

## Final report

### Strengthening capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement

|                          |                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Benefitting country(ies) | Global, Cameroon and Greece                                                                        |
| Type of funding          | Earmarked voluntary contribution to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund received from Azerbaijan |
| Amount                   | US \$100,000                                                                                       |
| Implementing period      | 01/11/2021 - 30/05/2026                                                                            |
| Reporting date           | July 2026                                                                                          |

#### 1. Background & Summary

In the framework of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO has explored the role of living heritage in emergencies, including situations of conflict and displacement. In 2020, the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention adopted [Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies](#), which offers guidance to national and international stakeholders on how best to engage and safeguard living heritage in various types of emergency contexts ([Resolution 8.GA 9](#)). The operational

principles and modalities emphasize the dual nature of living heritage in emergencies, both as being directly under threat and as a valuable resource that communities can draw on to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

In humanitarian crises, conflict and displacement threaten living heritage in different ways, leading potentially to a loss of identity, social cohesion and community resilience. This can have devastating impacts on communities, who rely on their intangible cultural heritage as a source of livelihood, and identity. Safeguarding living heritage in these situations can support cultural rights, strengthen social and psychological well-being and contribute to sustainable economic recovery.

Against this background, UNESCO implemented the pilot project Strengthening capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement (2021–2026). The project aimed to strengthen the capacities of communities and humanitarian actors to safeguard and mobilize living heritage as a source of resilience and recovery.



Figure 1 Workshop participants in Minawao refugee camp, Cameroon, October 2023 © UNESCO

The project pursued two objectives:

- Strengthen capacities to safeguard and mobilize intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement as a source of resilience and recovery.
- Increase awareness among national and international humanitarian actors of the role of intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement.

To achieve these objectives, UNESCO developed dedicated capacity-building materials on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. These materials were piloted through capacity-building workshops and community-based needs identification activities in Cameroon and Greece, in close cooperation with refugee communities, national authorities and humanitarian partners. Lessons learned from the pilot activities informed the development of a guide for humanitarian actors on safeguarding living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement, with the aim of strengthening the integration of cultural approaches into humanitarian action and supporting community resilience and inclusive recovery.

## 2. Results

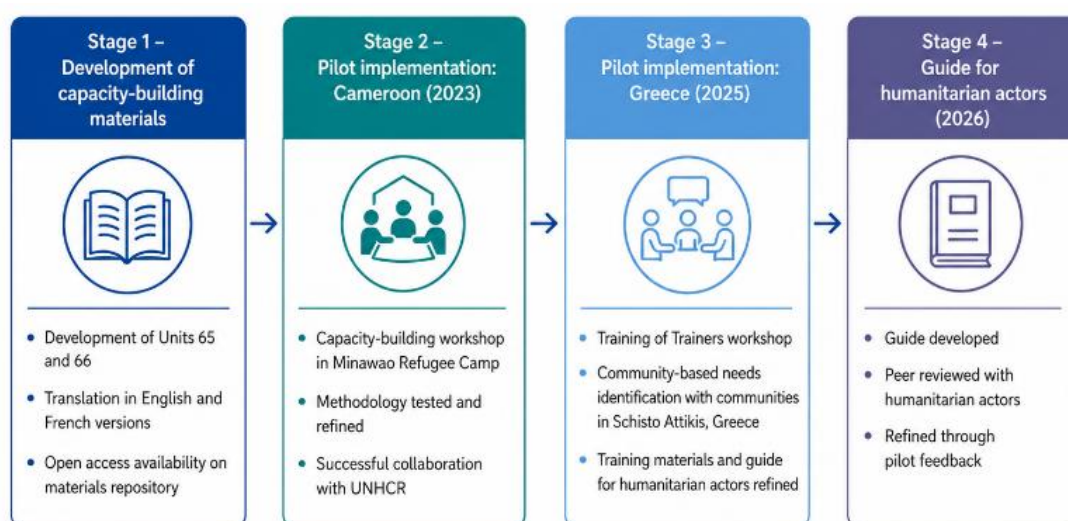
The project strengthened capacities and raised awareness of the role of living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement among both humanitarian actors and displaced communities. It also reinforced cooperation between the culture and humanitarian sectors, demonstrating the value of integrating living heritage into humanitarian action.

