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Living Heritage

in the face of COVID-19

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UNESCO is grateful to the survey respondents who provided photos together with their responses. You can find these images, which come from the communities, throughout the report. Details on the source of each photo are provided below.

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SUMMARY

Intangible cultural heritage is fundamentally linked to the people who practice and transmit it – it cannot exist otherwise. The COVID-19 pandemic put in stark relief the value of intangible cultural heritage and the importance communities attach to its continued practice and expression. The impact of the pandemic has been far-reaching. More than a year since the onset of the global health crisis that continues to affect all regions of the world, we have yet to assess the full economic, social, and psychological impacts on our individual lives and our societies as a whole.

As debates are sparked worldwide on how our future will look and how we can build back better for future generations, it is essential to reflect on the impact that the pandemic has had on living heritage and what this means for the future. To this end, in April 2020, UNESCO launched an ongoing global survey to collect testimonies from individuals and institutions to better understand how people are experiencing their living heritage during these difficult times. In twelve months, UNESCO received more than 200 testimonies from all regions of the world, giving an initial snapshot of how people experience their living heritage in times of crisis.

The survey results showed that, firstly, as would be expected, the pandemic greatly impacted the living heritage of communities around the world. While these impacts were often negative, in some cases, and somewhat surprisingly, they were positive. Secondly, in many cases, communities **adapted** their practice of living heritage to specific contexts, highlighting the resilience of many forms of living heritage in complex situations. This demonstrated, as the third point, that for many, the practice of living heritage became itself an important means of **resilience** for people to overcome social and psychological challenges they faced in the context of the pandemic.

The report presents the case for these three different, yet interrelated, dimensions of the pandemic's impact on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and suggests three broad areas of action with a view to the post-pandemic recovery phase. Firstly, during the recovery phase, it will be important to **strengthen direct support mechanisms to living heritage bearers**. These need to be enacted as much as possible at the local level, including through local governance structures, for building back better. Secondly, it is necessary, going forward, to leverage opportunities offered by **digital technologies** to support resilience and safeguarding and to increase the visibility and recognition of living heritage. And thirdly, there is a need to intensify efforts to integrate living heritage safeguarding into **emergency preparedness, response and recovery** plans in general.

Overall, the pandemic and the resulting restrictions on social life amplified the ongoing importance and relevance of intangible cultural heritage in addressing some of the most pressing and complex challenges of our time.

INTRODUCTION

"We believe that both the publication and the dissemination of the local experiences of the bearers who try to give life to their intangible cultural heritage in the midst of the pandemic, as well as the promotion conducted by allied institutions, can reduce tensions despite this global tragedy; reinforcing the role of intangible cultural heritage in promoting the values that give meaning to human endeavours and breathe hopefulness into it in the face of current problems."

Centro de la Diversidad Cultural (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

With the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in early 2020, the world was met with an unexpected global public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all aspects of our daily lives – from the way we work and learn to the way we interact and spend time together – including disruptions to the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

Intangible cultural heritage, also known as 'living heritage',¹ refers to cultural practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that are continuously recreated as they are transmitted from generation to generation and adapted in response to our environment. Both contemporary and dynamic, living heritage is important because it offers communities and individuals a sense of identity and continuity. It includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and knowledge and skills related to craftsmanship. Living heritage can promote social cohesion, respect for cultural diversity and human creativity, as well as help communities build resilient, peaceful, and inclusive societies.

Intangible cultural heritage exists only in so far it is enacted and transmitted by people, and it follows, therefore, that saving human lives remains undoubtedly the most critical action for safeguarding living heritage during the pandemic. Nevertheless, many of the measures taken to counter the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have had and continue to have an impact on people's ability to practise their living heritage. To support communities in facing the crisis, in April 2020, UNESCO launched an online survey and platform on 'Living Heritage Experiences and the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

The primary objective of the survey was to enhance learning and understanding about safeguarding living heritage in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The survey was built around two central lines of enquiry based on UNESCO's previous work on [intangible cultural heritage in emergencies](#). In recent years, UNESCO, has undertaken a reflection on the role of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, including both conflict and

disaster situations. In 2020, this culminated in the adoption by the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, of the [operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies](#), which provide guidance to stakeholders on how to best safeguard and engage intangible cultural heritage in emergency contexts. While they do not specifically address the context of pandemics, the operational principles and modalities provide a framework for understanding the dual role of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, both as being under threat and as a source of resilience and recovery for communities.

Following this approach, the survey was designed to collect information on:

- **The impact of the pandemic on intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding; and**
- **The roles that intangible cultural heritage can play in the resilience of communities in the context of the pandemic.**

In order to disseminate the survey experiences, the [online platform](#) was designed as a space where living heritage stakeholders could exchange experiences, draw inspiration and learn from each other about issues and challenges facing intangible cultural heritage during the pandemic. In this way, it corresponded to UNESCO's clearinghouse function by creating a platform for knowledge sharing and learning about intangible cultural heritage, bringing community voices to the forefront.

At the time of writing this report, the survey remains open to responses as the pandemic is ongoing; therefore, the report presents a summary of the survey responses collected during a period of one year, from April 2020 to April 2021. It does not purport to provide an exhaustive analysis of the pandemic's impact on living heritage worldwide. By looking at the voices and stories of communities who responded to the survey, the report seeks to highlight key insights and trends related to the pandemic's impact on intangible cultural heritage, the role it plays in people's lives and its continued relevance for addressing their challenges as the world eventually moves into a post-pandemic phase.

The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage



The adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as 'the Convention') by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003 was the result of longstanding efforts by UNESCO's Member States to provide a legal, administrative and financial framework to safeguard this heritage.

The main purposes of the Convention are to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, to ensure respect for it, to raise awareness about its importance and to provide for international cooperation and assistance in these fields. The Convention focuses on the role of communities and groups in identifying and safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage. It places emphasis on living heritage that is performed by people, often collectively, and mostly communicated through lived experience. It acknowledges that this heritage, passed through generations, is dynamic and is constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. As of April 2021, 180 countries have ratified the Convention.



Passers-by enjoy the blossoming cherry trees. Satte, Japan

I. SURVEY OVERVIEW

The survey included a central open-ended question asking respondents to share their experience of how their living heritage had been affected by the pandemic and how their communities were drawing on it to help cope.² Respondents were encouraged to share specific examples of initiatives from their country or community. There was also the possibility to include links to webpages, social media, images, and videos to illustrate the experiences. To promote a broad and inclusive approach, the survey was open to any element recognized by communities as part of their living heritage, whether inscribed or not on the Lists of the 2003 Convention.

The survey questions were kept to a minimum to ensure the widest possible participation among bearers and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in their own words. This gave the data more diversity than would be possible with a closed-question survey, captured the detail and nuanced experiences of communities during the pandemic, and led to the collection of rich qualitative data, providing a more holistic and comprehensive look at the issues at stake for living heritage in the pandemic. However, such open-ended surveys are by nature, less amenable to quantitative based conclusions, or meaningful statistical analysis.

The survey, available in English, French and Spanish, was open to all and published on the UNESCO website. It was furthermore circulated through UNESCO's networks, including the 2003 Convention's network of 157 accredited NGOs, its global network of 145 facilitators, Category 2 Centres with specialized activities in the field of intangible cultural heritage, as well as relevant UNESCO Chairs. Links to the survey and platform were promoted on UNESCO social media channels, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Many of the responses took the form of first-person testimonies, providing unique insights into people's feelings, attitudes, and understandings of their living heritage during the pandemic. The collection of these often candid and personal stories was important to the methodological design of the survey given that much of our living heritage takes place in our daily lives. The survey therefore sought to capture information not only about national-level programmes and initiatives, but local, everyday encounters with intangible cultural heritage in the pandemic that shape our understanding of the world and our place within it.³

In addition, the survey specifically aimed to gather comments, ideas and suggestions on how to help safeguard living heritage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The voices of the survey respondents are reflected in the recommendations presented in the report. This approach – giving voice to communities – is in line with one of the core principles of the 2003 Convention: that it is the communities who practice living heritage who must be at the centre of defining and leading safeguarding efforts.

Summary of responses

As of 1 April 2021, the platform features 236 experiences from 78 countries across all UNESCO regions. Of the responses received, the largest proportion came from bearers and practitioners of living heritage (33%), followed by national authorities (19%), university, researchers in the field of intangible cultural heritage (12%), cultural centres (12%), NGOs (11%) and museums (4%). The high ratio of bearers and practitioners who responded to the survey underscored the community-based nature of intangible cultural heritage and the multiple ways that the pandemic affected the everyday lives of practitioners. Several responses by national authorities were based on surveys collated at national level.

Examining the type of actor involved in the experiences, most responses mentioned initiatives led by bearers and practitioners of living heritage. This is not surprising given the need for rapid responses and the resulting, and often-spontaneous, nature of safeguarding initiatives that occurred following the outbreak of the pandemic at community level. This included activities that took place in homes or through personal social networks, as people shared their living heritage with others in their community to strengthen resilience during this time. Non-governmental organizations, national authorities, cultural centres, and other institutional structures, such as museums, also provided examples of more structured initiatives. Some of these initiatives targeted groups, such as indigenous peoples, youth, elderly bearers, and women.

Responses were received from all regions, with the largest proportion coming from Latin America and the Caribbean (34%), followed by Western Europe and North America (33%), Asia and the Pacific (18%), Eastern Europe (8%), Arab States (4%) and Africa (3%). It should be noted that the survey was only made available in English, French and Spanish; however, there were efforts coordinated at national level to translate the survey into other languages, wherever possible. The disparity of the situations in each country also results in the wide disparity in responses received from each region. The period in which the country was hit by the pandemic, the timing of lockdown measures, the level of internet access all contribute to explaining the discrepancy between regions.

