



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Intangible  
Cultural  
Heritage

## **Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies**

Cultural heritage throughout the world is increasingly affected by emergency situations, including conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards ('natural disasters'). These situations include threats to the transmission and viability of intangible cultural heritage, which provide a foundation for the identity and well-being of communities, groups and individuals [hereafter 'communities']. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage has a dual role to play in the context of emergencies: on the one hand, intangible cultural heritage can be directly threatened by emergencies, and on the other hand, it can effectively help communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

Emergencies present a complex field of operation due to the variety in nature and scale of armed conflicts and natural disasters and the range of stakeholders involved. The following operational principles and modalities offer guidance to States Parties and other relevant national or international stakeholders on how best to ensure that intangible cultural heritage is most effectively engaged and safeguarded in the context of various types of emergencies.

The operational principles and modalities below are in line with the Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO's action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict<sup>1</sup> and its Addendum concerning emergencies associated with disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards,<sup>2</sup> as well as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017). They should also be considered in tandem with the relevant provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and its Operational Directives, notably Chapter VI<sup>3</sup> on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development at the national level, as well as the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### **Principles**

The following principles shall underpin all interventions aimed at safeguarding and/or engaging intangible cultural heritage in emergencies:

1. Intangible cultural heritage exists only in its enactment by the communities who practise and transmit it, and is inseparable from their social, cultural and economic life. Its safeguarding is therefore indivisible from the protection of the lives and well-being of its bearers.
2. Communities whose intangible cultural heritage may be affected by an emergency include people in the natural disaster or armed conflict area, displaced persons and their host communities, as well as other people and groups connected with this intangible cultural heritage.
3. In all phases of emergency, the communities shall play a primary role in identifying their intangible cultural heritage. This requires the direct inclusion of the communities in identifying how their intangible cultural heritage might have been affected by the emergency and what measures are needed to safeguard it, as well as how they might draw on it as a resource for enhancing their resilience, facilitating recovery and re-establishing trust and peaceful coexistence within and between communities.
4. With reference to Article 11 of the Convention, States Parties shall take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in their

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1. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186>  
2. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259805>  
3. [https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational\\_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf)

territory. This provision applies in all contexts, including when intangible cultural heritage is affected by an emergency. In so doing, States Parties shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities in safeguarding actions, including refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants present in their territories.

5. National and international stakeholders involved in emergency management – including disaster preparedness and relief specialists, humanitarian actors, non-governmental organizations and armed forces – have an important role to play in safeguarding affected intangible cultural heritage and supporting concerned communities to draw on this heritage in preparing for and responding to emergencies.
6. Intangible cultural heritage is dynamic and adaptive in nature, constantly being recreated by communities in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, including emergencies. In all situations, efforts to safeguard or engage intangible cultural heritage should take into account and respect this dynamic and adaptive nature.

### **Modalities**

The following modalities integrate the above principles and identify actions appropriate to the three main phases in an emergency management cycle of preparedness, response and recovery, acknowledging that each phase can vary in duration and may overlap with other phases. Local circumstances and conditions will determine which of these actions would be most relevant and appropriate to a particular intangible cultural heritage element or situation.

### **Preparedness**

1. Raise the awareness and build the capacities of relevant stakeholders regarding the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and the present principles and modalities.
2. Provide resources and support for the capacity of communities to engage in all aspects of risk reduction and emergency preparedness in consultation with other stakeholders, especially in regions and countries prone to emergencies.
3. Integrate into inventories of intangible cultural heritage, as provided for in the 2003 Convention, information on the vulnerability of elements to potential emergencies. This should include the mitigation capacity of these elements, as well as details of the concerned locations and communities to facilitate identification and access during emergency response.
4. Include emergency preparedness in the safeguarding plans of specific elements. This can include preventive measures to address their potential vulnerability during an emergency, preparatory measures to enhance and engage their mitigation capacity, and a methodology to evaluate the situation of the element during the emergency response phase.
5. Incorporate relevant intangible cultural heritage in local, national, sub-regional and regional risk reduction and emergency preparedness.
6. Establish links between bodies safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage and those in charge of emergency preparedness.

### **Response**

1. Identify, locate and reach out to communities whose intangible cultural heritage is known or likely to have been affected by the emergency, as early as possible.
2. Prioritize resourcing and supporting the capacity of concerned communities to identify and address, through a community-based approach, their immediate safeguarding needs and to draw upon their intangible cultural heritage in mitigating the immediate effects of the emergency (community-based needs identification). In some contexts, it will only be possible to implement this set of actions during the recovery phase.
3. Share information within and between affected States Parties and other stakeholders, particularly humanitarian actors, relevant non-governmental organizations and/or armed

forces, to determine the nature and extent of the disruption to intangible cultural heritage and the scope for engaging it in mitigation. This is also to ensure that relief operations take full account of the existing intangible cultural heritage and contribute to its safeguarding.

4. Whenever a post-disaster or post-conflict needs assessment is undertaken, notably in the framework of multiparty international crisis response mechanisms, ensure that intangible cultural heritage is incorporated. Involve communities in the assessment of the effects of the natural disaster and/or armed conflict on their intangible cultural heritage as well as of related economic damage and losses, and human development impacts.

## **Recovery**

1. Carry out the community-based needs identification if this could not be performed earlier.
2. Based on the outcomes of the needs identification process, provide resources and support for communities to develop and undertake safeguarding measures or plans to enhance the mitigation capacity of their intangible cultural heritage. This engagement should be sustained throughout the recovery phase and into the following preparedness phase, as well as in the transition from dependence on humanitarian assistance towards development.
3. Engage intangible cultural heritage in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation between and within communities, including between displaced populations and host communities.

**Note:** Resources and financial support shall be sought under the various emergency-related funds, including the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund (emergency International Assistance). The listing mechanisms under the 2003 Convention may provide an opportunity for promoting and enhancing the visibility of elements that contribute to preparing for, responding to and recovering from the effects of natural disasters and/or armed conflicts (the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, as well as the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices), and/or to draw the attention of the international community to elements particularly threatened by a natural disaster and/or armed conflict (for the possibility of the accelerated procedure for a nomination to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, see criterion U.6 under Chapter I.1 of the Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention).