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

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

**Eighteenth session**

**Kasane, Republic of Botswana**

**4 to 9 December 2023**

**Item 12 of the provisional agenda:**

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

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| **Summary**  The present document reports on the progress made since the last Committee session under the three thematic initiatives launched by the Secretariat in 2021, namely (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.  **Decision required:** paragraph 30 |

**Background**

1. In 2021, the Secretariat initiated the development of thematic initiatives in the areas of (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. Following the request made by the seventeenth session of the Committee ([Decision 17.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/17.COM/13)), this document presents a summary of the main activities conducted under the thematic initiatives in 2023, as well as key considerations for the Secretariat’s future work on these thematic areas.
2. The development of the thematic initiatives reflects the growing awareness at national and international levels for culture’s important role in sustainable development. 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) underlined that culture, including living heritage, must be recognized not only as a fundamental right, but as a key pillar of sustainability on its own.
3. The increased awareness of culture’s role in sustainable development echoes the text of the Convention, which states in its Preamble that intangible cultural heritage is ‘a guarantee of sustainable development’, while the Operational Directives recognize the ‘interdependence between the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development’ (OD 170). This was furthermore emphasized by the recent [Seoul Vision](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/61291-EN.pdf) for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage and Sustainable Development and Peace, which drew attention to the potential of living heritage to address some of the most pressing social, environmental and economic challenges of our time.
4. The thematic initiatives respond to the needs expressed by States Parties and other stakeholders of the Convention for further guidance on how to practically and conceptually engage with these themes and leverage living heritage for sustainable development. The three thematic initiatives have adhered to a similar approach, comprising:
   * A comprehensive desk-based study, including a review of the normative framework, the existing literature and the development of an initial set of case studies from different regions around the world;
   * A global survey 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;
   * A collaborative peer review process undertaken by selected experts forming an advisory panel; and
   * A dedicated webpage on the Secretariat’s website to share references and relevant documentation.
5. While each thematic initiative is at a different stage of development, the remainder of this document will present the key updates under each thematic according to this overarching approach.
6. **Economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage**
7. Economic activities linked with the practice of living heritage can generate income for communities, groups and individuals concerned, and support livelihoods and decent work in the local economy. This can also support the practice and transmission of living heritage, thus fostering safeguarding and social cohesion. However, communities have also experienced some negative impacts and identified possible risks associated with some kinds of economic activities. These can affect the viability of intangible cultural heritage and/or lead to inequitable benefit for communities. Many communities thus seek ways to maximize the positive effects of economic activities on living heritage safeguarding and sustainable development, while mitigating the potential negative impacts on the viability of living heritage.
8. [The New Delhi Leaders Declaration](https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf) of the 2023 G20 Summit specifically encouraged ‘the international community to protect the living cultural heritage, including [associated] intellectual property, notably with regard to the impact of the over commercialization and misappropriation of such living heritage on the sustainability and on the livelihoods of practitioners and community bearers as well as Indigenous Peoples’.
9. Following the request of the Committee in 2019 ([Decision 14.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/14.COM/10)) to prepare a guidance note for communities and States Parties on a safeguarding approach to address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of living heritage elements, an expert meeting was convened in two parts[[1]](#footnote-1). Part I of the meeting was held *in presentia* from 27 to 28 September 2023, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, while Part II of the meeting was held online on 20 October 2023. Participants included twenty-six experts from diverse geographical regions and with different areas of expertise. The discussion of the meeting was based on the thorough preparations made, including a comprehensive desk-based study and a global survey as well as a collaborative review process undertaken by twenty-one experts forming a peer review panel.
10. The working documents presented to the expert meeting are summarized in the table below[[2]](#footnote-2):

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| **Expert meeting working documents** | |
| Agenda and Timetable | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/1 Rev.3)](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-1en_Rev3.docx) |
| List of participants | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/2 Rev.](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-2_Rev..docx) |
| Normative framework for economic aspects in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/3](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-3-en.docx) |
| Insights from different fields | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/4.a](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-4.a-en.docx) |
| Case studies | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/4.b](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-4.b-en.docx) |
| Survey methodology and overview of results | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/4.c](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-4c_en.docx) |
| Bibliographic references | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/4.d](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-4.d_EN-FR.docx) |
| Analysis of issues and trends | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/5](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-5_en.docx) |
| Draft guidance note on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding | [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/6 Rev.2](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-6_en_Rev_2..docx) |