### **Key results achieved:**

- Two new capacity-building units on safeguarding living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement were developed and made available in English and French through the 2003 Convention's capacity-building materials repository.
- UNESCO's first guide for humanitarian actors on safeguarding living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement was developed, drawing on lessons learned from the pilot activities and consultations with humanitarian partners.
- Two pilot capacity-building workshops and community-based needs identification exercises were conducted in the Minawao Refugee Camp (Cameroon) and the Schisto Open Facility of Temporary Reception (Greece), involving 91 participants, including displaced community members, host communities, humanitarian practitioners and government representatives.
- The project strengthened collaboration between UNESCO and humanitarian partners, including UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA, IOM and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), and demonstrated the relevance of safeguarding living heritage within humanitarian responses.

The project also generated broader interest in the role of living heritage in humanitarian settings among UNESCO's global facilitator network, members of the ICH NGO Forum and other partners, creating opportunities for future collaboration and knowledge exchange.

### 3. Project implementation (2023-2026)



#### Stage 1: Development of training materials

Two new training units were developed and are available in English and French on the capacity-building materials repository of the 2003 Convention. Their goal is to enhance capacities on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement:

- [Unit 65 'Basics in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement'](#) aims to equip participants with an understanding of the impact of conflict situations on intangible cultural heritage as well as the role that intangible cultural heritage may play in such contexts. It also aims to deepen participants' understanding of how to apply the operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergency situations to contexts of conflict and forced displacement and according to the different stages of an emergency management cycle.
- [Unit 66 'Conducting community-based needs identifications for intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement'](#) builds on Unit 65 and provides participants with the different steps undertaken in a community-based needs identification to assess the specific needs for intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. It takes participants through the different stages of undertaking a community-based needs identification through practical exercises to design and contextualize a methodology to their needs, covering also key ethical principles and frameworks for undertaking work in humanitarian contexts.

These training materials were also presented to facilitators during an online training session on 4 June 2026 as part of the training programme for the Global facilitators' network under the 2003 Convention to update facilitators' knowledge on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and displacement.

#### Stage 2: Pilot implementation in Cameroon

The capacity-building materials were first tested during a workshop held from 9 to 12 October 2023 in the Minawao Refugee Camp, Far North Region, Cameroon. The workshop was organized by the Living Heritage Entity and the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for Central Africa in close cooperation with UNHCR Cameroon.

The workshop brought together 41 participants, including refugee community leaders and living heritage bearers from the camp, representatives of neighbouring host communities, staff from the Ministry of Arts and Culture, UNHCR and other humanitarian and development

partners. In addition to strengthening participants' capacities, the workshop sought to raise awareness of the contribution of living heritage to the resilience and well-being of displaced communities.

As part of the pilot, participants conducted fieldwork in five working groups representing different refugee and host communities to test the community-based needs identification methodology. The pilot confirmed the relevance of the training materials and generated recommendations for their refinement. Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation between UNESCO and UNHCR to support the safeguarding of the living heritage of displaced communities.

A restitution workshop was held on 21 November 2023 at the UNESCO Regional Office in Yaoundé in a hybrid format. The meeting brought together facilitators, representatives of UNHCR, the Ministry of Arts and Culture and refugee community representatives to review lessons learned, discuss follow-up actions and strengthen partnerships established through the project.

A series of audiovisual materials were developed as part of the pilot, featuring participants' voices on the importance of living heritage as a source of resilience and recovery in the camp setting.



