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

**Expert meeting in the framework of the reflection on a broader implementation of Article 18 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Stockholm, Sweden**

**19 to 21 April 2023**

**Three reflection topics**

**Introduction**

1. Through this document, the Secretariat of the Convention intends to provide technical information to facilitate the discussions during the Category VI meeting on a broader implementation of Article 18 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, to be held from 19 to 21 April 2023 in Stockholm, Sweden. The document addresses three reflection topics, established for this purpose by the seventeenth session of the Committee (Decision [17.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/17.COM/10)), and considers various issues that were already raised during the Global reflection (2018–2022) on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention (hereafter, ‘the Global Reflection’).[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, this document is to be read in conjunction with another working document: ‘Background and objectives’ (document [LHE/23/EXP ART18/2](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_ART18-2_EN_.docx)).
2. This new reflection, which was first initiated by the sixteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee (Decision [16.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/14)), is essentially a follow-up to the aforementioned Global Reflection. It therefore seems appropriate, when exploring the full potential of Article 18, to follow the same twofold guiding principle that was employed during the Global Reflection, and to:

a) place, in the spirit of Article 15 of the Convention and of the [Ethical Principles](https://ich.unesco.org/en/ethics-and-ich-00866) adopted by the Committee in 2015, communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals at the centre of efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, and

b) enhance their active participation in all the steps of the listing mechanisms, including the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, which was created by means of Operational Directives (paragraphs 42 to 46) as a first tool for implementing Article 18 of the Convention.

**Topic 1: Improving access to and increasing the visibility of the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices**

1. The first reflection topic is aimed at improving the utilization of the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices itself. Picking up from the issues discussed during the Global Reflection, the new reflection may address the following issues, with the aim of improving the visibility of the Register and access to it, both for those who wish to share successful practices and for those who wish to benefit from good practices and experiences elsewhere in the world, or in their particular region or country.
2. **Functioning of the Register**: One of the weaknesses identified in the functioning of the Register is that that it has not been able to serve satisfactorily as a source of inspiration and information for communities and stakeholders around the world looking for safeguarding advice. The issue is partly quantitative since, so far, not enough programmes, projects or activities (no more than thirty-three selections in fourteen years) have been selected to cover a broad range of safeguarding issues and to form a useful set of experiences. A related issue might be the non-observance of the principle of equitable geographic distribution advocated in paragraph 6 of the Operational Directives.
3. The functioning of the Register might also be improved by a clearer presentation of the selected practices, for instance by developing possibilities for searches based on safeguarding themes. Furthermore, it is important to consider to what extent the Register has been functioning in relation to the four main purposes of the 2003 Convention, as stipulated in Article 1 of the Convention, and how to further enhance its contribution to these objectives.
4. **Follow-up and monitoring**: Notwithstanding paragraph 45 of the Operational Directives, the current embedding of the Register does not include a dedicated follow-up and monitoring system, unlike the Representative List and the Urgent Safeguarding List. Yet there is interest in learning about post-selection experiences: what happened after the selection; how were ideas and methods of safeguarding shared; how often, and with whom? It would be pertinent to reflect on whether, and if so how, information on follow-up and monitoring could be integrated into the periodic reporting framework.
5. **Criteria**: One very concrete outcome of the Global Reflection was the deletion of selection criterion P.9 from the set of criteria presented in Operational Directive 7 (Document [LHE/23/EXP ART 18/2](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-23-EXP_ART18-2_EN_.docx)). The Part I and Part II meetings of the Open-ended intergovernmental working group that carried out the Global Reflection also recommended the ‘[d]eletion or reformulation of criteria, other than criterion P.9 could be further discussed pending a broader discussion on the implementation of Article 18 of the Convention’. The meeting might wish to discuss the further reduction of the selection criteria for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. For instance, changes could be made to criteria P.2, P.6 and P.8, which were considered to show some redundancy among themselves, and to some extent to criterion P.4. If a proposal satisfies criteria P.1 and P.4, it can be assumed that the safeguarding practice in question would encourage coordination (criterion P.2), serve as a model (criterion P.6) and ‘and that it is possible to carry out an assessment of the results’ (criterion P.8). The Intergovernmental Committee was informed of these findings and recommended that they be used as a basis for discussion through Decision [17.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/17.COM/10) (paragraph 4)
6. **Revisions of Form ICH-03**: Unlike other forms, which underwent significant simplifications and adjustments, Form ICH-03 concerning the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices and its instructions did not undergo any revisions after the completion of the Global Reflection. This was because future reflections on a broader implementation of Article 18, which were expected to take place at short notice, might bring about adjustments to the functioning of the Register and further reductions or reformulations of its selection criteria. The forms are an integral part of the selection process, and it is through the answers to questions contained in them that the Evaluation Body and the Intergovernmental Committee can judge whether the selection criteria are met. It is therefore important to consider, after the discussion of the criteria, what adjustments of Form ICH-03 would be optimal for making it – and hence the Register – more easily accessible.
7. It is proposed that the discussions of the breakout groups be guided by the following questions:

* What measures are needed to further improve the functioning of the Register, including encouraging a higher number of submissions, in particular from currently underrepresented states, and the follow-up and monitoring of selected good practices?
* Should the selection criteria be revised and if so in what ways?
* What adjustments should be made to Form ICH-03 to ensure easier access to the Register?
* What other ways can be suggested to ensure better access to the Register and to increase its visibility?

