



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Regional Bureau
for Science and Culture
in Europe



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Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Regional Centre for the
Safeguarding of Intangible
Cultural Heritage in
South-Eastern Europe under
the auspices of UNESCO

14th Annual Meeting of the South-East European Experts Network on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible Cultural Heritage in emergencies: Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

Addressing questions of ICH and resilience in times of crisis

Online, 26 June 2020



CONCEPT NOTE

Background

The South-East European Experts Network on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) was established in 2007 by UNESCO, through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, in order to support the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the region.

The annual Network meetings¹ contribute to enhance a common understanding of opportunities and challenges linked to the safeguarding of ICH as a key asset of South-East European cultural diversity, promoting the sharing of knowledge and good practices on national measures to implement the Convention, and serving as a platform to develop regional and cross-border cooperation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 14th annual network meeting will be adapted to an online format. It will include a specific focus on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.

As illustrated by an ongoing UNESCO survey on living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the crisis goes beyond our physical health, causing profound disruptions in our social and cultural lives. Many festivals and cultural events have been cancelled or postponed, and cultural practices and rituals restricted. This has also resulted in the loss of income for many bearers and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage, many of whom largely operate in the informal sector and risk to be excluded by the measures and packages offered to cultural professionals and entrepreneurs at the national levels.

For some countries in south-eastern Europe, the impact of the crisis has been compounded by the occurrence of other natural disasters in close time proximity, such as the earthquakes that hit Albania in 2019 and Croatia in 2020.

Yet intangible cultural heritage is also adaptive in nature and many communities are turning to their intangible cultural heritage to help respond to and cope with the crisis. Intangible cultural heritage has shown to be a source of social cohesion, inspiration and creativity that can give hope and solidarity during such difficult times. Local and traditional knowledge, particularly regarding agriculture and the environment, can furthermore provide a source of resilience for many communities who face social and economic precarity.

The 14th annual meeting will be an opportunity to explore the diverse ways intangible cultural heritage has been impacted by the pandemic and how communities are responding to help strengthen the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in this context.

¹ Annual meetings took place so far in Arbanasi, Bulgaria (2007); Safranbolu, Turkey (2008); Zagreb, Croatia (2009); Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Romania (2010); Belgrade, Serbia (2011); Athens, Greece (2012); Sofia, Bulgaria (2013); Limassol, Cyprus (2014); Venice, Italy (2015); Supetar, Croatia (2016); Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017); Ljubljana, Slovenia (2018) and Cremona, Italy (2019).

At the same time, the current pandemic thus also presents a critical moment to reflect on and discuss the roles of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, in an area that is also vulnerable to seismic and hydrogeological hazards (as shown, most recently, by the earthquakes that hit Albania in 2019 and Croatia in 2020) .

The meeting is organized by UNESCO (UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, in cooperation with the UNESCO Culture Sector – Living Heritage Entity) with the support of the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe (Category 2 Centre operating under the auspices of UNESCO, based in Sofia, Bulgaria). The meeting is made possible by the annual contribution of Italy to the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

For the first time, this annual meeting of the Network bring together experts representing ICH national authorities with the UNESCO-accredited facilitators from the countries concerned, in order to enrich the exchange of ideas and strengthen cooperation between different actors across the region.

Objectives

The meeting aims to support Member States from South-East Europe by sharing information and good practices and providing opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of the roles of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, with a specific focus on experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to achieve this objective, the online meeting is envisioned as a combination of:

- presentations informing on UNESCO's work on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, including the operational principles and modalities, which were endorsed by the Intergovernmental Committee at its 14th session in 2019 ([Decision 14.COM 13](#))
- updates by participants and exchanges on the COVID-19 impact on ICH elements and communities, and on the diverse responses to the emergency, ranging from governmental measures to innovative grassroots actions
- discussions on ways to relaunch ICH activities after the COVID-19 emergency phase, also considering the socio-economic changes that the pandemic may provoke in the long term

The meeting is also an opportunity for networking and advancement in cooperation on safeguarding ICH in South-East Europe, in the spirit of the Network.

Topics for discussion

1. Innovative adaptations: Measures undertaken by practitioners, governments and mediators

Envisioned as a platform for sharing good practices, the session will address the diversity of initiatives witnessed or developed in the past months in response to the pandemic. Participants are invited to deliver presentations on experiences ranging from responses generated within practitioners' groups and communities, to measures undertaken by governments and mediators to relieve the crisis (e.g. financial instruments, support networks, normative or technical aid such as digitization, etc.).

Presentations by participants will be accompanied by examples that came to the fore through the ongoing UNESCO Survey on living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of UNESCO's efforts to raise awareness on the challenges and opportunities ICH provides for communities in times of crisis.

2. How to re-start activities after COVID-19

The session will provide space for dialogue on the re-activation of ICH processes after the COVID-19 emergency and on future activities planned in the participating countries, also considering the socio-economic changes that the pandemic may provoke in the mid-term.

Attention will be paid especially to ICH practices the viability of which is put at risk by the pandemic, as well as to already fragile and threatened practices on which the pandemic is putting additional burden, in order to foster international dialogue on safeguarding measures.