*Figure 2 Participants in the training workshop held in Minawao Refugee Camp, Cameroon*

### **Stage 3: Pilot implementation Greece**

Following the revisions made after the Cameroon pilot, the capacity-building materials were further tested and adapted in Greece. The activities were coordinated by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice, Italy) in close cooperation with the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum during 2025.

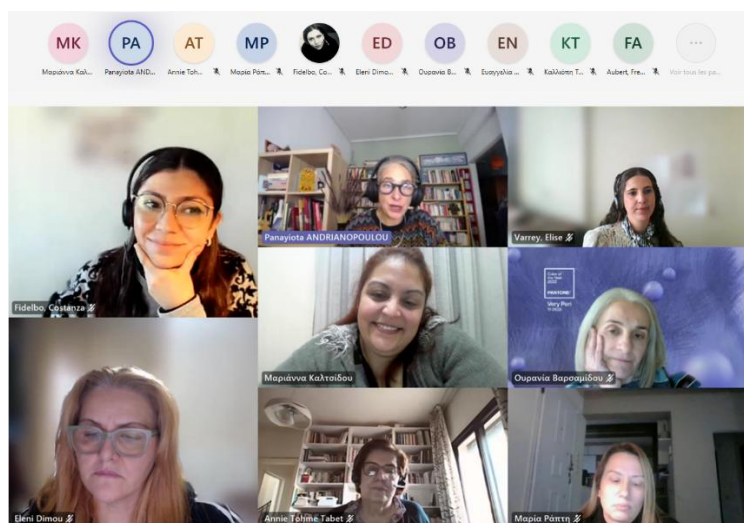
#### *Training of trainers (29–31 October and 18–19 November 2025)*

Two online Training of Trainers workshops were delivered on 29–31 October and 18–19 November 2025 by facilitators from the UNESCO Global Facilitators Network.

Approximately 30 humanitarian professionals working in 21 refugee camps across Greece participated, together with representatives of the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Culture. Interpretation into Greek for one workshop was supported by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).

The training was based on Units 65 and 66, which were adapted to the Greek context and translated into Greek. The translated materials will be integrated into the Ministry of Migration and Asylum's learning platform, strengthening national capacities to address living heritage in humanitarian settings.

Participants also reviewed the draft guide for humanitarian actors and provided feedback to improve its relevance and practical application.



*Figure 3: Participants during the second training of trainers' workshop held online, 18-19 November 2025*

### *Community-based needs identification (25 to 27 November 2025)*

From 25 to 27 November 2025, trained camp staff joined the lead facilitators to conduct a three-day workshop at the Schisto Open Facility of Temporary Reception.

The workshop brought together 35 displaced community members from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, State of Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, together with representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, EUAA, the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Education.

The workshop was structured over three days. The first day consisted of a preparatory session introducing the principles of living heritage and facilitating dialogue on participants' experiences and challenges related to its safeguarding in situations of displacement. This session helped establish trust among participants and laid the groundwork for the community-based needs identification.

The second day focused on the community-based needs identification exercise. Participants worked in culturally and linguistically coherent groups to encourage inclusive dialogue and active participation. The exercise enabled communities to identify key safeguarding needs and to highlight elements of living heritage that contribute to resilience, identity and social cohesion.

On the third day, participants reviewed and refined the findings during a restitution workshop. Together, they developed practical recommendations addressing both immediate and longer-term measures to strengthen the safeguarding of living heritage among displaced and host communities. These recommendations are intended to inform future programming and policy development.

Overall, the pilot validated the community-based needs identification methodology in a refugee camp setting and generated practical ideas for creating spaces where displaced communities can practise, transmit and share their living heritage. It also strengthened participants' capacities to identify, document and safeguard living heritage and provided valuable feedback to further refine the capacity-building materials and the guide for humanitarian actors.

### *Restitution meeting (19 December 2025)*

An online restitution meeting was held on 19 December 2025 to present the results of the Greek pilot. It brought together participants, partners and the donor to reflect on the implementation and discuss opportunities for future collaboration.

