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

**Expert meeting in the framework of the global reflection  
on the listing mechanisms under the 2003 Convention for the  
Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Online**

**7, 26 and 27 May 2021**

**Report**

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| As part of the expert consultation foreseen in the framework of the global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention, a category VI expert meeting was organized in May 2021. This document describes the outcomes of that meeting. The experts made many recommendations to improve the listing system that can be summarized into four approaches. Two of them, referred to as ‘fine-tuning’ and ‘repositioning, were recommended by about equal and substantial numbers of experts. |

#### I. Introduction

1. The Expert meeting in the framework of the global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention was convened online using the Zoom platform. It took place over six non-consecutive days in May 2021. The plenary session started on 7 May (Part I) and continued on 26 and 27 May 2021 (Part II). Three parallel breakout sessions were organized in between. All meetings took place from 13.00 to 16.00 (Paris time / UTC+2) as this time slot was the most convenient for the participants in different time zones. For the meeting agenda, see document [LHE/21/EXP/1 Rev.3](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-1_Rev.3.-EN.docx). The meeting was supported by a generous contribution from the government of Japan.

2. As described in detail in the working document presented during that meeting (document [LHE/21/EXP/2 Rev.4](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-2_Rev.4.-EN.docx)), the gathering formed part of a larger consultation with experts to contribute to the global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention. The main purpose of the meeting was to lay the ground for the Open-ended intergovernmental working group (Part I on 8 and 9 July 2021 and Part II on 9 and 10 September 2021, both online –the dates were revised after the expert meeting). In line with the preceding intergovernmental discussions, notably at the fourteenth session of the Committee (document [LHE/19/14.COM/14](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-14-EN.docx)), the expert meeting was structured around the following four themes:

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| Theme A: Overall approach to the listing mechanisms  Theme B: Issues related to the inscription criteria  Theme C: Issues related to the follow-up of inscribed elements  Theme D: Methodology for the evaluation of nominations |

3. The participants were thirty-four experts in the field of living heritage safeguarding, from all regions of the world, with specific expertise and experience on various aspects of the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention (for the list of participants, see document [LHE/21/EXP/6 Rev.5](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-6_Rev.5-EN-FR.docx)). In addition to representatives of UNESCO category 2 centres in the field of intangible cultural heritage, about twenty State expert observers also attended the plenary sessions. The meeting was convened as a category VI meeting, which, according to UNESCO’s regulations, means that the experts participated in their personal capacity and not as representatives of any government or organization. Although the results of the meeting are collective and not ascribed to participants by name, in some cases it was indicated whether a proposal enjoyed limited or broad support.

#### II. Background of the reflection (Part I of the meeting – 7 May 2021)

4. In the opening of the meeting in plenary (Part I), Mr Tim Curtis, Secretary of the 2003 Convention and Chief of the Living Heritage Entity of UNESCO, presented the background to the expert meeting ([presentation](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Experts_Meeting_Secretariat_Presentation-EN.pdf)), introduced the timeline of the reflection process, the four reflection themes as well as the meeting agenda and objectives. It was stressed that the experts had not been convened to make decisions nor to necessarily reach consensus; instead, they were expected to provide their views in the form of recommendations that might include various options for all themes under discussion.

5. Three presentations were then given to illustrate the challenges facing the current listing systems, along with a few suggestions to address them:

* The first presentation ([presentation](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Presentation_Rieks_Smeets.pdf)) by Mr Rieks Smeets, former Secretary of the 2003 Convention, introduced the paper that he authored for the present expert meeting, in which he described aspects of the historical processes that led to the adoption of the 2003 Convention and the first set of the Operational Directives of the Convention (document [LHE/21/EXP/3 Rev.](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-3_Rev-EN.docx)). Referring to the intentions of the drafters of these normative texts, Mr Smeets stressed that the reflection process might attempt to change the relationships between the two Lists and the Register in order to establish a more dynamic and open-ended system. He also found that the Committee did not include many community voices during its sessions, although provisions of the Convention (Article 8.4) and the Operational Directives (paragraph 89) allow for the consultation of bearers and practitioners of living heritage during in the meetings of the Committee. It was further suggested that the Committee, in line with indications in various basic texts of the Convention, ensure that the requirements for equitable geographical distribution be observed.
* The second [presentation](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Eva_Kuminkov%C3%A1's_Presentation_Reflection_on_the_listing_mechanisms_from_the_perspective_of_consultative_bodies-EN.pdf) by Ms Eva Kuminková, former Evaluation Body member (2016-2019) on behalf of the Czech Ethnographical Society, summarized the results of an online survey and small-scale interviews carried out with present and past members of the Evaluation Body, including past Subsidiary Body and Consultative Body members (document [LHE/21/EXP/4](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-4-EN_.docx)). These experts proposed certain options (e.g. rewording or removing criterion R.2, while requesting that the Evaluation Body find relevant information in the file) and raised various questions (e.g. whether criterion R.3 is necessary given that the viability should be ensured for inscriptions on the Representative List). It was also reported that Evaluation Body members suggested that studies be undertaken, for instance on the geographical and thematic balance of elements inscribed on the Representative List and on the effect of inscriptions on the Urgent Safeguarding List.
* The third and last presentation, by Ms Fumiko Ohinata, Head of the Programme Management Unit of the Living Heritage Entity, summarized the results of an online survey that the Secretariat carried out in March and April 2021 prior to the Expert meeting (document [LHE/21/EXP/5](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-5-EN.docx)). The aim of the survey was to undertake a broad consultation with experts who have experience with various aspects of the listing system. The 44-question survey was structured along the above-mentioned four reflection themes so as to directly support the global reflection process.