Measures around physical distancing, quarantine and limitations on mass gatherings directly affected many domains of intangible cultural heritage. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned experience (64% of responses) concerned **social practices, rituals, and festive events**, which were **cancelled or postponed** due to public health restrictions in response to COVID-19. Indeed, the cancellation of events was one of the most immediately visible impacts of the coronavirus on intangible cultural heritage as people were physically prevented from coming together. However, several other domains were also hard hit, including **traditional craftsmanship**, mentioned in 42% of responses, and the performing arts at 41%.

In terms of the type of responses received, almost all responses (93%) referred to the pandemic's impact on living heritage (see Figure 1, below). This included both the ways in which the safeguarding and transmission of intangible cultural heritage had been weakened or threatened by the pandemic and how, in other cases, it had been transformed, revived, or recreated. This underscores not only the **vulnerability** and fragility of living heritage in emergencies, but it also reflects the capacity of living heritage to evolve and adapt in response to the changes in the environment around it.



A violinist and mejoranera player participates in online cultural events, Panama

In this sense, 37% of responses also referred to the ways in which intangible cultural heritage provided a source of **resilience** to the communities, groups and individuals concerned, and strengthened their ability to withstand and cope with the pandemic.

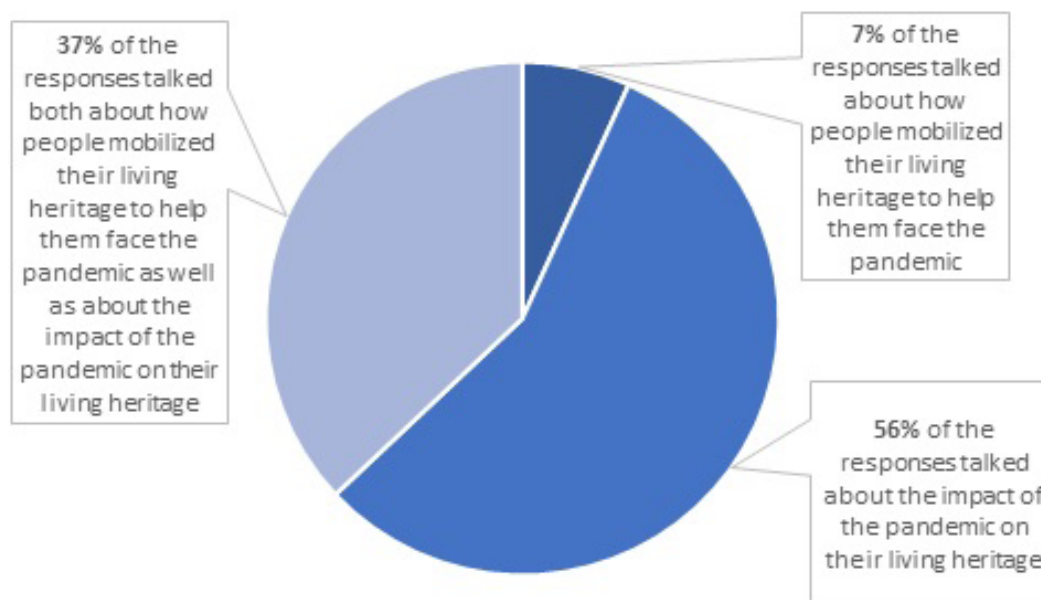


Fig.1. Impact and resilience as expressed in survey responses

In another question, respondents were asked how UNESCO, national and local governments and all stakeholders concerned could better support the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the pandemic context (see Figure 2, below). These ideas came directly from those who encountered challenges practicing their living heritage, as well as from those who mobilized their heritage to overcome the difficulties brought by the crisis. They constitute a basis for the guiding orientations presented in this paper for further recognising living heritage for its multiples roles in enhancing the well-being of communities and improving emergency preparedness. Respondents identified the need for stronger mechanisms to provide **financial and institutional support** to bearers and practitioners, including better access to **digital technologies**. Many responses also spoke of the need to **strengthen networking opportunities** among bearers and awareness-raising efforts about the role and importance of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding for people’s well-being in efforts to build back better. The survey and platform were created with this objective in mind and will continue to be open for the public to share and exchange information as their experience of the pandemic evolves.

How to help safeguard living heritage in the pandemic context?

Suggested types of measures	Explanatory description	Number of occurrences
Fostering digital public spaces	Support the creation of online public spaces allowing all bearers (including older generations) to practise and transmit their living heritage, and providing alternative means of heritage-sensitive commercialization to compensate the closure of physical spaces	37
Enhancing institutional support	Support provided by national or local institutions to living heritage communities	29
Networking	Encourage networking between communities, exchanging experiences / peer-to-peer learning	26
Providing financial support	Establish economic measures mitigating the impact of the crisis for living heritage communities	23
Media and communication support	Stimulate more communication about living heritage and more visibility in media	15
Documenting and monitoring	Foster the monitoring of intangible cultural heritage and its documentation, with online access to information	13
Supporting local production/ consumption	Support local production and consumption to sustain the livelihood of communities and build resilience	11
Participatory approach	Involve communities in the elaboration of policies or recovery process	10
Further researching the pandemic's impact	Foster further research on the impact of the crisis on living heritage or on the resilience intangible cultural heritage brings to communities	9
Enabling minimal access to physical cultural spaces	Assist bearers and practitioners in establishing appropriate health measures to allow some access to physical cultural spaces	7

Fig.2. Comments and suggestions collected through the survey on how to help safeguard living heritage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

II. HOW IS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTING LIVING HERITAGE?

Key findings

Physical distancing and lockdown measures led to the cancellation or postponement of many important events and restricted access to the spaces, places, objects, and materials necessary for the practice of living heritage.

The sudden loss of income and livelihoods for bearers and practitioners (many of whom largely operate in the informal sector) can seriously threaten the viability of living heritage, including its transmission to future generations.

In considering the pandemic's impact on intangible cultural heritage, it is first important to acknowledge that intangible cultural heritage is indivisible from the social, cultural, and economic lives of the communities who practice and transmit it. It follows that the upheaval communities experienced in their daily lives extended to how people interacted with their intangible cultural heritage. Likewise, threats to intangible cultural heritage itself have a direct and negative impact on the well-being of communities and their ability to cope with the crisis. Moreover, many important living heritage bearers and practitioners tragically lost their lives to the disease, with many more falling ill. This represents an immense loss to the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and the transmission of valuable cultural knowledge and diversity to future generations.

"The pandemic has caused physical and social distancing that has created the challenge of 'living differently' outside of the socio-cultural context marked by solidarity, living together and inter and intra-community encounters that are indispensable [to communities]."

Lassana Cisse, Expert, in heritage and local development (Mali)

It is still too early to isolate the full scope of the pandemic's impact on the transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, which will continue to play out for years to come. Previous studies by UNESCO on the safeguarding and mobilization of intangible cultural heritage in disasters have pointed to the lack of baseline data and a coherent framework to understand damages and losses to intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts.⁴ This issue is also relevant to our understanding of intangible cultural heritage in the pandemic, as well as other protracted crises, such as those related to climate change. Notions of non-economic loss and damage, which may include the loss of ways of life and cultural heritage, are difficult to quantify and often go unnoticed by the outside world. Moreover, given the complex processes of expression and transmission that characterize intangible cultural heritage, as well as its inherent dynamism, understanding the impact of this loss over the longer term is a challenging task.

Nonetheless, in the immediate term, it is evident that the physical distancing measures imposed by COVID-19 have had a profound impact on many forms of intangible heritage, which depend on human-to-human interaction for their very expression and viability. As detailed in Figure 3 below, the survey identified several different ways in which living heritage and its bearers have been impacted, whether negatively or positively, showing the resilient nature of heritage.

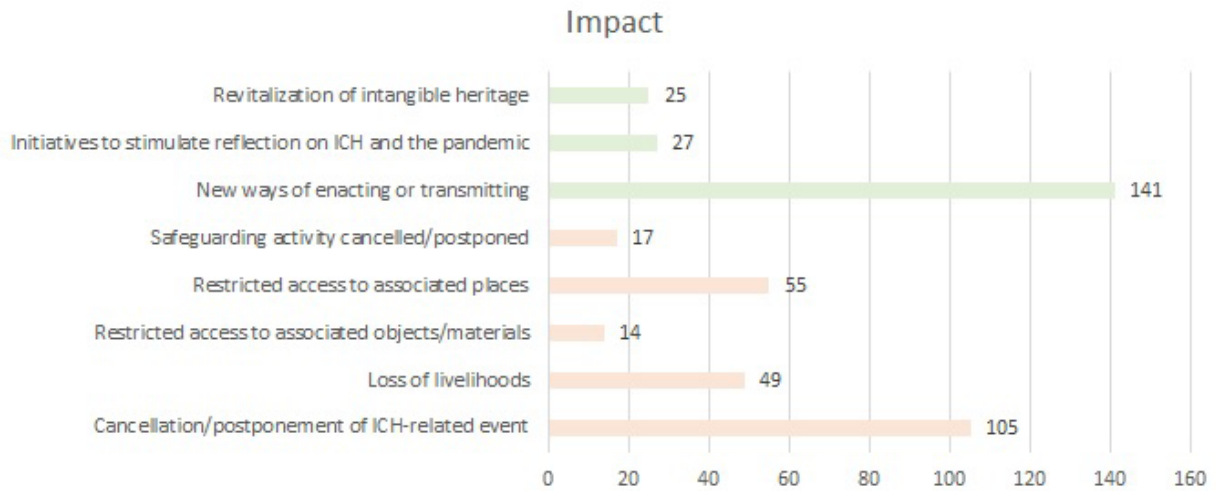


Fig.3. *Impact of the pandemic on living heritage in survey responses*

Disruptions to the enactment and transmission of living heritage

"The current situation has aroused in people a mixture of feelings in which regret and even pain for the cancellation (or uncertain postponement) of the various events and rituals has to deal with the concern for health, [one's] own and of loved ones, with the fear of contravening the rules imposed, with a widespread sense of abandonment and with anxiety for the future."

