities complicated coordination, travel, and scheduling. Negotiating timing around local agricultural calendars, cultural events and administrative imperatives required adaptability and close collaboration with the communities and partners. The project's impact is already visible, with artisans gaining confidence, recognition, and international exposure, while also helping to safeguard a nearly lost technique. Ongoing efforts – such as the introduction of blockchain for traceability and expanding international outreach – open opportunities for long-term sustainability.

Bringing living heritage to the classroom: Training of teachers in Thailand and Lao PDR – Linina Phuthitarn (Thailand)

This UNESCO project brought together secondary school teachers from Thailand and Laos to integrate living heritage into formal education. It emphasized several interconnected themes, including safeguarding living heritage, linking heritage to sustainable development, and promoting shared cultural identity across borders. Through interactive workshops, fieldwork, and an online community of practice, participants explored how living heritage could enhance student competencies and foster global citizenship. Educators were trained using innovative pedagogies, community-based research, and interdisciplinary collaboration, resulting in the creation of 35 lesson plans focusing on shared Thai-Lao heritage and contemporary social issues. This initiative demonstrated how living heritage can be a powerful educational tool and how the youth and communities can become cultural agents through the support of teachers.

Despite its success, the project faced several challenges including limited funding, cultural complexity in selecting elements of living heritage, political uncertainties, and differences in national education systems. Teachers identified passion, creativity, and strong local engagement as key solutions, along with the importance of securing school leadership support. Success factors included the involvement of multidisciplinary trainers, a rigorous participant selection process, and strong facilitation. Moving forward, educators highlighted the need for local government support, international teacher exchanges, formal agreements (MoUs) between schools, platforms for showcasing student work, and media literacy training. The ongoing collaboration among Thai and Lao teachers, who continue to share ideas and resources post-project, illustrates the enduring impact and potential for scalable, cross-border educational innovation grounded in living heritage.

Children's Museum in Cairo: Educational activities and partnerships with schools to strengthen the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage – Fatma Mostafa (Egypt)

The Children's Museum in Cairo serves as a vibrant example of how living heritage can be promoted in a non-formal education setting. Through over 15 years of programming, the museum has designed interactive, child-

centred initiatives that integrate intangible cultural heritage into exhibitions, educational activities, and events. These include outdoor displays on cultural diversity and nature, hands-on indoor exhibits using technology, traditional craft and agriculture workshops, summer camps, and inclusive programming for children with disabilities. Events celebrating living heritage in Egypt and beyond – such as traditional puppet shows, folk dances, and crafts – create immersive learning experiences. The museum also developed toolkits, including one on shared Egyptian-Sudanese heritage to support refugee integration, and another in collaboration with UNESCO introducing intangible cultural heritage domains to children through stories, games, and crafts. These initiatives engage young audiences in playful and meaningful ways, transmitting both local and global heritage.

The museum programme faces several challenges. These include the inherent difficulty of making intangible concepts culturally sensitive for diverse communities, balancing interactivity with respect for traditions, and keeping pace with the evolving nature of living heritage. Accessibility to knowledge holders, limited educator training, and insufficient funding further complicate the delivery of quality educational programming. Despite these challenges, the programme is a good example of diverse approaches to integrate living heritage in a non-formal education setting. Its success lies on a creative pedagogy, inclusive learning methods, and strong partnerships. These efforts help educators design respectful, dynamic programmes that are culturally relevant while adapting to the needs and interests of young learners. Cultural representation and sensitivity remain a priority, especially in a multicultural context like Egypt's, requiring ongoing engagement with community practitioners.

Teaching and Learning with living heritage in Greece, 2019 – 2024 – Katerina Christodoulou (Greece)

The project started after the successful completion of the joint UNESCO-EU project Teaching and Learning with Living Heritage in European Schools in 2019. It has successfully introduced intangible cultural heritage into primary, secondary, and vocational education (VET) in Greece. The project benefitted from strong inter-ministerial collaboration and multistakeholder collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, as well as the national ASPnet. Between 2020 and 2023, the intersectoral team organized hybrid teacher training events and workshops, culminating in a 2024 pilot involving 18 ASPnet schools working with 18 local living heritage elements. Outputs included 10 detailed case studies and 58 localized lesson plans. A Greek version of the UNESCO-EU Resource Kit for Teachers was published, further institutionalizing the methodology.

Key success factors that enabled scaling up included sustained institutional partnerships, funding from the Ministry of Culture, and the project's academic relevance – sparking interest from universities. Visibility and engagement were amplified through national hybrid events, summer schools, and cross-sectoral workshops. The initiative is now expanding through partnerships with universities, a UNESCO Chair and museums. Planned activities include additional teacher training workshops and ongoing efforts to integrate intangible cultural heritage into national curricula or extracurricular programmes.

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in basic education in Namibia and Zimbabwe – Mellisa Muchena (UNESCO Office in Harare)

The project was implemented with two core strategies that allowed further its scaling up: (i) capacity-building and knowledge creation, and (ii) strengthening policy mechanisms. Central to the first strategy was the development of a Teacher Training Toolkit, a formative assessment framework, and model lesson plans, all rooted in local cultural contexts of Namibia and Zimbabwe. Over 120 teachers across 24 primary schools were trained, directly benefiting more than 1,000 learners. A key innovation was the whole-school approach, which actively involved community members and heritage bearers in the learning process. Living heritage practitioners played a crucial role in shaping content and sharing knowledge with teachers and learners. Schools were encouraged to develop their own heritage action plans, supported by seed funding (25% of the project budget), reinforcing local ownership and showcasing the relevance and value of heritage-based learning. This community-embedded approach helped position the participating schools as pioneers, whose experiences are now being replicated in three other countries of the region.

The second strategy focused on policy dialogue and institutional coordination. From the outset, the project brought together key stakeholders – senior government officials from both the Ministries of Education and Culture, curriculum developers, education and cultural actors – ensuring alignment with national priorities, which were favourable to heritage-based curriculum. Recognizing the need to shift from teaching *about* living heritage to teaching *with* living heritage, the project facilitated joint sensitization sessions. Specific roles were assigned to government officials to build accountability and foster long-term ownership. Crucially, the lived experiences of learners and the positive outcomes in pilot schools informed the development of two context-specific policy briefs, which have already been adopted as working documents in ongoing curriculum review processes. These efforts aim not only to institutionalize heritage-based education in Namibia and Zimbabwe but also to create a replicable model for integration across the broader region.