#### III. Breakout group discussions

6. After the first plenary session, the experts were invited to work in one of three breakout groups that met in parallel on 11, 18 and 20 May 2021. Three hours were allotted to each breakout session. The composition of each group, including the moderator and rapporteur, is indicated in the annex of the background document; the annex was revised several times to reflect the latest situation regarding expert participation (document [LHE/21/EXP/2 Rev.4](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-EXP-2_Rev.4.-EN.docx)). The working language was English for Groups 1 and 2 and French for Group 3. The breakout group sessions also took place fully online, using the Microsoft Teams platform, which allowed for collective editing through shared files. Furthermore, each group was assisted by two members of the Secretariat.

7. All three groups were asked to discuss theme A, as it concerns overall approaches to improve the functioning of the listing mechanisms. Each group was also assigned one additional theme: Group 1 discussed theme B, Group 2 theme C and Group 3 theme D.

#### IV. Plenary discussions (Part II of the meeting – 26 and 27 May 2021)

8. The reports of the three breakout groups, which included detailed considerations and proposals by reflection themes, were presented by the rapporteur of each group during the plenary sessions held on 26 and 27 May 2021: Ms Masami Iwasaki (Group 1), Ms Anita Vaivade (Group 2) and Mr Ahmed Skounti (Group 3). The table below provides links to each of the reports. They can also be accessed through the webpage of the Convention concerning the global reflection ([link](https://ich.unesco.org/en/online-meeting-of-experts-category-vi-01165)).

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|  | **Theme A** | **Theme B** | **Theme C** | **Theme D** |
| **Group 1** | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52146-EN.docx) | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52147-EN.docx) | - | - |
| **Group 2** | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52148-EN.docx) | - | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52149-EN.docx) | - |
| **Group 3** | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52150-EN.docx) | - | - | [Report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/52151-EN.docx) |

9. The experts then discussed key proposals under each reflection theme. The discussion for theme A was moderated by Mr Tim Curtis, while the sessions concerning themes B, C and D were guided by each group’s moderator: Mr Marc Jacobs (Group 1), Ms Alissandra Cummins (Group 2) and Mr Léonce Ki (Group 3). The plenary sessions of Part II of the meeting gave the experts the opportunity to provide detailed explanations on the points they wished to highlight or comment on and to provide feedback on the issues raised and recommendations made for the themes that their group did not work on.

10. As a point of consensus, the experts stressed repeatedly the importance of making the listing system more directly accessible to communities and insisted that the reform be undertaken in such a way to facilitate community participation at different steps of the listing process. In this regard, specific proposals put forward include: (a) the use of the community’s language in the preparation of nominations; (b) the use of audio-visual tools for providing information requested in the nomination forms as well as for communicating any concerns; (c) the establishment of an ‘arm’s-length’ body with community participation to monitor the viability of inscribed elements; (d) the development of a network of inscribed elements for sharing safeguarding experiences; and (e) the creation of a special forum that would allow the governing bodies of the Convention to consult community representatives in a systematic manner. It was also made clear that the stakeholders of the Convention have been experiencing an increasing level of frustration as regards the listing system and that the reform is not only pertinent but has become a matter of urgency.

11. Overall, the suggestions and proposals considered by experts do not form conclusive solutions, as the purpose of the expert consultation was not for the experts to agree on every point of the reflection. Their positions, nevertheless, could be summarized into four approaches:

(a) the ‘**fine-tuning**’ approach stresses the benefits of the current listing system, considering that improvements can be achieved with a set of minor adjustments, for example by rewording criteria, revising the forms and clarifying certain procedures.

(b) the ‘**repositioning**’ approach advocates for more fundamental changes to the listing mechanisms of the Convention. It strives to clarify the roles of the two Lists and the Register and to reposition them in relation to each other.

(c) the ‘**stricter control**’approach seeks to make the listing system more restrictive, with a rigorous interpretation and application of the inscription criteria, considering that the current system is solid and that it is in line with the relevant provisions in the Convention.

(d) the ‘**maximum inclusivity**’ approach would allow for a dramatically higher number of inscriptions on the Lists, most notably on the Urgent Safeguarding List (up to thousands of them per year) with simultaneous requests for financing (crowdfunding) and/or expert assistance for the corresponding safeguarding plans.

12. A quick show of hands at the end of the meeting showed an equal balance of experts between ‘fine-tuning’ and ‘repositioning’. The ‘stricter control’ and ‘maximum inclusivity’ approaches were supported by one or two experts only. At the same time, it was not always possible to clearly categorize the proposals between the ‘fine-tuning’ and ‘repositioning’ approaches since some experts seemed to have supported a mix of the proposals under both approaches.

13. The main proposals made by the experts were summarised by the Secretariat in a working document for the Open-ended intergovernmental working group ([document LHE/21/16/COM WG/3](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-16.COM_WG-3-EN.docx)). The document includes possible effects and implications for the two main approaches. The present report is also made available to the intergovernmental working group to enable the States Parties to study the entirety of the proposals, particularly through the breakout group reports.