Associazione Culturale Circolo della Zampogna (Italy)

Perhaps the most immediately visible and direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on intangible cultural heritage was the cancellation or postponement of large-scale festive events. From Holy Week processions in Popayán, **Colombia**,⁵ to the Kuomboka ceremony in **Zambia** or Carnival celebrations in **Spain** and **Brazil**, many events were cancelled or suspended, sometimes for the first time in living memory. Their cancellation was profoundly felt by communities who described the destabilizing effects of not being able to come together at these pivotal moments in social and cultural life.



The Generalitat of Valencia postponed celebrating Las Fallas Festival due to COVID-19, Spain.

It should be noted that the cancellation of such events was an essential measure in line with public health advice to curtail infection rates. Communal gatherings are a keystone to many forms of intangible cultural heritage and by not following public health guidelines around physical distancing, they could have also contributed to the spread of the disease. Indeed, in the early stages of the pandemic in Asia and Europe, several disease outbreak events were linked to large gatherings of people for religious or cultural reasons. Recognizing the need to rethink the continued

practice of their living heritage in light of COVID-19 restrictions, the responses detailed how communities adapted to the situation by drastically limiting the number of people who could participate in large-scale events or streaming events online.

In addition to large-scale events, responses described the disruption caused by the pandemic to important social rituals and practices that provide meaning and structure to individual lives. For example, many practices and rituals associated with pivotal life cycle events – such as birth, deaths, and marriages – were restricted due to social distancing measures. Respondents described an intense sense of grief and loss in not being able to give a relative or loved one a proper burial. Funerals often involve entire communities, but social distancing changed how those rituals played out. Communities were forced to rethink how they bury their dead and associated end-of-life rituals and rites. In **Palestine**, communities spoke about how customs and rituals associated with death, such as holding charity feasts and meals for the soul of the deceased were restricted. Ceremonies were drastically reduced in size with condolences given over the phone rather than in large social settings. End of life ceremonies play an important therapeutic role for those who remain, and not being able to partake in them added significantly to the trauma already suffered by the loss of loved ones.



Funerals had to respect physical distancing measures, Spain.

Spotlight: Living heritage and the impact of the pandemic on UNESCO World Heritage properties



Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba, Togo

During the pandemic, many UNESCO World Heritage properties closed or became less accessible due to restrictions on movement.⁶ At the end of April 2020, UNESCO estimated that nearly 90% of the World Heritage properties around the world were closed or partially closed to the public. Communities living in or around these important cultural and natural sites are greatly affected by their closure, which in turn impacts the practice and transmission of the associated knowledge and skills.

Some examples of how the pandemic has impacted UNESCO World Heritage properties connected to living heritage include:

Deterioration of 'Takienta' mud tower-houses the traditional dwellings of Batammariba people in Togo, which are foundational to their cultural identity and indigenous knowledge (Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba, **Togo**);

Difficulty to access and maintain shifting agricultural systems known as chagras in the Colombian Amazon, traditionally managed by indigenous peoples following their ecological knowledge (Chiribiquete National Park – The Maloca of the Jaguar, **Colombia**);⁷

Disruptions to traditional land management practices and the intergenerational transmission of related cultural knowledge due to indigenous elders not being able to access the country (Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, **Australia**);

Cancellation of important cultural events such as the return of the Polynesian canoes to Taputapuātea and the Holopuni annual canoe races (Taputapuātea, French Polynesia, **France**);

Interruption of social practices and rituals related to the Jesuit Missions of La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná and Jesús de Tavarangue in **Paraguay**.

Restricted access to associated spaces and places



Spiritual support during the coronavirus pandemic, Kyrgyzstan.

Many measures imposed to mitigate the spread of the pandemic led to restrictions to, and closures of, many cultural and natural spaces and places of memory, which are intricately connected with expressions of intangible cultural heritage. This included the closure of religious and sacred sites, as well as national parks, where important rituals or social practices may take place.

The closure of UNESCO World Heritage properties also had knock-on effects for many associated intangible cultural heritage practices.

A response received from the Town of Bamberg, **Germany**, described how the market gardens, which encompass community traditions, knowledge and processing techniques, have been closed during the pandemic, not only affecting the transmission of this knowledge, but the livelihoods of those who depend on the gardens. In Timbuktu, **Mali**, disruptions to community practices have had an impact on the maintenance of the earthen architectural heritage.



Some practices associated with living heritage have been partially or totally interrupted, such as the community's knowledge of the maintenance of earthen architectural heritage in Djenné, Mali.

The survey also included several accounts about how the closure of religious sites and places of worship affected the enactment and practice of related intangible cultural heritage. This included restrictions on religious pilgrimages and their associated rituals, oral traditions, folklore, and social practices.

Religious practices can provide solace during times of hardship, but in the context of the pandemic, the communal gatherings often required for their practice posed a risk. Communities found new ways to continue enacting their practices, while respecting limits on physical gatherings. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, **India**, the closure of temples disrupted daily worshipping practices and the celebration of Meenakshi Thirukalyanam, celebrating the divine wedding of the Goddess Meenaskhi with Lord Shiva. The celebrations went ahead with revised restrictions, including a limited number of priests and an online livestream for the public.



Main gate of Meenakshi temple, Madurai, India.

Restrictions to religious sites also included cultural spaces, such as cemeteries, which are the site of important rituals and cultural events. In the **Republic of Moldova** the closure of cemeteries during the pandemic prevented communities from accessing the tombs of their relatives to undertake rituals usually performed in the Holy Week before Easter.

Likewise, in **Singapore**, practices and rituals related to the care for the dead were restricted during the Qing Ming Festival with the eventual closure of government columbaria, except for essential services like burials and the installation of urns. To enable families to continue the practices related to the Qing Ming Festival, some organisations like Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery introduced online services where devotees could order ancestral offerings and/or book a mass chanting session conducted by the monks, without having to be physically present at the temple.

In terms of cultural institutions and spaces, a UNESCO report in April 2021 showed that museums were closed for an average of 155 days in 2020, and in the first quarter of 2021, 43% of the world's estimated 104,000 museums faced closures.⁸ Museums can play an important role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and may often serve as a hub for safeguarding activities. The closure of museums worldwide thus caused a serious threat to many safeguarding activities in terms of education and awareness raising. However, while the closure of museums affected ongoing safeguarding activities, museums also found innovative ways to adapt to the situation and continue promoting intangible cultural heritage.



Sortez masqués comme nous

The Meyboom puppets also wear masks when they go out, Belgium



Indigo cloth is used for making masks, Austria.

For instance, the Färbermuseum in **Austria**, which plays an important role in safeguarding the element 'Indigo hand block printing in the Mühlviertel region',⁹ was forced to close its doors in 2020 with the pandemic. However, after the Austrian government recommended wearing face masks, the Färbermuseum started to produce masks made from local, indigo-dyed material. The masks were distributed in the region in exchange for donations to the museum.

Shortly after, a regional bank (VKB-BANK) ordered masks for more than 800 employees, showing a successful collaboration between a regional institution and traditional craftsmanship.

Social media played a particularly strong role in facilitating cultural institutions and museums to maintain contact with communities during lockdown. The Itata Museo Antropológico in **Chile** suspended all face-to-face activities abruptly during the confinement but maintained their work with the community by inviting people to learn more about their heritage on social media through audiovisual stories and conversations with poets, folklorists and visual artists.

Many forms of intangible cultural heritage that include live performances were forced to stop suddenly with the pandemic. This had a particularly devastating effect on the performing arts, including traditional music, dance, and theatre, which according to an OECD report on the creative and cultural sectors were among the hardest hit. The closure of such performance spaces not only affects the performers themselves, but the network of actors who support them, such as those who produce the instruments, stage tools or costumes.¹⁰

Spotlight: The impact of the closure of cultural institutions in the Republic of Moldova

The celebration of Easter is considered as one of the major holidays in the **Republic of Moldova**, marked by the enactment of several traditional practices from Palm Sunday and throughout the Easter Week. These range from ritual performances and the singing of Easter carols dedicated to St-Lazarus in villages to the organization of important festivals, such as the Duminică, la Florii Festival in Southern Moldova. With the closure of cultural venues serving as venues for these performances and the restrictions imposed on public gatherings, children lost an opportunity to learn the repertoire of traditional songs, dances and ritual acts that are annually performed outside of their immediate family.

Each year during Easter, the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History (Chişinău) in the Republic of Moldova organizes a workshop dedicated to painting eggs using a specific painting technique with beeswax. With the closure of the museum, the museum staff organized a contest for painted eggs prepared at home. Information and images were provided on the museum's website and Facebook page, as well as other Easter traditions and videos from previous workshops.



Painted eggs contest, organized by the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, Republic of Moldova

In **Japan**, the closure of the National Theatre and National Noh Theatre meant that many music players and performers of traditional stage performances such as Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki and Bunraku found themselves out of work. Moreover, the craftspeople who manufacture and repair the musical instruments also found themselves without work as the number of requests from performers dramatically decreased. One of the bearers of the string-making technique for stringed instruments faced the risk of permanently closing his business if the situation continued.