Finally, this session will include interactive tools to collect data on future actions to be possibly organized within the Network or other relevant regional cooperation frameworks, to develop capacities of relevant players (central and local authorities, accredited facilitators, community actors, etc.) regarding ICH in emergencies.

Working language

The meeting's working language is English.

Participants

Experts are invited to participate in representation of ministries of culture and/or other relevant authorities from the Member States covered by the geographical mandate of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; Greece; Malta; Montenegro; North Macedonia; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Serbia; Slovenia; and Turkey), plus Austria and Italy as observers.

As the meeting is organized online, facilitators from the mentioned countries accredited within the UNESCO Global capacity-building network are also invited to participate.

Contacts

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* Cover photo: The procession of Za Krizen ('following the cross') on the island of Hvar, Croatia, took place this year with participants wearing masks and the number of spectators being drastically reduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic. © Vilma Matulic/PIXSELL

TENTATIVE AGENDA

Morning Session	
10.00	Welcome speeches by the organizers
10.20	Framing the meeting: ICH in emergencies / Latest development in the life of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO Culture Sector - Living Heritage Entity)
10.40	Facing multiple emergencies (earthquakes/COVID-19); case studies from Croatia and Albania
11.00	Session 1 Reacting to emergencies: innovative adaptations and impact-mitigation measures undertaken by practitioners, governments and mediators
12.30	Lunch break
Afternoon Session	
13.30	Session 2 Discussion: How to re-start activities after COVID-19, and other possible future action based on lessons learned during the emergency.
14.45	Wrap-up
15.00	End of the meeting

Preparing for the meeting: indications for country representatives

Participants officially appointed to represent their respective countries in the meeting are kindly invited to prepare two kinds of input, to be delivered respectively before and during the meeting.

1. Pre-workshop survey

Aiming for a constructive and efficient use of time, we are conducting a short pre-workshop survey collecting information on the two topics proposed for discussion.

The information collected through the survey will be used to prepare a summary document that will be made available to participants.

All confirmed participants are invited to reply one or more of the following questions, in written, to put forward specific experiences or examples from your country that are especially significant and can enrich the exchange. Answers to each question should not exceed 1,800 characters with spaces.

1. Please shortly describe maximum three measures undertaken by the government / your organisation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic aimed at safeguarding ICH (either generic measures, or related to specific ICH elements). Please include comments on the impact of the mentioned measures, if assessed.
2. Do you have knowledge of ICH elements in your country that are being affected by the current Pandemic to such extent that their viability is jeopardized? Has any action been taken for urgent safeguarding and, if yes, what and how? What was the impact of such measures, if assessed?
3. Are you aware of any ICH practices and communities in your country that adapted in creative ways in response to the pandemic? Please, describe.
4. Based on your experience and opinion, what will be the impact of the pandemic on the ICH in your country beyond the emergency phase? What are the priorities to support the reactivation of ICH and its long-term safeguarding after the pandemic?

Responses are to be submitted by 16 June to the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, to the following e-mail addresses: l.destefani@unesco.org; y.zhi@unesco.org.

After analysing your responses, the organizers may contact you separately to collect additional data and coordinate presentations.

2. Presentations during the workshop

During the meeting, one representative for each invited country will be invited to deliver a 3-minute presentation, either live or with videos to be recorded in advance. Presentations in PowerPoint should not exceed 5 slides, possibly including photos. Pre-recorded videos may also include slides and short clips reflecting the situation in the respective countries.

Should you need assistance to record a video-presentation, you may contact the organizers for technical support, addressing Ms. Zhi Ye, y.zhi@unesco.org . Pre-recorded videos are to be delivered at the same email address, using a file-sharing system of your choice.

After the presentations, the floor will be open for discussion. Questions and comments that cannot be addressed during the meeting due to time constraints, will be collected through the chat channel and addressed at the end of the meeting if time permits, or in written form after the meeting.

Preparing for the meeting: indications for facilitators

Accredited facilitators who will attend the meeting are not expected to deliver formal presentations, but they are warmly invited to actively participate in the open-floor discussions, drawing on their insight and direct experience on the subject.

Questions and comments that cannot be addressed during the meeting due to time constraints, will be collected through the chat channel and addressed at the end of the meeting if time permits, or in written form after the meeting and coordinated by the meeting's facilitators.

In addition, all confirmed participants (including facilitators) are invited to reply one or more of the following questions, in written, to put forward specific experiences or examples that are especially significant and can enrich the exchange. Answers to each question should not exceed 1,800 characters with spaces.

1. Please shortly describe maximum three measures undertaken by the government / your organisation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic aimed at safeguarding ICH (either generic measures, or related to specific ICH elements). Please include comments on the impact of the mentioned measures, if assessed.
2. Do you have knowledge of ICH elements in your country that are being affected by the current Pandemic to such extent that their viability is jeopardized? Has any action been taken for urgent safeguarding and, if yes, what and how? What was the impact of such measures, if assessed?
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