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

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION**

**Eighth session**

**UNESCO Headquarters, Room I**

**8 to 10 September 2020**

**Item 12 of the Provisional Agenda:**

**Update on the reflection on the participation of non-governmental organizations  
in the implementation of the Convention**

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| **Summary**  The Committee initiated a reflection, at its twelfth session in 2017, on the definition of the advisory functions to be fulfilled by non-governmental organizations accredited under the 2003 Convention. The reflection continued throughout 2018 and 2019. This document presents the outcomes of this process following the request by the General Assembly at its seventh session in 2018 and by the Committee at its fourteenth session in 2019.  **Decision required:** paragraph 9 |

#### Background

1. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are recognized as important stakeholders for the implementation of the 2003 Convention. The Convention’s Article 9 stipulates that the Committee shall propose to the General Assembly the accreditation of NGOs with recognized competence in the field of intangible cultural heritage to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee. Correspondingly, paragraphs 91–96 of chapter III.2.2 of the Operational Directives provide the criteria, modalities and review of the accreditation process of NGOs, as well as the scope of the advisory functions they may be invited to provide to the Committee. These are defined, *inter alia*, as the evaluation functions for nominations, proposals and requests.
2. The Committee launched a reflection process at its twelfth session in 2017 on the advisory role of accredited NGOs ([Decision 12.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/13) and [Decision 12.COM 17](https://ich.unesco.org/en/d%C3%A9cisions/12.COM/17?dec=decisions&ref_decision=12.COM)). The initiation of the reflection originated mainly from the recognition that, at any one time, only 6 out of the 164 then accredited NGOs are members of the Evaluation Body and are therefore in a position to fulfil the advisory functions assigned in the Operational Directives to accredited NGOs. The Committee invited the Secretariat and an informal ad hoc open-ended working group ‘to reflect, in consultation with accredited NGOs, on the possible ways in which the participation of NGOs under the 2003 Convention could be further enhanced and how this would be reflected in the accreditation and renewal mechanisms of NGOs’. The present document reports the outcomes of such reflection, as requested by the General Assembly at its seventh session in 2018 ([Resolution 7.GA 11](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/7.GA/11)) and the Committee at its fourteenth session in 2019 ([Decision 14.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/15)).
3. This reflection process aimed at gathering ideas on:

* potential advisory functions – defined as ‘*inter alia*’ advisory functions in paragraph 96 of the Operational Directives – that accredited NGOs could fulfil for the governing bodies of the Convention;
* potential functions that accredited NGOs could fulfil in the implementation of the Convention;
* the evolution of the accreditation system of NGOs; and
* the role of the ICH NGO Forum.

1. As a first step of the reflection, the Secretariat organised an electronic consultation from September to October 2018 on the definition of the advisory functions to be performed by accredited NGOs and on the possible ways forward for the accreditation system. In total, 38 States Parties and 68 accredited NGOs took part in this consultation, the preliminary results of which were presented to the thirteenth session of the Committee in 2018 ([document ITH/18/13.COM/13](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-18-13.COM-13-EN.docx)). While taking note of the consultation process, the Committee requested that the Secretariat continue the reflection and present the results and proposals for the revision of the accreditation system at its fourteenth session ([Decision 13.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/13)). The electronic consultation was followed by a physical consultation meeting organised on 18 April 2019 at UNESCO Headquarters. The [report of the consultation meeting](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/45581-EN.docx) was reviewed by the Steering Committee of the ICH NGO Forum, before being shared with States Parties and accredited NGOs in August 2019. The results of the reflection were presented to the fourteenth session of the Committee in December 2019 (see section II below).
2. Overall, 76 States and 99 accredited NGOs took part in at least one stage of the reflection process organised by the Secretariat. While not all accredited NGOs and States Parties contributed to the electronic consultation, it was possible to gather a representative sample of opinions (56 per cent of accredited NGOs and 43 per cent of States Parties). In parallel and as part of its mandate, the informal ad hoc open-ended working group (established by the eleventh session of the Committee in 2016 and extended in 2017 by [Decision 12.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/13) and 2018 by [Decision 13.COM 16](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/16)) undertook discussions which led to a set of recommendations with regards to the participation of NGOs that are in line with the main outcomes outlined below ([Decision 14.COM 16](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/16) and [document LHE/19/14.COM/16](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-16-EN.docx)).