Likewise, a maker of the 'Sasaki Noh Costume' has had a dramatic decrease in orders over the last year threatening the closure of the business. This represents a significant threat to the continued viability of the element since the Noh costume makers have detailed knowledge and techniques of the craft transferred directly between performer and craftsman.



Many Bunraku performances had to be cancelled because of the pandemic, Japan.

Loss of livelihoods

"Folk performers, ritual dancers, theatre artists, people working in the handicraft sector etc. have all been seriously affected. This includes stage artists, dance school teachers, make-up artists, costume rental people, pageantry artists, wedding dancers, musicians, both classical and folk, and tribal artists who have lost their income."

Folkland – International Centre for Folklore and Culture (India)

Disruptions to the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage had important consequences for the livelihoods of intangible cultural heritage bearers during the pandemic. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural and creative industries – a sector that contributes US\$2,250 billion to the global economy and accounts for 29.5 million jobs worldwide – has been widely felt.¹¹ The OECD estimates that along with the tourism sector, the cultural and creative sectors were among the hardest hit by the current crisis, with the performing arts, festivals and museums some of the most affected by the physical distancing measures. Fewer events, activities, and visitors led to a sudden drop in revenue and reduced wages for many involved in the sector, with repercussions across the entire value chain of suppliers.

The results of this survey indicate that the situation has been particularly challenging for those whose livelihoods are based on their living heritage. With the **breakdown in production chains**, many artisans and traditional craftspeople have found it difficult to source raw materials. The **decrease in tourism** has weakened demand for craft goods and products catering to the tourist market. Figures on the true economic costs or losses for intangible cultural heritage are often harder to capture, given that so many bearers and practitioners of living heritage operate in the **informal sector**. Moreover, this also meant that community members encountered challenges in accessing financial subsidies made available for those in the creative sector, further exacerbating their already vulnerable position.

In some communities, living heritage can be a core part of the local economy and is often essential for sustaining the livelihoods of whole groups. Traditional craftsmanship, for instance, transmitted from generations, can be an important source of income for those otherwise on the economic margins of society. It generates income not only for the craftspeople and their families but also for those involved in transporting and selling craft products or gathering or producing raw materials. These activities, often conducted within the framework of the family or community, provide a sense of belonging and are closely linked to the identity of the community.

Traditional crafts have been affected by the closure of important venues for selling and showcasing craft work, such as exhibitions and art fairs. Restrictions in movement have hampered relations between artisans, customers and dealers and the demand for all types of non-essential goods has collapsed with increasing economic insecurity. In **Sri Lanka**, some traditional craftspeople were forced to suspend their crafts as the collection and transportation of raw materials and selling of craft items became impossible. Makers of traditional lace in **Poland** found it difficult to source materials, with the closure of shops, and limited availability online.

Further to the direct impact on the livelihoods of bearers, repercussions of the health crisis across the local economy should not be underestimated, as the cancellation of events and closure of public spaces affected the formal and informal economies linked to the daily lives of bearers. For instance, festive events take months or even years of preparation, supporting whole ecosystems of actors. The cancellation of such events and performances had a far-reaching impact on local economies.

Spotlight: Reduced demand for Chhau dance groups in India

Chhau is a traditional performing art in **India**,¹² involving dance and martial practices originating from eastern India. The dance incorporates vibrant, colourful, and elaborate masks portraying animals and characters from the epics. A response to the survey detailed how the Charida village – the hub for mask making in the region with more than 110 families comprising 300 skilled mask makers – were devastated by the drop in demand for products with the pandemic. The families depend on Chhau mask making as their primary livelihood, which they sell to dance troupes and tourists. The cancellation in performances has led to a drop in demand for the masks and a dramatic loss of income for the mask makers. Without financial opportunities, dance troupes are worried that they will now lose their members, who are forced to migrate for work. Many had already turned to farming and daily labour to supplement their income, but day-to-day survival remains a challenge.

Without financial opportunities, dance troupes are worried that they will now lose their members, who are forced to migrate for work. Many had already turned to farming and daily labour to supplement their income, but day-to-day survival remains a challenge.



Chhau masks are made by artists of the community, Seraikella, India.

The health crisis simultaneously hit almost all economic sectors, challenging governments to quickly provide support to communities fighting for their survival. Due to the very nature of their income-generating activities – be it sales of handmade items or income directly linked to each performance held – bearers and practitioners are particularly vulnerable to any major disruption on people’s daily lives. Many of them fall outside the formal sector and face significant difficulties in accessing financial subsidies and schemes from national governments, regional programmes, or private initiatives.

For instance, some practitioners in **Japan** noted the serious obstacles that many elderly bearers and practitioners faced in accessing and navigating information about available financial schemes since many are without regular access to the internet. This is also a concern for indigenous peoples and rural bearers of intangible cultural heritage, especially those who may not speak the dominant language or who speak indigenous languages and have difficulties accessing information.

Spotlight: Gender dimension of the pandemic's impact on living heritage in Botswana

Women account for 37% of the 2 billion workers in informal employment worldwide.¹³ For instance in Africa, up to 90% of employed women are in the informal sector and are therefore particularly vulnerable to the economic impact of the pandemic. In **Botswana**, while female practitioners of earthenware pottery¹⁴ have been able to continue to practice their craft at home, they have not been able to distribute or sell their products due to restrictions on movement. As the practitioners are operating in the informal economy, they are not eligible for the government bailout and face significant threats to their livelihoods. Earthenware pottery is practiced by women, who transmit their knowledge and skills to daughters and granddaughters. This also points to the gender dimension and the disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls.



The master potter Mmapula Rapekenene collecting moshalakane clay for pot making, Botswana.

III. HOW IS LIVING HERITAGE ADAPTING TO THE CRISIS?

Key findings

Communities have explored new ways to express, transmit and safeguard their living heritage despite restrictions around physical distancing, particularly by using digital technologies and social media, and finding alternative performing venues.

In some cases, the pandemic has triggered the revitalization of living heritage, especially among younger generations and fostered reflections on the roles and importance of living heritage in times of crisis.

While the pandemic has highlighted the fragility of some elements of living heritage and exacerbated threats to its transmission and safeguarding, in many cases it has also revealed the resilience of this heritage to withstand crises and adapt in response to evolving circumstances. Despite the restrictions and barriers, communities have found remarkable and innovative ways to continue practicing and transmitting their living heritage in the context of the pandemic. While conventional modes of practicing living heritage were no longer possible with restrictions on mobility and face-to-face encounters, communities explored new modes of transmission, particularly through digital technologies. In this way, communities found ways to keep their intangible cultural heritage relevant in the pandemic context and draw meaning from its continued practice.



The artisan Ulyses CasBal demonstrates the process of polychroming zomorphic clay figures, Mexico.

The ways communities have responded to the pandemic underlines the dynamic nature of intangible cultural heritage, which has always been adapted, negotiated and recreated by communities in response to their environment and history. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different. While some expressions or practices may be eroded or even lost, the responses show how others were transformed, reinvigorated, revived, and revisited by communities. The following section looks at the ways communities responded to the pandemic in adapting their living heritage to the challenging and unprecedented circumstances before them.



The manager of the Camp Zama Arts and Crafts Center gives an online class on making 'Hinamatsuri' dolls, Japan

New ways of enacting living heritage

"With its enormous variety and ever-changing forms and functions, the intangible cultural heritage is subjected to adaptation into any social circumstances, reflecting people's needs and their perceptions toward the outside world."

China Folklore Society (China)

Survey responses documented how communities in many instances found ways to adapt the practice of their living heritage to the new context and in line with physical distancing measures. Through innovative ways, bearers succeeded in safeguarding a sense of continuity and togetherness within the community and even broaden the reach of their practices using **online platforms**. For instance, the Za Krizen procession on the island of Hvar, **Croatia**, which usually attracts hundreds of spectators along its 25-kilometre journey, was limited to a few cross bearers and streamed entirely online over eight hours.



The procession of Za Krizen ('following the cross') on the island of Hvar took place this year with a drastically reduced number of spectators, Croatia.

Another interesting example concerned the safeguarding of the tradition of the blessed palm in the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** where the Palmeros de Chacao adapted the traditional search for the palm, which has been carried out for more than two hundred years in the Waraira Repano mountain, closer to participants' homes due to restrictions on mobility. The respondent explained how this led to the selection of other types of more accessible plant species to alleviate the availability of raw plant materials needed for preparing the blessed crosses. This example points to the way a practice may also be transformed in response to changes brought about by the pandemic.

Innovative use of digital technologies

"Society is taking advantage of virtual means to meet in the practice of some knowledge and traditions. It is these practices and knowledge that are giving people hope, that allow people, despite distance and confinement, to meet and identify themselves. That is the power of living heritage"

María Claudia López, President, ICOMOS Colombia (Colombia)

Survey results clearly underlined the use of digital technologies and **social media** as new channels for enactment and transmission. This included the streaming of live performances online, awareness-raising initiatives through social media, online workshops led by bearers, as well as professional and scientific activities on safeguarding living heritage in the pandemic. With the closure of theatres and performing spaces, some theatres made available free online content of past performances, such as the National Gugak Center and Seoul Donhwamun Traditional Theatre in the **Republic of Korea**.

Another example is online festivals related to intangible cultural heritage that created new spaces for communities to come together and share in their intangible cultural heritage. In Finland, for instance, the VirtualKaustinen online festival invited participants to send in their own musical greetings – over 350 videos from across Finland and other countries were received. Such initiatives, while no substitute for the live interaction between audience and performers during live shows, did provide opportunities for the public to share and enjoy in intangible cultural heritage, sometimes reaching new audiences.