Community members and humanitarian practitioners shared testimonies on the value of integrating living heritage into humanitarian work. As one camp operator observed:

*“It was a really powerful and inspiring experience, as a person and as a professional. It made me reconnect with my role as a humanitarian worker and realize that heritage, although rooted in different cultural backgrounds, is something we all share.”*

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss lessons learned and explore options for scaling up similar initiatives in other displacement settings.



Figure 4: Participants during a training workshop in the Schisto Camp – Greece - Credits: UNESCO Venice Office



Figure 5: Participants to the community-based needs identification in Schisto camps – November 2025



Figure 6: Participants during a training workshop in the Schisto Camp – Greece

## Stage 4 Development of a guide for humanitarian actors

Building on the experience gained through the pilot activities, UNESCO developed [a guide for humanitarian actors on safeguarding living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement](#).

The guide raises awareness of the contribution of living heritage to humanitarian action and provides practical guidance for integrating safeguarding measures into preparedness, response and recovery. It includes recommendations for conducting community-based needs identification and for working effectively with displaced communities while respecting humanitarian principles and ethical considerations.

The guide was informed by consultations with humanitarian partners, including UNHCR and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and underwent peer review by members of UNESCO's global facilitator network. Feedback gathered during the pilot activities in Greece was also incorporated to strengthen its practical relevance.

The guide was published on the Secretariat's website under the [webpage on emergencies](#) and launched in conjunction with the eleventh session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention (17–18 June 2026).

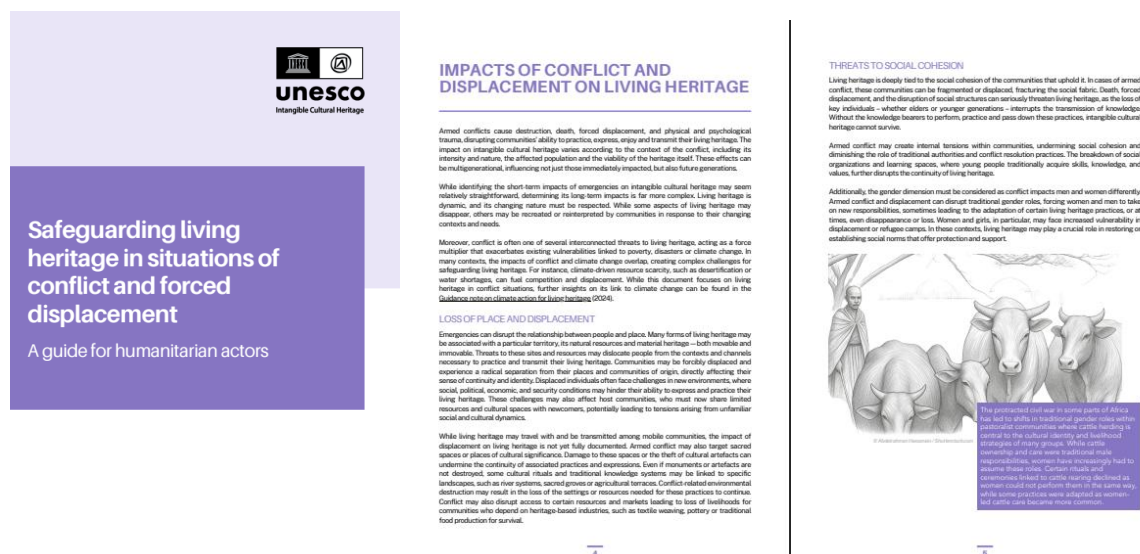


Figure 7 Extracted images from the guide for humanitarian actors

## **4. Challenges and how they were addressed**

The project encountered several implementation challenges, which were addressed through adaptive planning and close collaboration with partners.