1. The participants raised several key issues to be considered in the development of any guidance:
   * Safeguarding actions to address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of living heritage elements need to be part of a broader safeguarding approach that also supports communities to enjoy positive and equitable benefits, where appropriate, from market engagement of their living heritage practice.
   * Not all aspects of living heritage were equally integrated into or affected by the market, so the extent to which economic dimensions affected safeguarding could vary widely. In some cases, it was not as relevant as others.
   * Many communities have struggled to control economic contexts affecting safeguarding and achieve equity and sustainability while safeguarding their heritage. This may relate to the power dynamics and asymmetries with respect to third parties, as well as to intra-community dynamics, within and across communities.
   * Indigenous Peoples have had extensive experiences of over-commercialization, decontextualization, misappropriation and misrepresentation, but they have also in some cases been able to mobilize community organizations and political access effectively to address these problems at a collective level.
2. The participants supported the development of a guidance note, emphasising that it must be general enough to cover different contexts, communities, domains and types of market engagement for living heritage, but specific enough to be practically useful, especially where supplemented by sector-specific guidance, case studies, toolkits and other aids. They furthermore underscored the importance of focusing on safeguarding heritage practices and cultural meanings, rather than products when developing heritage-sensitive economic strategies as part of safeguarding approaches.
3. The guidance note can be found in Annex and includes an introduction situating it within the normative framework of the Convention and key considerations. The guidance note suggests a flexible, heritage-sensitive and rights-based approach to responsible and inclusive planning and management for economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. The guidance note does not propose a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, but that safeguarding measures for economic contexts should always be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the communities concerned, as well as to their intangible cultural heritage.
4. The guidance note already provides overarching principles to guide economic dimensions of safeguarding planning, where required by communities, groups and individuals concerned, in line with the principles and ethical frameworks of the Convention. At the same time, further work is needed to practically identify, develop and share case studies, tools and methodologies for developing community-led strategies, enabling consideration of goals, resources, mitigations and trade-offs.
5. **Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change**
6. The 2003 Convention, with its insistence on the primacy of community-based approaches, and its emphasis on the dynamism of living heritage knowledge and practices, has an important contribution to make in discussions on the social and cultural dimensions of climate change. The importance of integrating cultural heritage into international discussions on climate change was underscored in the Final Declaration adopted at MONDIACULT 2022, which encouraged the development of operational guidance on the subject in the framework of the UNESCO conventions. To support the ongoing thematic reflection on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change, the following documents have been prepared:
   1. A literature review on the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change;
   2. A bibliography of the scoping review with more than 2000 references on the intersections of intangible cultural heritage and climate change;
   3. An annotated list of resources and links related to intangible cultural heritage and climate change;
   4. A Background Note presenting the salient trends emerging from the literature review and survey results; and
   5. A Concept Note providing an executive summary of the Background Note.
7. The focus of the Secretariat’s work so far has been to map some of the ways in which the 2003 Convention might conceptually and practically contribute to discussion and progress in this rapidly evolving area. In this regard, the Background Note under development:
   * Maps out basic terms and concepts in the field of climate change and intangible cultural heritage, seeking areas of overlapping interest;
   * Explores the dual role of intangible cultural heritage in all emergencies, including the risk posed to the transmission and viability of intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change and the multiple roles for intangible cultural heritage in terms of risk reduction and resilience;
   * Examines the intersection of climate change and intangible cultural heritage in existing policy frameworks, and their integration in the frameworks of other fields, including development, environmental and rights-based frameworks; and
   * Presents potential strategies and tools for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change, highlighting three priority areas of future action: policy guidance, partnerships and capacity development.

Peer review process

1. The draft documents underwent a peer review process between August to October 2023. The peer review panel consisted of sixteen experts from all regions, coming from a diverse range of disciplines and backgrounds, spanning the fields of cultural heritage, climate change, disaster risk management, cultural rights and sustainable development. The peer reviewers offered valuable insights on the work’s scope, relevance of the concepts used, strategies for policy development and future actions. Additionally, they identified other pertinent literature and case studies to enhance the document’s comprehensiveness. This collaborative process involved both written feedback and online meetings.
2. The peer review process highlighted some of the challenges in working at the intersection of intangible cultural heritage and climate change. One challenge relates to how to position the Convention in relation to the considerable body of work that has been undertaken in relation to the role of local and Indigenous knowledge in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Strong partnerships and intersectoral collaboration, both within and outside UNESCO, will be critical for the effective development of this work. The Concept Note and Background Document being developed represent the first step in mapping the current field and where the Convention might meaningfully contribute. They will serve as a platform for dialogue and awareness raising on the Convention and climate change, in identifying key concerns for future discussion. This documentation will lay the foundation for the organization of an expert meeting in 2024, entailing further reflection on what guidance and tools will be needed for safeguarding living heritage in the context of climate change.