Music group on stage of the 2020 edition of the Finnish music festival VirtualKaustinen, Finland.

The pandemic likewise led some bearers and practitioners to develop **new ways of working together** in the digital space. Music and dance groups convened online. This may create opportunities for new forms of exchange and collaboration among bearers from different regions and countries. It may also open new spaces and access for some bearers who may otherwise face challenges to physical participation. At the same time, while cultural practices that traditionally take place in person may have been able to experiment with new modes of creation and collaboration, the UNESCO Policy Guide on Culture in Crisis points to the uneven level of digital skills among bearers and practitioners as well as measures that can be implemented to upgrade them.¹⁵



La Malacrianza Fundación Folklórica & Cultural held livestream talks on national dates, cultural elements, and research on folkloric blocks from regions of the country, Costa Rica.

Innovative approaches were taken by communities to ensure that wider audiences could still participate in important ritual events. Several important festive events and rituals related to the religious calendar were livestreamed to audiences in their home, such as Catholic Holy Week processions, digital iftars during Ramadan, and or prayer ceremonies during Buddhist and Hindu new year celebrations.

In **Georgia**, traditional feasts were performed online, with people preparing traditional dishes and drinks on a table before a computer screen, complete with toasts, songs and dancing. These examples demonstrate how digital technologies afforded communities the opportunity to share in and engage with their living heritage, while following ‘stay-at-home’ orders.



Family celebration during COVID-19 pandemic, United States

Spotlight: The tamboradas drum-playing rituals in Spain¹⁶

While the ritual, which usually takes place during Catholic Holy Week celebrations, could not be performed in the streets, the Peñas de Tamborileros de la Semana Santa de Hellín (Association of Drummers' Clubs of the Holy Week of Hellín) in Castile-La Mancha, launched the slogan 'Stay at home' and invited the drummers to play more than ever from windows, balconies and terraces of the city, sharing videos and photos on social media. Despite physical distancing, the continuation of this ritual created an atmosphere charged with emotion and feeling of collective communion, offering solidarity and support to community members.



Enara and Fran beat drums from rooftops as part of tamboradas celebrations in Hellin, Spain.

Countless initiatives highlighted in the survey included the use of social media and specific campaigns targeted around intangible cultural heritage. Online challenges were created, themed around intangible cultural heritage. For International Dance Day, CIOFF Greece created a video with 52 dancers across 12 cities in Greece dancing together from their home and shared through social media.



Dancers created videos for International Dance Day, Greece.

In **Singapore**, to foster a sense of togetherness amongst the local Muslim community during Ramadan, the National Heritage Board (NHB) introduced a month-long campaign titled #RamadanTogether to take Ramadan to the digital space. They created a website, providing a comprehensive writeup of the living heritage practices of Ramadan, along with links to online events that would be conducted via video or livestreaming platforms throughout the month. This shows not only the adaptation to digital forms, but how this was used as an opportunity to exchange, learn more about living heritage and raise awareness of its importance.

"In such circumstances when physical interaction is impossible, social digital networks turned into the only available tool to share in the living traditions of Georgia. Through social [media] the community members invite others to participate in the different challenges related to the intangible cultural heritage elements."

National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia (Georgia)



Mask made by a bearer of boutis textile arts, France.

To ensure continued transmission and learning about intangible cultural heritage, online workshops were organized by intangible cultural heritage bearers and practitioners. Online workshops provided the opportunity to sometimes reach new audiences. For instance, several craft associations and individuals, such as the case of a bearer of boutis textile arts in **France**, organized online workshops and training to support their community. They also helped build their capacities during the pandemic by making available helpful tools and resources.

While the online realm has been helpful in the pandemic, it cannot necessarily provide a substitute to replicate the face-to-face contexts necessary for the transmission of many forms of intangible cultural heritage, especially those based on the close master-apprentice relationship. The pandemic raises broader issues related to the practice of intangible cultural heritage in a digital environment.



Relationship between a master and his pupil in Cremona, Italy.



Two elders using Dantem, the Goan grinding stone, India.

Digital technologies open new possibilities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, but they cannot necessarily replace traditional modes of transmission. Indeed, the longer-term impact of these transformations is, at this stage, difficult to assess. While no doubt offering opportunities, the shift to digital technologies also requires deeper reflection on the implications for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

in line with the [Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage](#).¹⁷ Associated risks must be carefully considered, such as **decontextualization, copyright issues**, and the protection of **culturally-sensitive information and data**.

"Digital technology needs to be used for dissemination, capacity building...but it should not disempower leading to situations where intangible cultural heritage practitioners do not benefit from the sharing of digital content."

Contact Base (India)

The increasing use of online tools and platforms raises the issue of the **global digital divide**. While the pandemic has accelerated a shift towards digital technologies across the culture sector, this must be considered against the growing inequalities in the digital realm with over 4 billion of the 7.8 billion people in the world not having regular access to the Internet.¹⁸ Moreover, such divides often have gendered aspects with the OECD estimating that around 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone and can access mobile Internet.¹⁹ Many intangible cultural heritage bearers are elderly, or may come from rural and minority populations and indigenous peoples, facing additional disadvantages in accessing digital technologies.

Spotlight: Living heritage of indigenous peoples and the pandemic

Several responses to the survey documented testified to the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples, and particularly indigenous elders, are vulnerable to the risks from the pandemic, with significant cultural implications for the communities concerned. Indigenous elders play a crucial role in transmitting their culture, knowledge, values and languages to future generations. This may include, for instance, knowledge about protecting and managing the environment, traditional systems of governance, customary law and cultural ceremonies, which are all critical to the health and well-being of the community.



The Center for Conservation of Cultural Property and the Environment in the Tropics (CCCPET) is monitoring the quarantine practice of the Bontoc indigenous community in the northern Cordillera, Philippines

For instance, some responses referred to traditional systems of governance to invoke compulsory lockdown of communities to protect against the spread of the disease. In the northern province of Cordillera in the **Philippines**, the practice of *tengao* or *te-re* were called upon by community elders to close off entry to the community. Usually the practice was imposed enacted by communities as a rest period, often following festivities, harvest periods, conflict resolution, or to allow people to recover from sickness.²⁰ However, in the context of COVID-19, it was invoked by communities to reinforce local measures and prevent people from entering or exiting until *tengao* was lifted.

Many communities restricted access to their territories, as similarly described in responses from **Colombia**, **Ecuador** and **Bolivia**. While this means limiting access to consumer goods and medical services, they describe how it has also prompted the returned interest in to knowledge of traditional medicines, ancestral ceremonies as well as the recovery of agricultural practices.

In **Colombia**, Misak elders are teaching traditional agricultural techniques to younger generations, strengthening traditional recipes, while the Piaroa have been working on research to recover traditional seeds in experimental orchids. The Yaruro people have been working to research how to grow Moriche Palm trees, which provide a source of food as well as wood to build houses and crafts to sell. They also used the time to research the traditional stories related to the Moriche palms and related myths.



According to a contributor from Chía, Colombia: 'Life is teaching us new ways to share our cultural and natural heritage.'

Revitalization of living heritage transmission in times of crisis

"The remarkable irony about COVID-19's imposed culture of isolation is that it has facilitated the transmission of cultural knowledge from parents who now work from home, to children, whom have been ensconced for their safety. Songs, stories and even proverbs about resilience and withstanding trials and tribulations (such as those which reference the West African god Anansi) abound and are being recycled to teach life lessons and transmit coping mechanisms to deal with the pandemic."

David Brown, Director of Policy and Research at Jamaica Creative (Jamaica)

In some cases, among **younger generations**, the pandemic saw the **revival** or renewed interest in specific elements of intangible cultural heritage. Several of the examples collected through the survey were linked to increased time spent at home during the confinement, intensifying opportunities for transmission between generations. There was renewed interest in traditional crafts, such as lacemaking and embroidery techniques, as the lockdown provided more conducive environments to learn and acquire the specific skills and associated knowledge. In this way, the pandemic has shown how emergencies can sometimes provide reinvigorating or creative contexts for intangible cultural heritage, prompting the resurgence in nearly abandoned elements.

A particularly strong theme that emerged in the responses was a renewed interest in knowledge and skills related to **food preparation**. Food carries deep and multiple meanings for communities and the preparation of traditional foods and dishes has provided a sense of normalcy and comfort during the confinement. Spending more time at home, families found an opportunity for exchange and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. For instance, **Iranians** are witnessing the return of traditional dishes, including cooking and preparation methods of dishes from the Qajar era (18th and 19th centuries). Baking traditional Iranian pastries and bread also became very common. As one respondent notes: 'This revival of traditional food production (and of associated cooking utensils) signals two important aspects of intangible cultural heritage: first, that in a time of stress and uncertainty, traditional methods of food preparation provides people with comfort and a sense of reasserting control over their lives; second, many of these traditional foods require a lot of time and attention which is something that we all have in abundance, but which modern life in its normal manifestation does not usually allow us.'



Toquilla straw hat weaving,
Ecuador.

In addition to traditions around food, the responses noted instances of craft revival in **China**, storytelling and oral traditions in **Palestine** and traditional games in **Italy**. A 17-year-old apprentice in the traditional weaving of the **Ecuadorian** toquilla straw hat²¹ explained that ‘In some houses, the time is being used to educate the youngest in weaving’. Likewise, it is expected that ‘once the situation at the national level is overcome, the toquilla straw products that are being made at home can be sold. Also, due to mandatory confinement, weaving is being practiced at home to distract oneself’. This demonstrates how more time spent in the home during the confinement created greater opportunities for the transmission of living heritage between generations.