The first challenge concerned the selection of pilot countries. Sudan was initially identified as the first pilot country; however, the outbreak of conflict in 2023 made implementation impossible. UNESCO therefore identified Cameroon as an alternative pilot country, where the presence of a large refugee population and strong cooperation with UNHCR provided an appropriate context to test the capacity-building methodology.

In Cameroon, language diversity presented operational challenges. While the training materials were available in English and French, many participants spoke Hausa and Fulfulde. To facilitate inclusive participation, bilingual participants supported interpretation between local languages, English and French throughout the workshop. In addition, many participants were unfamiliar with the 2003 Convention and its terminology. An additional introductory session was therefore incorporated into the programme to familiarize participants with the Convention's key concepts and safeguarding approach.

The selection of the second pilot country also required careful consideration. Greece was ultimately identified due to its experience in managing long-term displacement, the presence of refugee reception facilities, and the strong commitment of the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum to participate in the project. Existing national capacity-building initiatives also provided favourable conditions for adapting and testing the training materials.

In Greece, the principal challenge was adapting the capacity-building materials to the needs of humanitarian practitioners, many of whom had limited prior knowledge of the 2003 Convention. To address this, the materials were revised to place greater emphasis on practical exercises and were translated into Greek to improve accessibility. Interactive exercises and group discussions were incorporated to encourage participation and facilitate peer learning.

The community-based workshop in the Schisto Open Facility of Temporary Reception also presented operational challenges. The participant group changed throughout the workshop, and more communities participated than originally anticipated. As few comparable cultural initiatives had previously been organized in the camp, the activities attracted additional participants. At the same time, humanitarian practitioners identified a broader need for training on cultural sensitivity and on the cultural backgrounds of displaced communities, highlighting an important gap that the project helped to address.

Interpretation during the Schisto workshop also proved challenging. While interpretation between Arabic and Greek was available, English remained the common working language for many participants. This risk had been anticipated during workshop preparation, and the facilitation team was assembled to provide complementary language skills, enabling communication in Arabic, Greek, English and French throughout the activities.

The development of the guide for humanitarian actors required additional time to ensure meaningful consultation with humanitarian partners. These consultations were essential to ensure that the guide responded to operational needs and reflected humanitarian practice. These recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the guide, strengthening its relevance and usability for humanitarian practitioners.

## **5. Direct Beneficiaries, Key Partners and Other Stakeholders**

The project directly benefited displaced communities, host communities, humanitarian practitioners and government counterparts in Cameroon and Greece, while also strengthening cooperation between UNESCO and key international and national partners.

In Cameroon, direct beneficiaries included refugee communities in the Minawao Refugee Camp, neighbouring host communities, camp administration and security services, as well as representatives of decentralized state services in the Mayo-Tsanaga Department, including

culture, education, health and environment. Humanitarian actors and representatives of the Ministry of Arts and Culture also participated in the activities. Cooperation with UNHCR was central to the implementation of the pilot workshop and to strengthening the integration of cultural approaches in humanitarian settings.

In Greece, the online Training of Trainers reached approximately 30 humanitarian practitioners working across 21 refugee reception facilities, as well as staff from the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Culture. The second workshop involved a majority of female participants, contributing to gender-balanced participation in capacity-building activities.

The on-site workshop in Schisto brought together 35 displaced persons from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, along with 21 institutional representatives and humanitarian practitioners from the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. Representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) also contributed to the workshop, strengthening inter-agency coordination and awareness on the role of living heritage in displacement contexts.

More broadly, the guide for humanitarian actors targets national and international organizations working with displaced populations, including United Nations agencies and international partners such as UNHCR, OCHA and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It is intended to support the integration of living heritage considerations into humanitarian programming, policy and field operations.

Beyond immediate beneficiaries, the project also generated wider spillover effects. It strengthened understanding of the 2003 Convention among participating institutions and contributed to increased awareness among non-governmental organizations, researchers, cultural heritage professionals and media actors engaged in displacement and cultural heritage issues. It also reinforced UNESCO's global network of facilitators and practitioners working on intangible cultural heritage in emergency contexts.