**Topic 2: Towards the creation of an ‘observatory’ for sharing good safeguarding practices**

1. The Register of Good (formerly: Best) Safeguarding Practices, which is based on Article 18, is not mentioned in that article as such. When the sixteenth session of the Committee decided to launch a new reflection on Article 18 of the Convention (Decision [16.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/14)), the idea was not only to continue discussing issues raised during the Global Reflection concerning the management of the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, but also to consider the implementation of Article 18 beyond it. Given that communities, groups and individuals practise their living heritage in different parts of the world, it seems pertinent to explore **the possibility of setting up an online ‘observatory’** (previously also called an ‘arm’s-length body’) in order to explore the full potential of Article 18 of the 2003 Convention. The beginning of this idea was raised earlier, for example in the context of the Evaluation of UNESCO's Standard-setting Work of the Culture Sector, conducted by the Internal Oversight Section of UNESCO in 2013 (Decision [8.COM 5.c.1](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/8.COM/5.c.1)). The idea was further developed when experts were consulted in the first phase of the Global Reflection (document [LHE/21/16.COM EXP/7](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-7-EN.docx)). Given the high number of procedurally complex issues, the Global Reflection was not conclusive on the possibility of creating an observatory. With reference to Decision [16.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/16.COM/14) (paragraph 9), it is important to consider how such an ‘observatory’ might enhance dialogue and communication among stakeholders of the Convention in a concrete manner, with a particular focus on communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals.
2. The core objective of an online observatory could be to enhance dialogue for the purposes of sharing good safeguarding practices, in particular in terms of sharing, follow-up, communication, collaboration and capacity-building. Dialogue through such an online observatory would in the first instance allow for the exchange of information between and among communities from different parts of the world to support their safeguarding efforts. At the same time, the dialogue might also bring about more direct engagement by the Convention's governing bodies with communities and bearers of living heritage.
3. In terms of the links with the implementation of various mechanism of the Convention, an online observatory could be used in concrete ways, for example for:
   1. Forming a ‘network of inscribed elements and practices’ in order to exchange information regarding elements/programmes following inscriptions/selection on the Lists and the Register and to monitor safeguarding plans and the sharing of safeguarding methods;
   2. Raising awareness about local, regional, national and international events related to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, with direct inputs from communities.
4. Practical considerations: It is important to manage the volume and types of information to be exchanged. A balance needs to be sought allowing communities around the world to make direct inputs and share information through an online observatory. At the same time, the information flow must be managed in a meaningful way for the implementation of the Convention. Moderating ‘chats’ on a regular basis is labour-intensive but a minimum amount of intervention would seem necessary.
5. The online modality would open up possibilities that were not conceivable when the Convention was adopted two decades ago. It would, for instance, facilitate the dissemination of audio-visual materials created by communities, groups or individuals wishing to share their good safeguarding practices. The observatory could be foreseen partially as a social medium/forum for informally and directly sharing knowledge regarding good safeguarding practices. Different languages could also be used for communicating in the observatory through the mechanism of automatic translation.
6. Dealing with communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals, would mean it is particularly important to respect the [Ethical Principles](https://ich.unesco.org/en/ethics-and-ich-00866) for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, and in particular the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Sharing images or disseminating information that may lead to the identification of individuals may not be appropriate in many circumstances. It may be necessary to establish guidelines specifically geared at sharing information online.
7. Needless to say, clarification is required regarding the administrative set-up as well as financial and operational implications of an online observatory. A base plan could be to establish the observatory on a global basis with regional ‘rooms’, involving all stakeholders of the Convention. Such institutional considerations might be closely linked to the decisions, in which practitioners and other tradition bearers would also have to be involved, as to how an online observatory would be set up and maintained.
8. It is proposed that the following issues be discussed in the breakout groups:

* Are there any useful examples of online observatories, with the involvement of communities, if possible, from which lessons could be learnt?
* What could the basic structure of an online observatory be?
* In what concrete ways could the exchange of information through an online observatory contribute to the implementation of the Convention and to the work of the governing bodies, the Secretariat and the Evaluation Body?
* How can it be ensured that the online sharing of information is ethically sound and in the interests of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals?
* What solutions could be suggested for the administrative set up as well as financial and operational implications of an ‘observatory’?
* Does the meeting recommend the creation of an online observatory that would be set up in the first place to share and prepare good safeguarding practices?

**Topic 3: Any other issues to be identified**

1. The third topic has been left deliberately open to allow experts participating in the Stockholm Category VI meeting and/or in the Open-ended intergovernmental working group to identify issues relating to Article 18 that they feel should also be discussed.
2. What has not been raised so far, for example, is the relationship of Article 18 to International Assistance in the sense of Articles 18.1 and 18.2 of the Convention. Programmes, projects and activities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, whether or not they are selected on the Register, may already be supported by the Funds of the 2003 Convention, as is also foreseen in Article 20 (c) of the Convention. In addition, preparatory assistance, for which Form ICH-05 is used, is intended to provide resources for the elaboration of proposals for programmes, projects and activities that best reflect the principles and objectives of the Convention. These possibilities notwithstanding, very few requests have been made so far for that benefit from International Assistance with reference to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.
3. It is proposed that the following issues be discussed in the breakout groups:

* What solutions could be envisaged to improve access to International Assistance for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices?
* What other issues may be pertinent for untapping the full potential of Article 18 of the Convention?

1. See, in particular, the reports of the breakout group discussions held during the Category VI meeting of experts in May 2021 (Document [LHE/21/16.COM EXP/7](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-7-EN.docx)) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)