Ongoing initiatives

1. The Secretariat’s efforts under this thematic area were complemented by several ongoing activities undertaken by key actors for the Convention, including category 2 centres under the auspices of UNESCO and accredited non-governmental organizations. These include the organization of expert meetings, symposiums, research programmes and publications focusing on the intersection of climate change and intangible cultural heritage and the contribution of the 2003 Convention to this emerging area. UNESCO has also launched engagement with actors outside the culture sector, such as the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) programme, in collaborating on a call for case studies on the intersections of intangible cultural heritage and climate change.
2. Furthermore, the Secretariat’s work on climate change is informed by its experience in the field of intangible cultural heritage and disaster risk reduction through ongoing operational and capacity-building activities. These include the capacity-building project for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Small Island Developing States in the Pacific and the Caribbean (2022-2025), which aims to support the integration of intangible cultural heritage into plans and policies for disaster risk reduction, as well as through inputs to the UNESCO Culture Sector’s emergency preparedness and response activities.
3. **Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts**
4. Urban heritage is not only expressed in its built or material forms, but through the living uses and practices in cities. It is therefore important to understand how living heritage practices are situated in urban spaces and in what way they can contribute to long-term sustainable development and well-being for their communities.
5. **Background document:** The key achievement during the reporting period was the development of a background document, which synthesizes insights form the literature review and global survey conducted in 2022. The background document outlines key issues, challenges and opportunities related to the topic and proposes methodological approaches to address the specific needs of living heritage in urban settings, with a particular focus on urban planning approaches. The background document aims to:
   1. Understand how urban planning approaches can pose a threat to living heritage, and
   2. Explore how living heritage can contribute to city management and development.

The background document advocates for integrating safeguarding measures for living heritage into urban development policies, planning and legislation, and includes an analysis of four master plans that successfully incorporate intangible cultural heritage. These plans reveal elements, models, strategic actions, tools and recommendations for safeguarding living heritage and incorporating it into urban planning processes.

1. **Global survey results:** Global survey results highlighted the substantial influence of spatial organization and urban management on living heritage safeguarding. Key findings included:
   * Urban planning and development provisions can directly threaten the viability of living heritage, with 57% of survey respondents identifying threats related to rapid urbanization, destruction, or interventions in spaces associated to living heritage.
   * Positive examples of the relationship between urban environments and living heritage, included cultural practices that take place in public spaces, parks, ecosystems, religious venues, museums and performance spaces. Historic city centres and routes used for processions and festivals were also mentioned.
   * Anticipated benefits for incorporating intangible cultural heritage into urban planning, included ‘social cohesion and well-being’ (38%), ‘sense of identity’ (27%), ‘sustainable livelihoods’ (11%) and ‘inter-generational communication’ (7%).

The survey showed that safeguarding public spaces where living heritage is practiced and implementing resilient planning to mitigate negative impacts can help cities accommodate growing urban populations, underscoring the need to familiarize urban planners with the importance of living heritage safeguarding.

1. **Case Studies Compendium:** Through the global survey, case studies were identified, showcasing issues related to inventorying processes, threats, safeguarding measures, and adaptation strategies for living heritage in urban contexts. The Compendium offers illustrative instances of how living heritage has been integrated into urban planning, covering issues related to associated benefits, planning areas, community involvement, and the key individuals and organizations working in the field of living heritage in urban contexts.
2. **Proposed methodology:** The background document includes a proposed methodology aimed at guiding urban planners, policymakers and decision-makers in integrating safeguarding measures into urban development plans. The methodology identifies strategic actions to address potential threats and maximize benefits, providing a flexible framework adaptable to local planning, regulatory and institutional contexts. This methodology outlines steps for integrating living heritage into the planning process, defining roles, responsibilities and a chronological roadmap for ways forward.
3. **Peer review process:** As a next step, the background document, comprising the proposed methodology and Case Studies Compendium, will undergo a peer review process. The outcomes of this review will inform the planning of an expert meeting scheduled for 2024. The purpose of this meeting will be to refine guidance on safeguarding living heritage in urban contexts and explore the role of living heritage in urban planning and management.