"Supporting and sharing information related to the living culture allows us to rethink the importance of the intangible cultural heritage and this knowledge helps to overcome the effects of the lockdown."

The Regional Library Peyo Yavorov, Burgas (Bulgaria)

In this context, the pandemic prompted many to reflect on and explore the roles and value of intangible cultural heritage in their lives and for society more broadly. In finding new ways to engage and connect with their living heritage during the pandemic, respondents reflected on the important roles that living heritage plays in providing a sense of **hope, belonging and social connectedness** during the crisis.



Murals prepared by local artists to raise awareness about COVID-19 prevention, United Republic of Tanzania

IV. HOW ARE COMMUNITIES MOBILIZING THEIR LIVING HERITAGE TO HELP THEM FACE THE PANDEMIC?

Key findings

Living heritage is often a source of spiritual and emotional comfort, contributing to mental well-being and alleviating feelings of isolation, anxiety and uncertainty during the pandemic.

Different forms of living heritage, such as poetry, song and storytelling, are being used to communicate information about COVID-19, to promote behaviour change and to advocate for public health recommendations.

Many people are turning to their living heritage linked to local systems of food production, agriculture and health care as a way of strengthening networks of mutual aid and support.

Based on the testimonies received through the survey (see Figure 4 below), living heritage has played and continues to play a pivotal role in supporting a more sustainable and resilient recovery of communities. Many of the responses highlighted how communities drew on their living heritage as a source of community solidarity, reciprocity and resilience. Such values were decisive in supporting communities to better cope with the crisis, but they are also, more generally, vital tools in overcoming obstacles to sustainable development. Furthermore, communities, bearers and practitioners seized the opportunity to initiate, strengthen and revive safeguarding efforts to keep their heritage alive. Their efforts drew attention to the important role that living heritage plays for the well-being and sustainable development of societies.

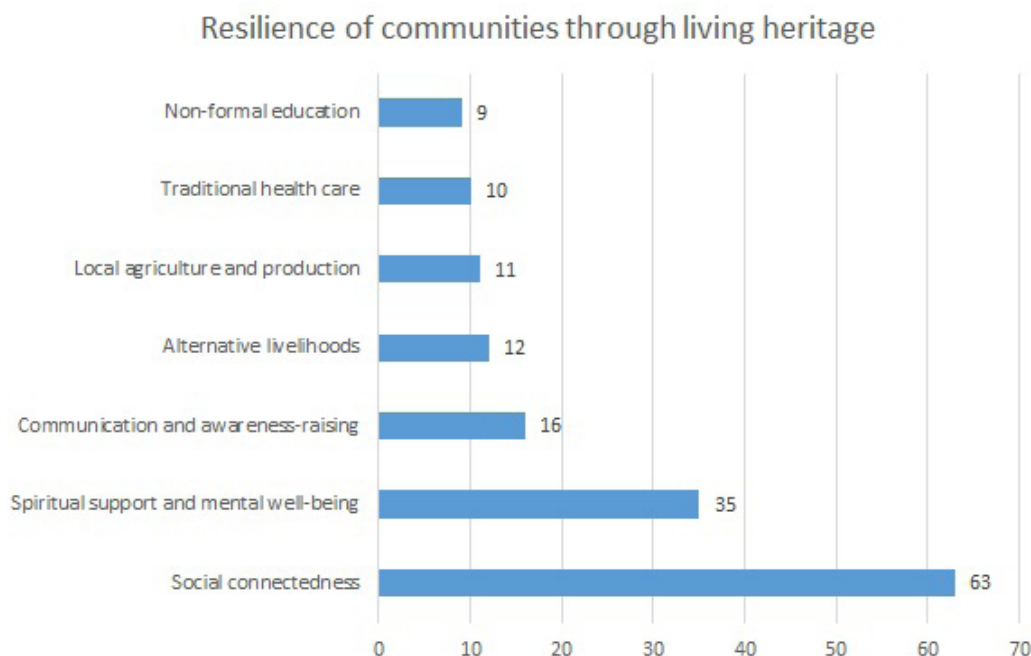


Fig.4. Resilience of communities through living heritage in survey responses

Strengthening solidarity and social connectedness

"Rather than a country action, what we are seeing are community-based actions of solidarity among inhabitants. In this sense intangible cultural heritage provides a common ground of understanding and an ethical frame of what is expected of each member of the community."

La Enciclopedia del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial (Mexico)



The Kyrgyz epic trilogy is a source of moral and spiritual support, Kyrgystan.

A high number of survey responses referred directly or indirectly to the role of living heritage in providing a sense of social cohesion, community and continuity, sometimes referred to as 'social connectedness'. People found ways to adapt and practise their living heritage, despite the restrictions of the pandemic, as it morally and mentally brought them together as a community and reaffirmed their sense of belonging and identity.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, for instance, epic storytellers of the Kyrgyz epic trilogy recounted the Manas epic via social networks and online concerts to urge people to unite and remain tolerant. The Manas epic, often performed on public occasions and holidays expresses the historical memory and identity of the Kyrgyz people, and in the context of the pandemic, was adapted to provide moral support and solidarity.²²

The role of music and dance in creating a sense of belonging and participation was a particularly powerful antidote to the growing sense of alienation and isolation many felt during lockdown. Music and dance are not only important forms of self-expression to convey emotions but are expressions of collective identity and social relatedness. In the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, dance traditions acquired new meanings with the pandemic to express persistence and solidarity in combatting the disease.

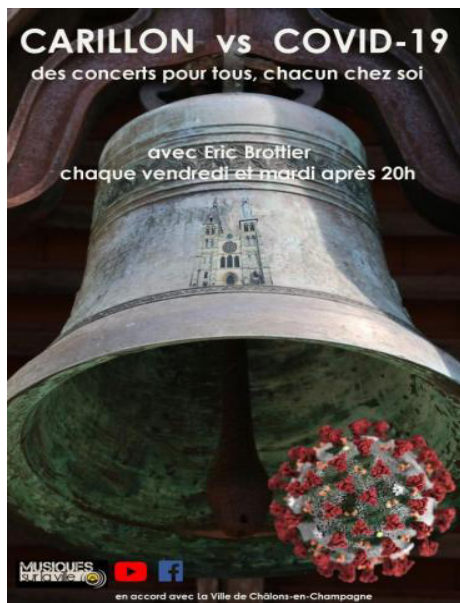
Videos of dance traditions were shared initially by the country's medical staff in the hospital, to boost morale and escape feelings of grief and sorrow, but soon gained momentum among the larger public.

In this way, living heritage helped remind people that physical distancing did not necessarily mean social distancing and hence did not have to result in social isolation. Music was often mobilized by communities to enhance social connection, allay anxiety and defy the threat of the pandemic to community spirit.

Several bearers and practitioners furthermore described how, at the individual level, practising and enjoying their living heritage brought a source of joy and inspiration to counter feelings of fear and uncertainty in the pandemic. In this way, living heritage was also an important spiritual and emotional support for many during the pandemic.

In **Uruguay**, payadors – performers of the payada music tradition – took to social media to disseminate solo improvisations of their art.

It is interesting to reflect on the new forms of collective rituals that emerged in the context of the pandemic, as evidenced by a number of responses. In **France**, the carillon of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, rung its 56 bells over the city every Friday and Tuesday at 8:00 p.m. during the confinement, accompanied by concerts streamed online, inviting people to sing from their home or street. Such collective acts, anchored in the community's living heritage, played an important role in connecting people during the crisis.



The association Musiques sur la ville set up Carillon vs COVID-19, France.



The payador Leonardo Silva performing online, Uruguay.

The responses indicated a spike in ritual activity during the pandemic and several examples illustrate how rituals linked to living heritage have become important tools for the resilience of communities during the pandemic, and many found new ways to enact such rituals as a much-needed constant against an increasingly uncertain world. Rituals can help relieve feelings of anxiety and chaos, particularly when there is a sense that we have lost control over the our present and future. Collective rituals furthermore provide connection through shared experiences, which can help forge a sense of belonging and cohesiveness in a community.

The different roles that living heritage plays in these examples – as a psychological comfort for the people who the practise or enjoy it, as a channel of social support and cohesion, and as a way to maintain identity and impart a sense of continuity – are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. They show how intangible cultural heritage bolstered the resilience of communities to help them overcome feelings of social isolation, uncertainty and loss.

This reminds us that public health is not just about preventing the transmission of disease, but also about enhancing people’s quality of life. It is equally important to care for the public’s mental health and social well-being, even more so in the context of the pandemic when related measures affect all of society. Intangible cultural heritage is a collective and common experience that everyone can relate to. The survey shows how living heritage strengthens the sense of belonging, makes people feel that they are not alone; in this sense, it also has an important therapeutic and restorative dimension.

Living heritage as a tool to raise awareness about COVID-19

"In Cambodia, intangible cultural heritage is deployed for the transmission of important public health messages. The 75-year-old Master Kong Nay, master of the Chapei Dang Veng, sings about hand washing and social distancing and other COVID-19 safety tips."

Cambodian Living Arts (Cambodia)



Traditional string puppetry, Sri Lanka.

A particularly telling example relates to the oral traditions of the Amazigh in the Atlas Mountains of **Morocco**, which were adapted to help raise awareness about COVID-19. The community shared poetic verses and poems to express their feelings about the pandemic, as well as encourage people to follow public health advice. This example also underscores the importance of local and indigenous languages in ensuring effective communication about COVID-19.

