

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

**COORDINATION MEETING OF UNESCO CHAIRS AND UNITWIN NETWORKS ACTIVE IN THE
FIELD OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

19 June 2026

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris (Room VI) and online

Concept note and agenda

Background

1. The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme is UNESCO's network for inter-university cooperation, bringing together the expertise of higher education and research institutions to help address the complex challenges facing the world today. Created in 1992, it promotes integrated approaches to research, training and academic activities across diverse fields by strengthening university networks, fostering institutional capacities, and facilitating the international exchange of knowledge and expertise in line with UNESCO's mandate. Today, the Programme includes more than 1,000 Chairs and Networks worldwide, of which around twenty focus on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Through its interdisciplinary approach, the Programme links UNESCO's core fields of competence – Education, Culture, Natural and Social Sciences, and Communication and Information – to generate knowledge, strategic insights, and innovative solutions that contribute to more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures.
2. UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks play a strong role in safeguarding living heritage. They support the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by producing knowledge, developing innovative approaches in support of community-based safeguarding, and exploring how intangible cultural heritage can be linked with thematic areas such as education, climate change and artificial intelligence. At the same time, they play an important role in training the next generation of administrators, decision makers and heritage professionals in the field, helping to ensure continuity and effectiveness in safeguarding efforts. Through these activities, they help translate academic collaboration into concrete support for communities and policy makers working to keep living heritage vibrant and alive.
3. A [dedicated webpage](#) on the 2003 Convention website presents the Chairs and Networks active in the field of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Recognizing that dedicated UNESCO Chairs in this field were unevenly distributed – and notably absent in Africa and the Arab States at the time, a [regional mapping](#) was conducted between 2016 and 2020 with the participation of 66 universities engaged in living heritage to explore the extent to which living heritage is reflected in higher education programmes worldwide. Chairholders also took initiatives to convene coordination meetings of existing Chairs in 2017 and 2018. More recently, a forum for UNESCO Chairs and Networks was held alongside the twentieth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in 2025, providing a platform for exchange and dialogue.
4. UNESCO Chairs and Networks are expected to play a strong role in support of the implementation of the 2003 Convention, and to do so within the broader ecosystem of actors involved in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including States Parties, communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders. A more structured framework for collaboration amongst them, however, could help consolidate existing efforts and improve visibility of activities. Above all, strengthened interactions would support closer alignment of university programmes with developments and priorities in the implementation of the 2003 Convention, as well as facilitate exchange knowledge and good practices, enrichment of their programmes, and the integration of intangible cultural heritage into teaching and research.
5. A coordination meeting is therefore convened with the Chairs and UNITWIN Networks engaged in living heritage. It brings together Chairholders, network coordinators, as well as their colleagues and students, in line with the ambition to broaden participation, close geographical gaps and further open the Convention space to those engaged in training, research, and innovation. Together, participants will reflect on the most effective ways to strengthen collaboration and enhance the role and visibility of universities within the framework of the 2003 Convention.
6. A survey was circulated in May 2026 to collect relevant information on the composition, programmes and activities of the Chairs and UNITWIN Networks. The main results of the survey will be shared during the meeting.

Agenda and timetable

Friday, 19 June 2026	
2.30 p.m.	Registration of participants Connectivity test
3.00 – 3.15 p.m.	Item 1: Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome remarks by Mr Nayef Al-Fayez, Assistant Director-General for Culture • Introduction of the participants • Objectives of the meeting and agenda
3.15 – 3.40 p.m.	Item 2: Status of the partnership with and amongst the Chairs and UNITWIN Networks Presentation by the Secretariat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Chairs and UNITWIN Networks active in the field of intangible cultural heritage • Current collaboration
3.40 – 4.00 p.m.	Break
4.00 – 5.20 p.m.	Item 3: Strengthening the partnership with and amongst the Chairs and UNITWIN Networks - Enhancing coordination, visibility and impact under the 2003 Convention Three thematic dialogues, each opened by a brief reflection from Chairholders. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordination and visibility within the Convention ecosystem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What practical mechanisms could strengthen regular coordination and exchange between the Secretariat and UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks working on living heritage, while also increasing visibility?</i> 2. Knowledge, innovation and capacity-building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How can Chairs and Networks contribute more strategically to knowledge production, innovation and capacity-building for safeguarding living heritage?</i> 3. Regionally balanced and sustainable cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is needed to foster more balanced, inclusive and sustainable cooperation across regions within the network of Chairs and UNITWIN Networks?</i>
5.20 – 5.30 p.m.	Summary and Closing