**Key considerations**

1. The Secretariat’s initiative represents the opening up of the Convention into new thematic areas, but also poses specific considerations for the Convention’s future work. Progress so far has aimed at laying the conceptual and theoretical foundation on which to develop more specific guidance and tools in the future. Going forward, this work must take into account key considerations that hold relevance not only for the thematic initiatives but also for the Convention’s broader ongoing efforts to harness living heritage for sustainable development.
2. **Intersectoral cooperation:** A central and recurring issue that has arisen across all thematic initiatives has been the importance of intersectoral cooperation, awareness raising and data sharing at all levels. This includes between communities, municipalities and other local actors, across ministries at national level, and between public and private sector actors. This also includes collaboration between sectors within UNESCO and between UNESCO and other key international stakeholders, including relevant United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization and Convention on Biological Diversity, among others. With view to developing more holistic approaches to heritage safeguarding, synergies will be critical between UNESCO Conventions working on culture, notably the 1972 and 2005 Conventions, and on the links between tangible and intangible heritage. Moreover, it will be important to explore interconnections between the three thematic initiatives themselves, examining where and how they may overlap and inform each other.
3. **Context-specific approaches:** A key challenge in developing guidance under each of the thematic areas will be in responding to the specific needs, contexts and concerns of the multiple stakeholders involved. Differences in context, and the specificity of the relationship of individuals and groups of practitioners and entrepreneurs within different communities should be recognized. Moreover, the guidance developed must account for the diversity of cultural heritage within different cultural, social, economic and environmental contexts. This diversity prevents a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, instead favouring general principles that can accommodate the varying contexts, communities and domains involved. Additionally, following the initial overarching reflections led by the Secretariat, further consultation, discussion and research will be required to develop sector-specific guidance, case studies and toolkits. Such tools will enhance the practical application of the overarching guidance in the specific contexts of each thematic area.
4. **Cultural and human rights perspectives:** A crucial aspect in shaping the development of any guidance under the thematic areas will be the integration of cultural and human rights perspectives. This entails a consideration of fundamental rights, including the right to access and enjoy all forms of cultural heritage, to take part in cultural life, the right of members of minorities to enjoy their own culture, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage. In this regard, any guidance developed should be in line with the relevant frameworks, instruments and standards at the international level, including existing international human rights instruments, as well as the provisions and principles of the 2003 Convention, including the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.
5. The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

DRAFT DECISION 18.COM 12

The Committee,

1. Having examined document LHE/23/18.COM/12 and its annex,
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), [16.COM 5.b](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/5.b), [17.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/17.COM/13),
3. Further recalling 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), the New Delhi Leaders Declaration of 2023 and the 2023 Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace,
4. Reaffirms the important role of intangible cultural heritage for an inclusive social, economic and environmental development, and 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;

**Economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage**

1. Takes note of the outcomes of the expert meeting on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and thanks the experts for their efforts and pertinent contributions;
2. Further takes note of the guidance note annexed to this decision as a useful reference document addressing the main issues at stake and encourages the Secretariat to enhance knowledge gathering in specific issues related to the economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding through the collection of case studies and experiences;
3. Underlines the importance of ensuring better intersectoral cooperation on the issue of economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, including between local and national levels of government, UNESCO’s cultural conventions and other relevant international organizations;

**Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change**

1. Appreciates the initial findings from the reflection undertaken so far and invites the Secretariat to pursue its endeavours through the organization of an expert meeting to develop guidance for States Parties and other relevant stakeholders on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change;
2. Welcomes the first steps undertaken to initiate dialogue with other institutions with expertise in the field of climate change and disaster risk reduction and further encourages the Secretariat to explore linkages and cooperation with relevant UN and international bodies working in these fields;
3. Acknowledges the Secretariat’s existing capacity-building efforts on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts and calls on the Secretariat to consolidate this experience through the development of further tools and case studies;

**Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts**

1. Commends the Secretariat for the work achieved so far by identifying issues and gathering pertinent case studies and also encourages the Secretariat to continue its reflection under this thematic initiative in order to refine guidance on safeguarding living heritage in urban contexts and explore the role of living heritage in urban planning and management;

**Ways forward**

1. Underscores the need for strengthened intersectoral cooperation, awareness raising and information sharing under the thematic areas;
2. Further requests the Secretariat to report on the progress made in the implementation of thematic initiatives for examination by the Committee at its nineteenth session in 2024.