## 6. Communication and Visibility

Communication and visibility activities were implemented in line with UNESCO's communication strategy to disseminate project results and raise awareness of the role of living heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement. Activities combined institutional dissemination, public communication and outreach within statutory frameworks of the 2003 Convention.

The contribution of the donor to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund was acknowledged in relevant statutory meetings of the 2003 Convention, including sessions of the General Assembly of States Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee.

UNESCO also organized and contributed to several side events and expert meetings to share project results and promote dialogue between the culture and humanitarian sectors.

A side event entitled **"Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in situations of conflict and forced displacement"** was held on 7 December 2023 during the 18th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kasane, Botswana. The event presented early results from the pilot activities in Cameroon and highlighted the role of living heritage in strengthening dialogue, social cohesion and resilience among displaced communities. It brought together representatives of communities, humanitarian actors and experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage. Opening remarks were delivered via video message by H.E. Ms Adriana Molano Arenas, Deputy Minister of Culture of Colombia and facilitator of the 2003 Convention. Presentations were delivered by UNESCO experts and partners, including representatives of UNHCR and community participants from the pilot activities.

*“For communities, living heritage is what makes the difference between living and being alive.” Mr Martin Andrade, UNESCO Consultant, Colombia*



*Figure 8 Panelists and moderator from the side event on December 2023.*

As part of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW), UNESCO convened an [online roundtable](#) on 5 March 2026 entitled **“Culture as a cross-cutting resource in emergencies: Strengthening humanitarian action through cultural approaches”**. The session explored the role of cultural practices and living heritage in psychosocial support, social cohesion and recovery in crisis settings, drawing on field experiences from Ukraine, Gaza, Colombia, Cameroon and Greece. The pilot project implemented in Greece was presented as a concrete example of integrating living heritage into humanitarian programming.



*Figure 9 Invitation to Online roundtable at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week 2026*

In addition, the project was presented at an international coordination meeting **“Improving international coordination and response effectiveness to safeguard culture in emergencies”** convened by UNESCO on 30 September 2024, focused on strengthening cooperation on culture in emergencies. Under the session on Systematizing lessons-learned for the integration of culture and heritage in emergency situations and recovery planning, a representative from UNHCR spoke on the Cameroon pilot as a good example of collaboration

between UNESCO and humanitarian actors and as a practice with potential for replication in other contexts.

Furthermore, on the occasion of the tenth session of the General Assembly, as part of an **“Information and exchange meeting on capacity-building approaches under the 2003 Convention”** organized by the Living Heritage Entity on 18 June 2026, the lead facilitator involved in the Cameroon pilot was invited to share their experience providing capacity-building support in situations of conflict and forced displacement.

Public communication activities further enhanced visibility of the project. UNESCO published articles on its website and through its regional offices, including:

- Rethinking Crisis Response: The Role of Culture in Recovery and Social Cohesion (3 June 2026) <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/rethinking-crisis-response-role-culture-recovery-and-social-cohesion>
- Empowering displaced communities in Greece through living heritage (22 December 2025): <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/empowering-displaced-communities-greece-through-living-heritage>
- Training of trainers: Strengthening intangible cultural heritage safeguarding in situations of forced displacement in refugee camps in Greece (19 December 2025): <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/training-trainers-strengthening-intangible-cultural-heritage-safeguarding-situations-forced?hub=66976>
- Safeguarding living heritage for resilience and recovery at Minawao Refugee Camp in Cameroon (23 October 2023): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/news/safeguarding-living-heritage-for-resilience-and-recovery-at-minawao-refugee-camp-in-cameroon-13496>

These communication activities contributed to increased awareness of the role of living heritage in humanitarian settings and strengthened engagement with partners across the culture and humanitarian sectors.