Beyond being an important mechanism of social support and connectedness, the survey illustrated how communities were adapting their intangible cultural heritage to communicate in culturally relevant and meaningful ways about public health measures around COVID-19. This communication shows how intangible cultural heritage can be drawn on to develop public health messaging that is more tailored to the cultural contexts and realities of communities, which may ultimately lead to more effective health communication. Living heritage was mobilized in different ways to adapt the source and channel of the message, from traditional string puppet drama²³ in **Sri Lanka**, videos in vernacular languages in **Fiji** or Aken songs in **Kazakhstan**.



Murals to raise awareness on COVID-19 prevention in one of the informal settlements in Lami Municipality, Suva, Fiji.

"The majority of these jokes and new satirical expressions, or those that re-employed popular proverbs, traditional songs, and public statements; have been monitored and documented in a new way by changing some words or formulating them to engage with the COVID-19 epidemic."

Hamza Osama Aqrabawi, Hakaya Organization (Palestine)



Effigies to ward off COVID-19, Thailand.

Interestingly, some responses referred to the role of mythical figures and local folklore to help reinforce restrictions around COVID-19. For instance, in some villages of **Senegal**, communities appealed to the figure of Kankurang²⁴ – as a guarantor of order and justice as well as the exorcist of evil spirits – to help enforce the curfew.²⁵ Usually associated with initiation ceremonies and rites, the practice took on new meaning in the context of the pandemic to help enforce public health measures.

In a similar vein, villages on Java island in **Indonesia** deployed ghostly figures known as ‘pocong’, believed to be the soul of a deceased person, to patrol the streets after dark, reminding people to stay indoors after curfew and raise awareness about virus control measures.²⁶

Local systems of mutual aid, agriculture and food production

Responses spoke to a renewed interest in local forms of production, especially traditional knowledge and skills related to agriculture and food production, in the context of the pandemic. This was also linked to the disruption of supply chains and economic downturn, which led some communities to explore traditional forms and networks of mutual aid, particularly around the distribution of food.

In Hong Kong, **China** for instance, local communities observed a revival in local food culture as people turned to traditional knowledge for producing and preserving food to make their own rice wine, fermented paste and plant vegetables. The respondent noted that 'Many citizens started to re-visit their traditional culture and have started to plant edible plants that were once an important food source of local rural community'.

These responses as well as other traditional practices of solidarity demonstrate how living heritage can serve as a source of resilience for communities who continue to safeguard their heritage, while adapting it to the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. Knowledge about traditional agricultural and food production techniques is promoting more sustainable and resilient food systems and supporting networks of solidarity among communities in the distribution of food. It also points to the way the pandemic prompted many people to rethink their relationship to nature. The values of solidarity, reciprocity and mutualism embodied in many traditional agricultural systems can provide models for living less based on consumption and more focuses on greater harmony with the environment. The examples demonstrate how living heritage can provide time-tested responses to the crisis, which may be relevant in addressing other global crises.

Spotlight: Renewed interest in local food production know-how in Lebanon and Palestine



Lockdown is not as strict in rural areas, where a return to healthier, organic farming is observed, Lebanon.

In **Lebanese** villages, the specific circumstances linked to the pandemic sparked a renewed interest in local knowledge related to the environment. ‘As containment is not as strict in rural areas, a return to healthier and organic agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the gathering of wild plants that can be consumed, cooked or used for healing purposes has been observed’. Locally produced foods were being donated to people in need who may have suffered because of the economic crisis or unemployment during confinement.

Similarly, in **Palestine**, there was wide interest in the traditions and customs related to agriculture, particularly in rural areas. These communities also demonstrated a return to traditional forms of aid and community solidarity, such as the distribution of food and vegetables, produced locally.

Living heritage as alternative sources of income

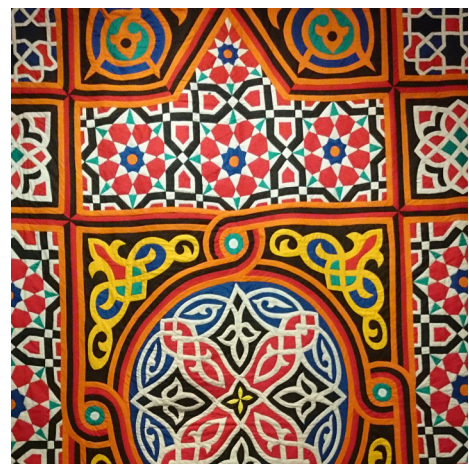
The potential of living heritage to generate alternative income, foster entrepreneurship and strengthen local economies, should be underlined. Several of these initiatives also served to bolster support and relief efforts for COVID-19, in providing much-needed supplies. In **Belgium**, traditional breweries and distilleries gathered forces to produce medical alcohols, as an example of rethinking craftsmanship. In **Mexico**, artisan ceramists from Jalisco State, started making decorated funerary urns to honour those who had lost their lives to COVID-19.



Carême carnival costumes from French Guiana, France.

Similarly, bearers of the mi-carême carnival tradition in French Guiana, **France** re-fashioned scraps of old carnival costumes into masks, which were distributed to the elderly, demonstrating ‘a beautiful example of inter-generational transmission, solidarity and humanism in connection with the valorization of intangible cultural heritage’ (Observatoire regional du carnaval guyanais).

The role of women in these initiatives cannot be overlooked and some actions paid particular attention to provide necessary support to women. For instance, traditional crafts can provide economic opportunity for women during the crisis. In **Egypt**, community entrepreneurs and women’s associations started a number of initiatives to promote their intangible cultural heritage, such as the creation of masks featuring Bedouin or khayameya motifs and techniques, as well as the launching of digital platforms for the sale of local handicrafts (oils, soaps, marquetry).



Khayameya motifs, Egypt.

Spotlight: Creating masks with traditional techniques in Peru's Ayacucho region

Several responses related to the customization of face masks with traditional embroidery and weaving techniques recognized by communities as part of their intangible cultural heritage. Sarahuino artists Venuca Evanan, Violeta Quispe Yupari and her mother Gaudencia Yupari from the Ayacucho region in Peru developed masks using traditional designs based on their living heritage. They affirmed that 'our purpose is to use art as a way to identify ourselves with our original culture in these difficult times and to promote Sarhuino art in our country and abroad'. In addition to providing a source of income for Sarhuina families during the pandemic, the reusable masks comply with the regulations indicated by the Government of Peru, through the Ministry of Health.



Traditional artists developed a prototype mask with traditional designs based on the heritage of the Ayacucho region, Peru.

Traditional knowledge about healing and health care



Jamu is a traditional medicinal remedy in used to treat ailments and boost the immune system, Indonesia.

There was also increased interest among respondents in different forms of knowledge and know-how about traditional health care. **Austria**, for instance, witnessed an increased public interest in local knowledge and traditional medicine concerning the uses of plants and herbs. Likewise, in **Palestine**, more people became interested in popular medical treatment based on knowledge of medicinal herbs, whereas in the **Plurinational State of Bolivia**, the Kallawaya traditional doctors, who were hired by Panama at the end of the 19th century to treat the yellow fever pandemic, have also been investigating the use of their pharmacopoeia knowledge to treat COVID-19 symptoms.

Communities turned to traditional strategies and know-how around the control of infectious diseases to enhance their resilience in the face of COVID-19. These time-tested approaches, developed and passed on over generations, existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic and have been critical to the sustainability and resilience of communities for centuries. In many cases, communities have recreated and adapted them to respond to present-day challenges around the pandemic, and this has proved particularly critical in situations where access to medical health care is lacking. They demonstrate how a community's living heritage – the accumulated cultural knowledge, beliefs, practices, oral traditions and rituals they pass down – bolster their ability to cope with contemporary challenges and can offer contextual solutions for recovery. The value of living heritage is reaffirmed in these stories by demonstrating its essential role in maintaining peace, well-being and – in some cases – survival.

Spotlight: The practice of *Idyango* as traditional cleansing points in Zambia



The Tonga of the Gwembe valley build elevated sleeping quarters known as Ingazi, made of poles and situated away from other houses in the homestead. They help reduce the spread of disease by ensuring physical distancing while providing safe quarters for the patients.

Communities in rural areas of Monze, **Zambia**, turned to traditional responses to pandemics to help slow the spread of the disease. With the nearest health centres only accessible by foot, and difficulties accessing medical supplies including hand sanitizer, soap and masks, the communities recreated the practice of *Idyango* to help curb the virus. *Idyango* refers to a traditional cleansing point at the entrance of every village and household. It was traditionally used to avoid the spread of diseases, particularly from hunters returning from the forests or strangers to the village believed to have come into contact with potentially harmful substances, either physical or spiritual.

For instance, when hunters returned from the forest, they were required to undergo the *Idyango* ritual to wash their head, face, hands and feet in water mixed with herbs. This practice was also extended to visitors from faraway places, or after a person visited a place considered to be 'unclean', such as a graveyard after burial or visiting a terminally ill patient. In the context of COVID-19, some households and villages recreated this practice to establish cleansing points before entering the village.