**Annex**

**Introduction to the guidance note[[3]](#footnote-3)**

1. Intangible cultural heritage (or living heritage) covers various domains of knowledge and practice, including oral poetry and other forms of oral expressions, performing arts such as dance or song, social practices, including rituals and festive events, agricultural practice and other forms of knowledge about nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. Intangible cultural heritage has always played a vital role both in sustaining people’s well-being, identity and continuity, and – often – in generating income and supporting decent work and livelihoods within communities. From the perspective of those practising the heritage, these functions are frequently interlinked. Economic engagement may be initiated by communities, groups and individuals concerned, or by third parties. This can include, but is not limited to, gift, barter or trade of tangible items such as traditional foods or crafts produced through intangible cultural heritage practice, reimbursement for transmission of skills or broader economic benefit from performances or festivals. Economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage, as well as associated objects and places, has thus, in many, although not all, cases, been an important aspect of its meaning and viability for communities, groups and individuals concerned.[[4]](#footnote-4) Ensuring appropriate and equitable benefit from intangible cultural heritage practice can encourage young people to appreciate and practise their heritage, and thereby promote transmission. However, economic activity does not in all cases contribute to positive safeguarding outcomes (which could be termed cultural sustainability), or ensure sustainable and equitable cultural, social, economic or environmental benefits to communities concerned. Economic engagement may even negatively affect intangible cultural heritage practices, meanings and values, and associated tangible heritage.
2. The texts of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter, the Convention) recognize both positive and negative aspects of economic engagement for safeguarding and sustainable development. On the one hand, the Convention’s Preamble states that intangible cultural heritage is ‘a guarantee of sustainable development’, while the Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention recognize the ‘interdependence between the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development’ (paragraph 170) and recognize that intangible cultural heritage can be ‘a powerful force for inclusive and equitable economic development’ (paragraph 184, see also paragraphs 116, 170, 185 and 186). As the Operational Directives and the Organs of the Convention warn, on the other hand, overly intensive economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage (over-commercialization), inappropriate use outside its usual context (decontextualization), unauthorized use by third parties (misappropriation), inaccurate representation of the intangible cultural heritage (misrepresentation) and loss of control over economic dimensions by communities, groups and individuals concerned (dispossession, paragraphs 185(b)(ii) and 186(b)(ii) of the Operational Directives), may have negative consequences both for livelihoods and the viability of intangible cultural heritage, including its meanings and values (paragraphs 102, 116-117, 120 and 171 of the Operational Directives).
3. While mitigations against negative impacts of market engagement have been proposed in the texts of the Convention and decisions of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter, the Committee), there is no specific guidance available on how to manage economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding under the Convention.[[5]](#footnote-5) In December 2019, the Committee thus requested[[6]](#footnote-6) that the Secretariat prepare a guidance note for communities, and States Parties concerning ‘the safeguarding measures and good practices that address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of elements’ of intangible cultural heritage. In accordance with the normative framework of the Convention, safeguarding actions to address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of elements of intangible cultural heritage should be part of a broader safeguarding approach that also supports communities, groups and individuals concerned to enjoy equitable benefits, where they wish to do so, from appropriate economic activity associated with their intangible cultural heritage.
4. [The 2023 Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/61291-EN.pdf) has called for the implementation of ‘heritage-sensitive economic approaches and safeguarding measures’ that harness living heritage for improving the sustainable livelihoods of communities, while fostering continued practice and transmission of their cultural heritage in a meaningful and appropriate way. [The New Delhi Leaders Declaration of 2023](https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf) has encouraged ‘the international community to protect the living cultural heritage, including [associated] intellectual property, notably with regard to the impact of the over- commercialization and misappropriation of such living heritage on the sustainability and on the livelihoods of practitioners and community bearers as well as Indigenous Peoples’. Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities, in particular, have suffered considerable unwanted and inappropriate third party economic use of their intangible cultural heritage, but have also demonstrated ways to mobilize community and third party responses to address them. These experiences can be very relevant in different contexts, to communities safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage and engaging in economic activities depending on it.
5. Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage can contribute to equitable and inclusive economic growth, reducing poverty and inequalities across all sectors and strata of society (paragraphs 174 and 183-184 of the Operational Directives). Economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage should be consistent with safeguarding (Ethical Principles, paragraph 1), not undermine its viability (Ethical Principles, paragraph 2), respect the ‘moral and material interests’ of communities, groups and individuals concerned, benefit them (Ethical Principles, paragraph 7), generate income, and secure productive employment and decent work (paragraphs 185-186 of the Operational Directives).
6. Where they wish to engage in, or are otherwise affected by, economic activities regarding their intangible cultural heritage, communities, groups and individuals concerned should lead the process of managing economic dimensions of safeguarding, supported as needed by other stakeholders. All stakeholders have a duty to base any such engagement on the active involvement and free, prior, informed and sustained consent of communities, groups and individuals concerned, in line with article 15 of the Convention, various Operational Directives and the Convention’s Ethical Principles (paragraphs 1 and 4). In ratifying the Convention, States Parties undertake to ‘take the necessary measures to ensuring the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in their territory’ with the participation of communities concerned (articles 11(a) and 15). Governments, non-governmental and cultural organizations, and the private sector, may develop policies, assistance programmes, and capacity-building initiatives to this end. Legal frameworks such as contract law and intellectual property law, consultative mechanisms and marketing support, should involve and represent community interests and protect their rights.