#### Main outcomes of the reflection

1. While a detailed analysis on the outcomes of the reflection was presented to the fourteenth session of the Committee ([document LHE/19/14.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-15-EN.docx)), the main outcomes can be summarised as follows:

* As regards the purpose of the accreditation system two visions exist: on one hand, the accreditation is understood to provide the expertise and experience of NGOs in the sense of Article 9.1 of the Convention and paragraph 96 of the Operational Directives; yet at the same time the accreditation system is considered as an affiliation system, through which NGOs can be identified and can benefit from international recognition.
* Concerning the definition of advisory functions to be fulfilled by NGOs, two main categories emerged corresponding to the two visions of the accreditation system outlined above: NGOs are considered both as advisory organizations to the Committee and as stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention.
* As for processes and criteria applied for the accreditation and review of accreditation, it was widely acknowledged that during the review of accreditation the contribution and commitment of accredited NGOs (paragraph 94 of the Operational Directives) should be assessed on the same criteria as those used to accredit NGOs in the first place (paragraph 91 of the Operational Directives).
* Considerations were given to the possible establishment of an ‘umbrella organisation’, responsible for the accreditation and review of accreditation, and for the coordination of the advisory support by NGOs. The proposal did not gain a consensus, and States and accredited NGOs leant instead towards the improvement of the current system or, alternatively, a hybrid approach, in which the current accreditation would be improved and where the ICH NGO Forum could play a role.
* Unbalanced geographical distribution of accredited NGOs was outlined as one of the major concerns. The reflection process has pointed out that the possibility of establishing a ceiling of accredited NGOs in over-represented regions was not welcomed. Instead, initiatives to raise awareness about the accreditation system and build capacities of NGOs from under-represented regions received positive remarks.

1. The fourteenth session of the Committee in 2019 discussed at length the outcomes of the reflection ([Decision 14.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/15)). The Committee reaffirmed that NGOs accredited under the 2003 Convention, irrespective of their size and capacities, are valuable custodians of the Convention. The session also gave an opportunity for the Committee to learn about the recent developments under the ICH NGO Forum which adopted its Bylaws[[1]](#footnote-1) and Code of Conduct as well as its recent thematic undertakings (particularly related to the topic of intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts and intangible cultural heritage and sustainable tourism). Rather than radically changing the accreditation system currently in place, the Committee has indicated its preference to refocus the accreditation on NGOs with recognized competence to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee. In this regard some of the functions that may be open to accredited NGOs include periodic reporting, pre and post inscription peer assistance process, monitoring the impact of inscription, follow-up on inscribed elements, dissemination of good safeguarding practices, thematic studies and projects (e.g. intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts, tourism and commercialization) and capacity building.
2. The issue of under-represented regions was considered again as an issue and the Committee therefore encouraged stakeholders to organize capacity building for NGOs that may seek accreditation in the future with a particular focus on non-governmental organizations based in under-represented regions. Furthermore, the Committee asked to hear the voices of NGOs through more meaningful and regular interactions between the Committee and the ICH NGO Forum and therefore decided to include, on an experimental basis, a specific item on ‘Report of the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum’ at its fifteenth session. The Committee also decided that mapping the network of accredited NGOs would be valuable to facilitate their involvement in the implementation of the Convention and the work of the Committee. In this regard, the Secretariat is requested to gather relevant information from accredited non-governmental organizations in order to map their domains of competence, taking into consideration their capacities.
3. The General Assembly may wish to adopt the following resolution:

DRAFT RESOLUTION 8.GA 12

The General Assembly,

1. Having examined document LHE/20/8.GA/12,
2. Recalling Article 9 of the Convention and chapter III.2 of the Operational Directives,
3. Further recalling [Decision 12.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/13), [Decision 12.COM 17](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/17), [Decision 13.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/13), [Decision 13.COM 16](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/16), [Decision 14.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/15), and [Decision 14.COM 16](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/16) as well as [Resolution 7.GA 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Resolutions/7.GA/6) and [Resolution 7.GA 11](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/7.GA/11),
4. Commends the Secretariat, accredited non-governmental organizations, the ICH NGO Forum, the informal ad hoc open-ended working group and States Parties for carrying out the reflection on the participation of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Convention;
5. Acknowledges the important role and untapped potential of accredited non-governmental organizations and the ICH NGO Forum in providing support for the implementation of the Convention;
6. Welcomes the specific item ‘Report of the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum’ to be inscribed, on an experimental basis, on the provisional agenda of the fifteenth session of the Committee;
7. Takes note of the outcomes of the reflection process and requests that the Secretariat implement, as appropriate, the relevant decisions of the Committee in consultation and collaboration with the ICH NGO Forum.

1. . Seven groups of functions of the ICH NGO Forum were identified in its Bylaws (Article 3), summarized as follows: (1) serve as a forum of exchange of information and ideas for safeguarding ICH; (2) act as a platform for networking and cooperation among ICH NGOs; (3) foster the ethical principles and participation of civil society in the safeguarding of ICH; (4) provide resources, reports and information about safeguarding practices to UNESCO, States Parties, communities, practitioners and other stakeholders; (5) support NGOs in advancing their cooperation with governmental and intergovernmental entities; (6) contribute to the capacity-building programme and to experience sharing on good safeguarding practices; (7) advise the Intergovernmental Committee on specific thematic issues and participate in reporting and monitoring on inscribed elements and safeguarding practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)