Other quarantine practices usually applied to persons or households afflicted by a disease were also invoked in response to COVID-19. *Chihumu*, where entry and exit to a household is restricted or prohibited when a household member becomes sick was also documented. Communities were encouraged to isolate households and put *Chihumu* signs marked by brightly coloured string or cloth tied a few meters away from the household to warn outsiders not to approach and avoid unwanted visitors. Likewise, *Kafwungo*, which refers to isolation within the household, was prescribed to those who were thought to have COVID-19 in the home. Usually practiced as a way to control highly contagious diseases such as diarrhoea, measles, coughs and small pox, with *Kafwungo* the contaminated person is isolated to a particular space in the house and then after the isolation, cleansing and purification rituals are undertaken. For instance, once believed to be free of the affliction, *chigogo* or *ku gogoloka* cleansing rites are performed and all objects that the person came into contact with are burnt and destroyed. This may include utensils, clothes and even temporary structures used for isolation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One year on, we have come to reflect more deeply on what lessons can be drawn from the pandemic. At a global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed some of the vulnerabilities in our current social and economic systems. It has prompted many of us to take a step back and think more consciously about what kind of future we want for the next generations. The responses to the survey showed how the pandemic led many to turn to their intangible cultural heritage to help cope with the evolving crisis. Through connecting and engaging with their living heritage, communities were reminded of their shared values and meaning, and that they were not in the crisis alone.

Intangible cultural heritage has a pervasive role in everyday life. It shapes how we interact with others, connect with each other and come together. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented many forms of intangible cultural heritage from being expressed and practised. Yet it also underscored the basic human need for social connection, of which living heritage is a vital source. Creative solutions are needed to both protect public health and the right to access and enjoy culture, so that people everywhere are able to fully participate in cultural life.

For many respondents, not being able to practise their intangible cultural heritage was a form of suffering. Intangible cultural heritage was shown to be a central and vital source of social connectivity. Similarly, rituals and ceremonies around pivotal life cycle events, such as funerals and marriages, hold immeasurable psychological, spiritual and social significance at both community and individual level, that often cannot be postponed, cancelled or replaced.²⁷ In many countries, authorities allowed some of these rituals to continue despite the lockdown measures, precisely because of their importance. Indeed, despite restrictions, lockdowns and curfews, people continue to find new ways to come together to enjoy and practice their living heritage. The examples gathered through the survey illustrated how communities have continued to draw meaning from their intangible cultural heritage as an important source of resilience during the pandemic.²⁸

The pandemic further demonstrated that intangible cultural heritage is fundamental to a **people-centred approach to recovery**, focused on addressing the needs and well-being of communities. While it highlighted the utility of living heritage in several areas of development, it also called for strengthening efforts to better mobilize and leverage living heritage, not only in the post-pandemic recovery phase but also in improving our capacities to face future crises.

This report puts forward three guiding recommendations to orient the efforts of governments, civil society, the private sector and bearers to strengthen the safeguarding of living heritage in the COVID-19 pandemic recovery phase and beyond.

1. Strengthen recovery support mechanisms to living heritage bearers at the local level, including through local governance structures, for building back better

All stakeholders should be encouraged to better involve bearers and practitioners in the governance of their living heritage as a core part of building back better after the pandemic and beyond. In times of crisis, participatory approaches should be put in place to consult with individuals and groups concerned to explore alternatives when physical spaces necessary for the practice of living heritage are temporarily closed for public health reasons and/or when measures temporarily prevent public gatherings. Given that many practitioners are active in the informal sector, and require all the more guidance in situations of crises, it is important to establish mechanisms that provide adequate support – both financial and institutional– to individuals and groups of bearers and their living heritage. It is crucial that support mechanisms, financial or otherwise, be channelled through institutional structures that are as close as possible to the practitioners themselves. Furthermore, acknowledging the far-reaching impact that the pandemic had on local economies, post-pandemic support initiatives should be encouraged to foster local production and consumption of products associated to the knowledge and know-how of bearers, which will in turn reinforce the resilience of local communities for the future.

Recommended safeguarding actions:

Create participatory consultation mechanisms for involving communities and bearers in decisions relating to sanitary measures that restrict their ability to practise their living heritage as well as in developing recovery actions that impact them and their living heritage;

Enhance institutional and financial support for bearers and practitioners, particularly at local levels of governance; and

Support local income-generating activities benefiting living heritage bearers and practitioners.

2. Leverage opportunities offered by digital technologies and increase the visibility and understanding of living heritage

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial importance of social interactions and gatherings for both people's well-being and the practice of living heritage. In times of uncertainty during which access to public spaces was limited or restricted and public meetings were discouraged if not prohibited for public health reasons, bearers and practitioners demonstrated a creative and innovative use of digital technologies – some of which are shared in the present report. National, regional and local authorities should be encouraged to facilitate inclusive access to digital technologies to all interested bearers and raise their awareness about their potential for ensuring the continued

practice of living heritage. Of course, in the longer term this should serve to complement and enhance, rather than replace, as has been often required during the pandemic, the physical and embodied practice of living heritage in physical spaces. Specific attention should be devoted to ensuring that the use of digital technologies provides a broader audience with access to living heritage and in the process does not lead to further inequalities among bearers due to difficulties in accessing or using digital tools. All relevant stakeholders, in particular bearers and practitioners, should be ensured access to information concerning their heritage, including, whenever possible, through online means, allowing them to provide updated information that could better inform the status, gaps and needs for specific living heritage practices. Furthermore, media should be encouraged to further raise the awareness of the general public, including through digital means, about the roles that intangible cultural heritage plays for the mental and physical well-being of individuals and for the resilience of communities and societies as a whole.

Recommended safeguarding actions:

Support the development of online public spaces, giving the opportunity to all interested bearers to practise and transmit their living heritage. This should include, when appropriate and desired by bearers, creating online spaces that could compensate for the closure of physical spaces, as well as providing access to information related to their living heritage;

Encourage online networking activities within and between communities of bearers, allowing experience sharing and peer-to-peer learning; and

Initiate communication campaigns and visibility actions through traditional and online media involving not only bearers but also other professionals in the fields of health and science to enhance the recognition of living heritage.

3. Strengthen and amplify the linkages between safeguarding living heritage and emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans and programmes

The COVID-19 pandemic underlined the crucial need to foster understanding and knowledge about living heritage, as well as to monitor its situation, in particular when communities are suddenly and drastically confronted with exceptionally adverse conditions. As the pandemic is still ongoing and is likely to continue affecting bearers of living heritage and living heritage practices themselves in the medium-term, relevant stakeholders, authorities and humanitarian actors need to be sensitized not only about the impact of crisis on peoples and their living heritage but also on how response and recovery efforts stand to benefit from acknowledging the contribution of living heritage and its practitioners in building back better.

Furthermore, we need to better understand the impact of particular emergencies on the transmission and viability of living heritage and the social and economic impact on the livelihoods of peoples affected by an emergency. Universities and research institutions could be mobilized to further research on the impact of the health crisis on the evolving practice of living heritage and its mobilization for the resilience and recovery of peoples and societies. The importance of this relationship between living heritage and how

people and communities experience and react to protracted crisis situations cannot be underestimated, particularly as, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all likely to face further crisis situations, not least of which, those linked to climate change.

Recommended safeguarding actions:

Establish links and foster regular information sharing and cooperation between institutions and individuals in charge of emergency preparedness, response and recovery and those responsible for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage;

Support initiatives to help communities in better identifying how crisis situations impact their living heritage, and reinforce the integration of disaster risk reduction in intangible cultural heritage inventories and programmes; and

Ensure that necessary measures are taken to enable authorities, humanitarian actors and emergency responders to draw upon living heritage to reinforce the effectiveness of response and recovery programmes.

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 3. The survey responses were assessed by the survey team for completeness and pertinence. Those with sufficient information were published directly on the UNESCO platform in their original language and voice. A qualitative analysis was undertaken to identify key themes that emerged along the two main lines of enquiry. The data was coded according to these themes by the survey team to facilitate the access and analysis of information. The survey responses are publicly available in their original language on the Convention's website and can be searched according to country, domain, actor, language and key themes.
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ANNEX

Survey on living heritage experiences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Living heritage may be affected in different ways by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: it may be threatened, restricted, adapted, or transformed amongst other things. At the same time living heritage may help to provide a source of resilience, solidarity and inspiration for many communities during these difficult times. In this context, we would like to hear about experiences related to intangible cultural heritage during the pandemic. In what ways has your living heritage been affected by the crisis? How are you or your community drawing on your living heritage to cope with the present situation? Please share your stories. We hope that these stories will help enhance our learning about safeguarding living heritage in the context of the ongoing pandemic and inspire communities to learn from each other and share their experiences. Selected experiences are being shared on the dedicated web site of the 2003 Convention (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/living-heritage-experiences-and-the-covid-19-pandemic-01123>) for communication purposes to contribute to ongoing learning and information sharing on the topic. Thank you for your contribution. If you have any questions, please contact us at: ich.com@unesco.org

1. Name / Organization
2. Country / countries
3. Share with us your experience.

How has your living heritage been affected? How are you or your community using your living heritage to cope with the current situation? Can you give specific examples from your country or your community?

4. Relevant links (webpages, social media, images, videos etc.).

You can also include a link to a WeTransfer, Dropbox, OneDrive or any other download link, along with the accompanying information. For images or videos shared on the UNESCO website, the Secretariat will contact you to request the appropriate copyright information.

5. Do you agree for this information to be shared on the UNESCO website and/or social media channels?

Yes

No

6. Do you have any other comments/ideas/suggestions on how to help safeguard living heritage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. Contact email (will not be made public)

The Secretariat may contact you on this address for further information.

Living heritage

in the face of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of communities around the world, and in doing so highlighted the importance people attach to being able to continue practicing their living heritage. This report presents the result of a survey, launched in April 2020, that collected 236 testimonies from 78 countries to better understand how people have been experiencing their living heritage during the pandemic. For many, continuing to practice their living heritage became an important factor in helping to alleviate the pressures that the pandemic placed on them. The report provides three guiding recommendations and accompanying safeguarding actions for different stakeholders in the post-pandemic recovery phase.