7. Safeguarding planning that takes economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage into account should be rights-based, ensuring ‘that the rights of the communities, groups and individuals that create, bear and transmit their intangible cultural heritage are duly protected when … engaging in commercial activities’ (paragraph 104 of the Operational Directives). The Convention does not create new rights in regards to intellectual property or use of biological and ecological resources linked to intangible cultural heritage, according to article 3(b). However, some countries have already implemented legal protections for intangible cultural heritage, traditional knowledge or traditional cultural expressions at the national level. In the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC) is facilitating international text-based negotiations on international legal instruments for the protection of traditional knowledge (TK), traditional cultural expressions (TCEs) and genetic resources (GRs), that may help communities manage economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Provisions in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), its Nagoya Protocol and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), underline the importance of respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities, and finding ways to ensure that communities can better control, manage and benefit from economic dimensions of their intangible cultural heritage. This is supported by the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (2018), as UNESCO is committed to the full realization of the provisions of the Declaration.
8. Developing heritage-sensitive and rights-based approaches to managing economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage can help to address both sustainability and safeguarding concerns in rapidly changing contexts. The need to consider limits on unsustainable economic growth at a time of climate crisis, and the use of digital technologies, such as social media and artificial intelligence, pose new challenges and possible threats to the viability of intangible cultural heritage and livelihoods of its practitioners. If the digital divide is adequately addressed, such technologies may also offer opportunities for alternative approaches to managing economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and integrating climate-related resilience strategies into the process.
9. The diversity of the intangible cultural heritage, of the communities who are its stewards, custodians or guardians, and of the economic contexts in which it can be used by different stakeholders, prevents a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to safeguarding planning and management, however. Many intangible cultural heritage practices (in such domains as handicrafts, performing arts or agricultural technologies) might disappear without a market for associated products or services. Other forms of intangible cultural heritage, such as sacred rituals, social practices and certain kinds of community knowledge, if exploited commercially, may lose the meanings and values communities associate with their intangible cultural heritage, or experience unwanted changes in them. Communities may wish to restrict access and manage economic activity tightly in such cases.[[7]](#footnote-7) Not all aspects of intangible cultural heritage are thus associated with economic activity, or equally integrated into, or affected by, gift, barter or cash economies, so the extent to which economic dimensions affect safeguarding could vary widely. The opportunities and risks or threats identified by communities (Ethical Principles, paragraphs 6 and 10) might depend partly on the nature of the intangible cultural heritage and its usual context of practice and transmission, as well as prior engagement in the market. Different kinds of products and services based on intangible cultural heritage have been sold or exchanged in the past, and can in future be developed, innovating in various ways in response to changing contexts. Some changes or innovations may be considered more appropriate than others within a community (Ethical Principles, paragraph 8).
10. Many communities face challenges in managing economic dimensions of safeguarding and achieving equitable benefit from activities associated with them. These challenges may relate to relationships with third parties, as well as to dynamics within communities or groups, including relationships between communities and individual community entrepreneurs. Challenges arise in part from a lack of information, experience or resources to control market engagement and power asymmetries in respect of third parties. Power asymmetries can also be present within and across communities, through experiences of structural disadvantage or discrimination linked for example to gender, race or ethnic identities, age, rural or urban location or migrant status. This can limit the ability of some communities, groups and individuals to benefit from opportunities, or to protect themselves from third parties exploiting aspects of their intangible cultural heritage without their consent, and contrary to their interests. Economic engagement may also result in internal disputes, as communities are not homogenous, and the rights and interests of individual practitioners and heritage entrepreneurs within a community may be only partially aligned with community as a whole. Those earning income through their intangible cultural heritage may respond in different ways to intangible cultural heritage-related market opportunities, threats and risks. They may also enjoy different rights in the market. While intangible cultural heritage may be a shared resource recognized by communities, some aspects of it may be subject to individual rights protection (for example copyright) or other legal restrictions. There may be customary limitations on access to or use of intangible cultural heritage beyond (and sometimes within) the community or group that need to be observed.
11. The guidance note thus suggests a flexible, heritage-sensitive and rights-based approach to responsible and inclusive planning and management for economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. Safeguarding has to be led by communities, groups and individuals concerned, assisted where needed by different stakeholders, including States and State agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, and the private sector. The guidance note can provide principles to guide economic dimensions of safeguarding planning, where required by communities, groups and individuals concerned, and support collaboration within communities and between them and third parties.
12. The guidance note can inform the work of the General Assembly, the Committee and its Evaluation Body, and the UNESCO Secretariat. Both positive and negative economic dimensions that may be associated with intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding should be considered when evaluating nominations to the Lists and proposals for the Register of the Convention, or International Assistance requests, for example. International Assistance and capacity-building mechanisms under the Convention could be used to assist communities, groups and individuals concerned, and third parties, to benefit from insights and intersectoral cooperation on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding.
13. Information about economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage, and management of these processes within States should be collected (for example via specific indicators in the periodic reporting process, such as B15). Additional indicators to this end may be developed as part of the periodic reporting process in the reflection year (2025). Information could be shared via platforms on Periodic Reporting or the Article 18 mechanism. This can contribute to the development of further guidance on this issue.
14. Further research is also needed on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding under the Convention to inform more detailed guidance. This can include deep dives into specific issues such as the role of economic meanings and values, opportunities and risks associated with intangible cultural heritage by communities, groups and individuals concerned, new digital environments and the use of inventories, or incorporating insights from tangible heritage conservation, biodiversity and climate change management into intangible cultural heritage safeguarding methodologies. It is important to develop practical tools including stakeholder- or sector-specific toolkits and case studies, tailored to the needs of communities, States, NGOs and public and private sectors, and specific sectors such as tourism or foodways and agriculture.
15. Appropriate strategies for awareness raising about and effective use of this guidance note should be developed and implemented. There is also a need for intersectoral awareness raising, cooperation and data sharing between local and national levels of government, across ministries, across the 1972, 2003 and 2005 Conventions within UNESCO, their associated organizations, and across international organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

