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

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Seventeenth session**

**Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco**

**28 November to 3 December 2022**

**Item 13 of the provisional agenda:**

**Thematic initiatives on living heritage and sustainable development**

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| **Summary**  In 2021, the Secretariat initiated the development of thematic initiatives pertaining to (i) the economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, (ii) safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change and (iii) the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts. The present document reports on the progress made since the sixteenth session of the Committee in December 2021.  **Decision required:** paragraph 18 |

**Introduction**

1. In line with UNESCO's Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029 ([41C/4](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083)), the Operational Directives of the Convention ([Chapter VI](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-9.GA-EN.docx)) and the Committee's Decisions underlining the importance of highlighting the contributions of living heritage to sustainable development,[[1]](#footnote-1) the Secretariat has been undertaking since 2021 efforts in specific thematic areas to contribute to a holistic approach to heritage safeguarding and sustainable development. These initiatives are also in line with the [Final Declaration](https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/10/6.MONDIACULT_EN_DRAFT%20FINAL%20DECLARATION_FINAL_1.pdf) of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2022), which commended the new impetus given to the role of culture for sustainable development, as a force for resilience, social inclusion and cohesion, environmental protection and sustainable and inclusive growth.
2. Building on the methodology already applied in the work on the [safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in emergency situations](https://ich.unesco.org/en/emergency-situations-01117), the following three thematic areas were identified: the economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (Section A), safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change (Section B), and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts (Section C). Initial actions taken in these three areas were first reported to the sixteenth session of the Committee in December 2021 which invited the Secretariat to pursue its efforts (Decision [16.COM 5.b](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/5.b)). The ninth session of the General Assembly in July 2022 gave further encouragement to the initiative by appreciating the progress made under the thematic initiatives (Resolution [9.GA 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/9.GA/6)). The present document reports on the actions undertaken since December 2021 to further advance thematic work.

#### Economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

1. Economic activities linked with the practice of living heritage, as well as the trade of cultural goods and services related to expressions of intangible cultural heritage, can generate income for their practitioners, contributing to improving the livelihoods of communities who practice and transmit this heritage, as well as strengthening the local economy and improving social cohesion. However, the potential negative impacts of such activities, whether intended or not, on the viability of intangible cultural heritage raise increasing concerns for the practising communities. The threats and risks to intangible cultural heritage that are linked to commercial activities are diverse, from its ‘freezing’, loss or distortion of its purpose and meaning, decontextualization, misappropriation, or over-commercialization. The Convention and its Operational Directives (notably paragraphs 116, 117 as well as Chapter VI.2) recognize the complexity of the interrelations between economic activities and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and suggest general measures for mitigating these risks and ensuring the primary role of communities as drivers and beneficiaries of these activities in line with the [Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage](https://ich.unesco.org/en/ethics-and-ich-00866).
2. The Committee and its evaluation bodies have reflected on numerous occasions on the economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including both its positive and negative aspects, in particular in the context of examining nominations to the Lists of the Convention and periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention at the national level.[[2]](#footnote-2) At its fourteenth session in December 2019, the Committee requested the Secretariat ‘to publish the recommendations of the Evaluation Body on the safeguarding measures and good practices that address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of elements in a guidance note for communities and States Parties’ (Decision [14.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/10), paragraph 14). This decision was made based on recurring concerns expressed by the Evaluation Body regarding (a) the economic dimensions that certain nominations of elements for inscription on the Lists of the Convention emphasize and (b) the perceived risks of planned safeguarding measures that may not sufficiently prioritize the safeguarding of social functions and cultural meanings, thereby leading to their potential decontextualization as a result of over-commercialization, for instance through the branding or labelling of a product associated with a living heritage practice. The importance of a guidance note is highlighted in the Report of the 2022 Evaluation Body presented for examination by this session of the Committee under Item 7 of the provisional agenda (document [LHE/22/17.COM/7](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-22-17.COM-7-EN.docx)).
3. As a first step towards the development of a guidance note that would address not only the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of intangible cultural heritage but provide a more comprehensive overview of the economic aspects in safeguarding actions, the Secretariat undertook a series of actions in 2021 and early 2022, including the compilation of past decisions from the governing bodies of the Convention, recommendations of evaluation bodies, a review of the existing literature, the establishment of a peer review panel of experts and the development of an initial set of case studies from different regions around the world.
4. As a second step, a [global survey](https://ich.unesco.org/en/surveys-on-thematic-initiatives-01277) was launched at the beginning of October 2022 and addressed to more than 1,000 stakeholders of the Convention, including national authorities, accredited non-governmental organizations, category 2 centres and contact persons for elements inscribed on the Lists. The survey aimed at identifying (i) the positive and negative effects of commercialization relating to elements of intangible cultural heritage, (ii) initiatives from States and communities aiming to maximize the positive impact of commercialization for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and (iii) initiatives from States and communities aiming to prevent and mitigate the negative impact of commercialization on intangible cultural heritage. In addition, by reaching out to contact persons of inscribed elements, it is hoped that thematic initiatives could constitute a platform of engagement for communities, providing an opportunity for experience sharing and networking among communities facing similar issues and giving them the possibility to contribute directly to intergovernmental discussions on the subject.
5. At the time of drafting, 138 respondents from more than 60 countries had participated in the survey. The results of the survey and their analysis are expected to provide a broader range of insights on the implications of economic activities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, which will be integrated into the guidance note, in the form of case studies, considerations on new issues or those already identified, and recommendations. The finalized guidance note is foreseen to be made available on the website of the Convention in 2023. Furthermore, the guidance note and the survey will provide a basis for further reflection under this thematic initiative, with the possible organization of an expert meeting on the economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage to be held in 2023 or 2024, pending the mobilization of additional funding to cover the costs of such a meeting.

#### Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change

1. Climate change and the increasing number of climate-related disasters, including sea-level rise, heatwaves, cyclones, droughts, wildfires and flooding, represent a major challenge to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage worldwide. Threats include the accelerated loss of knowledge bearers, the displacement or relocation of whole communities, and the destruction or loss of access to the settings and resources needed for communities to practice and transmit their intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, the Convention's Operational Directives recognize the importance of intangible cultural heritage to strengthening community-based resilience to natural disasters and climate change (paragraph 191). More specifically, they acknowledge the potential role of intangible cultural heritage, and in particular knowledge and practices concerning geoscience and the climate, to disaster risk reduction, disaster recovery, climate adaptation and climate mitigation.
2. The [Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies](https://ich.unesco.org/en/operational-principles-and-modalities-in-emergencies-01143) are also relevant to understanding the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change. Adopted by the General Assembly in 2020, they provide guidance to States Parties and other relevant stakeholders on how best to safeguard and mobilize intangible cultural heritage in various emergency contexts, including those linked to climate-related disasters. They highlight the dual role that intangible cultural heritage may play in an emergency, as both being under threat and as a potential resource for communities to draw on as a valuable tool for resilience. Moreover, they draw attention to the importance of community-based approaches to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, and that communities should always play a primary role in identifying how their intangible cultural heritage is at risk, what measures are needed to safeguard it, as well as how they might draw on it as a resource for enhancing resilience.
3. The Secretariat has had some initial experiences implementing the operational principles and modalities in disaster contexts through its capacity-building work on intangible cultural heritage and disaster risk reduction. In 2021, a project funded by Switzerland in Honduras and the Philippines brought together living heritage experts and disaster management specialists to enhance capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts. Moreover, in April 2022, with the support of Japan, UNESCO launched a three-year project for safeguarding living heritage in emergencies in five Small Island Developing States in the Pacific and the Caribbean (Bahamas, Belize, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu), particularly prone to the effects of climate change. This project will provide timely support to communities at risk to mobilize their living heritage as a source of resilience and to mitigate potential negative effects to their living heritage.
4. It is in this context that the Secretariat has launched a [global survey](https://ich.unesco.org/en/surveys-on-thematic-initiatives-01277) at the end of October 2022 on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change to better understand experiences of climate change among living heritage stakeholders (the survey is ongoing at the time of publishing this document). The survey was also disseminated widely to other key actors working in the field of climate change. The survey sought to solicit examples and experiences on the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change: namely, its vulnerability to climate change and climate-related disasters, as well as its capacity to provide communities with a source of resilience to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to changing social and ecological environments.
5. The results of the survey will feed into a guidance note being developed, which will include case studies demonstrating the complex relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change in different geographic, social-cultural and ecosystem settings. The guidance note will also incorporate the results of a scoping review of the literature undertaken by the Secretariat earlier in the year. It will seek to enhance awareness of how intangible cultural heritage can be harnessed to build resilience to climate change and support social inclusion, while also providing guidance to States on how to integrate living heritage into strategies for climate adaptation and mitigation. In this way, it seeks to contribute to UNESCO's house-wide efforts to enhance knowledge for climate action by demonstrating the importance of living heritage in developing locally relevant, sustainable and inclusive responses to this pressing global challenge.

#### Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts

1. Urbanization is increasingly shaping how societies live and interact. The convergence of multiple communities with different cultures in urban areas, and the unprecedented rates of urbanization worldwide are impacting ways of life and the transmission of living heritage. In cities, cultural practices can lose visibility due to urban dynamics and may come into conflict with other practices or expressions of intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, the same practices provide a source of identity in urban contexts. In this situation, urbanization has brought into sharp focus the need to understand how living heritage adapts, evolves or even disappears in urban contexts. Multiple factors, such as rural-to-urban migration, climate change, land scarcity and increasing living costs, are impacting the practice of living heritage in cities.
2. At a global level, instruments and standards on living heritage and urban development have been developed to set principles and approaches on this issue. Among them, the World Charter for the Right to the City (2005) highlights the importance of the social functions and cultural resources of urban centres, as the primary purpose of the city. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) recalls the need to preserve urban heritage, including tangible and intangible components, to achieve a balance between urban growth and quality of life. The UN Habitat New Urban Agenda 2017 recognizes the correlation between good urbanization and development practices in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, which recalls the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage for sustainable development, as does the Hangzhou Declaration (2013). The Jeonju Declaration on ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage, a Resource for the City of Today and Tomorrow’, recalls how safeguarding living heritage in urban contexts ‘has been under-explored and under- represented in policy-making’. International instruments and standards that focus on the topic of intangible cultural heritage and urban contexts are both timely, and urgent.
3. Since May 2018, the Secretariat has been implementing a multi-year extra-budgetary project, ‘Intangible Heritage and Creativity for Sustainable Cities’, with the support from the private sector of the People's Republic of China, under which pilot actions were implemented through community-based inventorying exercises in six selected cities, namely George Town (Malaysia), Harare (Zimbabwe), Kingston (Jamaica), Ayacucho (Peru), Tbilisi (Georgia) and Irbid (Jordan). The project aimed at promoting the role of culture in sustainable urban development and more specifically, addressing the role that living heritage can play in building sustainable cities. These pilot projects received strong support from the stakeholders in the implementing cities.
4. Considering the results of the pilot project on community-based inventories in cities, the Secretariat started in December 2021 developing guidelines and policy recommendations for the implementation of the Convention in urban contexts. The guidelines are underpinned by the idea that urban heritage is not only expressed in its built or material forms, but through the living uses and practices of people in cities and how they are situated in urban spaces. To help develop the guidelines, a [global survey](https://ich.unesco.org/en/surveys-on-thematic-initiatives-01277) on ‘Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts’ was launched in mid-October 2022 (the survey is ongoing at the time of publishing this document). The aim of survey was to collect input from stakeholders in the fields of urban planning and intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and identify key topics at the crossover of living heritage and urban planning practice. The survey incorporated issues such as: ways to identify living heritage in cities, threats to intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts, methods and challenges when integrating intangible cultural heritage, as well as potential recommendations when living heritage can contribute to the ecological, economic, and social structures of cities, and how to identify key stakeholders.
5. The guidance note on living heritage and urban planning will outline a framework for integrating living heritage into urban planning, accessible to urban planners, policymakers, living heritage communities and stakeholders. It will include case studies on the integration of intangible cultural heritage in master and urban strategic plans, reflecting different urban plans, policies and regulations already in place. Furthermore, the Secretariat will seek to ensure the acknowledgment of communities’ intangible cultural heritage practices in the space strategy of the city and sustainable development processes.
6. The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

DRAFT DECISION 17.COM 13

The Committee,

1. Having examined document LHE/22/17.COM/13,
2. Recalling the Chapter VI of the Operational Directives, Resolution [9.GA 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/9.GA/6), as well as Decisions [14.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/10) and [16.COM 5.b](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/5.b),
3. Reaffirms the important role of intangible cultural heritage for an inclusive social, economic and environmental development, welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the thematic initiatives on the (i) economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, (ii) safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change, and (iii) safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts, and looks forward to the guidance notes to orient the efforts of States and communities in the three abovementioned areas;
4. Appreciates the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, notably through the dissemination of surveys that enable reaching out to focal points of elements inscribed on the Lists of the Convention, and encourages States Parties to facilitate the participation of communities concerned in such initiatives;
5. Requests the Secretariat to continue the development of activities under the thematic initiatives and calls on States Parties and other potential partners to support their implementation through financial and in-kind contributions, including for the organization of expert meetings;
6. Further requests the Secretariat to report on the progress made in the implementation of thematic initiatives at its eighteenth session in 2023.

1. . For the most recent decision, see Decision [16.COM 8](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/8) (paragraph 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . See Decision [16.COM 7.a](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/7.a) (paragraph 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)