**Guidance note on economic dimensions of**

**intangible cultural heritage safeguarding under the 2003 Convention**

In December 2019, the Intergovernmental Committee requested[[8]](#footnote-8) that the Secretariat prepare a guidance note for communities and States Parties concerning ‘the safeguarding measures and good practices that address the risk of decontextualization and over-commercialization of elements’ of intangible cultural heritage. Drawing on the approach taken in the Operational Directives (especially Chapter VI) and the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (Decision [10.COM 15.a](https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/10.COM/15.A)), such measures should be integrated into safeguarding planning that can also, in many cases, support sustainable livelihoods and decent work.

In accordance with the Convention’s Ethical Principles and paragraph 104 of the Operational Directives, the primary role of communities, groups and individuals concerned should be respected in decisions on economic activity associated with their intangible cultural heritage, based on their free, prior, informed and sustained consent. As custodians, they are the ones to decide whether and how to share their intangible cultural heritage in an economic context. They should be the primary beneficiaries of fair and equitable remuneration generated through their intangible cultural heritage. Their rights and interests should be respected and protected in economic contexts, including customary practices governing access. External judgments of what constitutes over-commercialization, decontextualization, misappropriation or misrepresentation should be avoided.

This guidance note thus suggests a flexible, heritage-sensitive and rights-based approach to management of economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding, meeting the specific needs of different communities, groups and individuals, as well as their intangible cultural heritage.

1. **Integrating economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage in safeguarding planning**
2. Communities, groups and individuals concerned, and community-led organizations, where they consider it to be appropriate and necessary, are invited to use heritage-sensitive planning and management processes to support responsible and sustainable economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage practice and transmission, while ensuring safeguarding;
3. All stakeholders, together with communities, groups and individuals concerned as primary actors in safeguarding, are invited to consider the following steps in developing such safeguarding measures, where appropriate:
   1. Identify, including in community-led research, inventories and (if appropriate) nomination files under the Convention, the meanings and values associated with their intangible cultural heritage whether cultural, social, environmental or economic, any customary practices governing access and use, information about appropriate contexts, acceptable boundaries of continuity and change, and potential risks and benefits of economic activity associated with their intangible cultural heritage;
   2. Determine how intangible cultural heritage practice, and any associated responsible production and consumption, may benefit communities, groups and individuals in a sustainable cultural, social, environmental and economic way, while safeguarding the heritage concerned and ensuring continued intangible cultural heritage practice and transmission;
   3. Develop awareness-raising plans and/or actions to communicate the meanings and values of the intangible cultural heritage to others, and the safeguarding strategies adopted;
   4. Identify existing cases of inappropriate economic uses of their intangible cultural heritage, such as over-commercialization, misappropriation, dispossession, misrepresentation and decontextualization, and develop appropriate prevention, mitigation and redress strategies for them;
   5. Enable internal processes for monitoring and evaluation of economic activity associated with their intangible cultural heritage practice and transmission, and early identification of challenges, and identify steps to implement them.
4. All stakeholders, together with communities, groups and individuals as primary actors in safeguarding, should, where requested by them:
   1. Support internal community consultation, dispute resolution and decision-making about economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding;
   2. Support and facilitate capacity building, networking and sharing of experiences within and among communities, regarding the relationship between safeguarding and economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage, and how it can be used to achieve sustainable, equitable and inclusive economic benefit, reducing poverty and inequalities; and
   3. Support and/or reinforce collective actions and cooperative community structures to ensure sustainable, equitable and inclusive economic benefit associated with their intangible cultural heritage, reducing poverty and inequalities.
5. **Collaboration and partnerships**
6. Collaborations and partnerships should be fostered, where requested by communities, both among and between communities, groups and individual concerned and different stakeholders, to support communities in developing heritage-sensitive approaches to economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding;
7. All stakeholders are invited, where requested by communities, groups and individuals, to provide access to legal and financial support and advice, start-up capital, suitable business partners, marketing platforms and mechanisms for equitable benefit from economic activities associated with intangible cultural heritage;
8. Awareness-raising programmes should be developed for third parties, including entrepreneurs and audiences or consumers, to promote understanding, appreciation and respect for intangible cultural heritage, and related products and services created and valued by communities, groups and individuals concerned; and
9. Good practice examples of heritage-sensitive approaches to economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding that promote community benefit should be developed and shared with relevant stakeholders, as part of capacity-building initiatives to increase third-party awareness of risks and benefits for communities, groups and individuals concerned.
10. **Policies and actions by States and intergovernmental organizations**
11. Appropriate and well-coordinated legal and policy frameworks, ethical guidelines, protocols, dispute resolution processes, mediation mechanisms or consultative bodies and other interventions including financial support, education and awareness-raising, should be developed to maximize beneficial opportunities for communities, groups and individuals concerned linked to economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage practice and transmission, while preventing and mitigating threats and risks. Interventions can relate to multiple sectors aside from culture, including trade and industry, tourism, agriculture, food and health;
12. Robust and regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, with appropriate indicators, should be established on the regional, national or sub-national level, in which communities and/or organizations are fairly represented, to determine the challenges faced by communities, groups and individuals regarding economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Based on such information, and data from inventories and nomination files, the opportunities, benefits, and potential risks of economic activity associated with intangible cultural heritage practice and transmission in different domains, communities or groups, sectors of society, regions or parts of a country should be reviewed and evaluated, together with communities, groups and individuals concerned as primary actors in safeguarding; and
13. Mitigations should be developed and implemented against identified harms arising from economic activity to ensure safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage and to support equitable community benefit and control over it, where required by them. Prevention and mitigation actions should pay particular attention to addressing possible power asymmetries, both within communities and groups, as well as between them and third parties using their intangible cultural heritage for economic gain. Such mitigations can include awareness-raising and capacity-building for communities, groups and individuals concerned and third parties in respect of legal and policy frameworks and enforcement of rights. Specific mitigations may be developed for elements of endangered intangible cultural heritage and vulnerable or disadvantaged communities or groups.

1. See the [webpage](https://ich.unesco.org/en/expert-meeting-on-economic-dimensions-01316) of the Convention dedicated to this Category VI meeting of experts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Documents 3-6 were prepared with the contribution of a peer review panel who provided inputs on earlier drafts. Document 6 was revised following Part I of the meeting to reflect the feedback from the participants and was then presented and discussed in detail during Part II of the meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This document was prepared by the consultant Harriet Deacon, with assistance from participants to the Category VI expert meeting (see List of participants in document [LHE/23/EXP THEMA-ECO/2 Rev.](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_THEMA-ECO-2_Rev..docx)) and Peer Review Panel on economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding (Gulnara Aitpaeva, Cristina Amescua, Chiara Bortolotto, Shubha Chaudhuri, Emily Drani, Nigel Encalada, Léonce Ki, Sharon Le Gall, Joseph Lo, Lucas Lixinski, Aroha Mead, Ancila Nhamo, Desmond Osaretin Oriakhogba, Diego Rinallo, Ana Shanshiashvili, Ahmed Skounti, Rieks Smeets, Silja Somby, Junjie Su, Anita Vaivade and Siri Wernberg), in collaboration with the UNESCO Living Heritage Entity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In this guidance note, the terminology ‘communities, groups and where applicable, individuals’ will be used, following the texts of the Convention. However, differences in context, and the specificity of the relationship of individuals and groups of practitioners and entrepreneurs within different communities, including Indigenous Peoples, should be recognized. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As the Evaluation Body has noted, see document [LHE/19/14.COM/10](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-10-EN.docx) paragraph 37; document [LHE/20/15.COM/8](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-20-15.COM-8-EN.docx) paragraph 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Decision 14.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/10) paragraph 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Document [ITH/14/9.COM/10](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-14-9.COM-10+Add.3-EN.doc) paragraph 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Decision 14.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/10) paragraph 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)