



ICH NGO Forum Annual Symposium 2026 (In person and online)

Sunday, November 29, Xiamen, China

Open Call for Presentations and Contributions

Digital inclusivity for Living Heritage: Opportunities and Challenges for Communities and NGOs in the Age of Technological Innovation

The 2026 Symposium of the ICH NGO Forum, organized on the occasion of 21st session of the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, will focus on the opportunities and challenges that digital transformation presents for the safeguarding of living heritage.

As digital technologies increasingly influence how intangible cultural heritage is documented, transmitted, interpreted, shared and governed, it is essential to ensure that the communities, groups and individuals concerned remain at the centre of safeguarding processes. Digital tools can create new opportunities for participation, visibility, transmission, education and collaboration, while preserving community agency, contextual understanding and cultural meaning. At the same time, they can also deepen inequalities, reinforce exclusion, facilitate the appropriation of cultural knowledge, and weaken community decision-making over cultural expressions.

The symposium responds to the current challenges in the safeguarding of ICH and to the growing international discussions regarding cultural rights in digital environments. The 2025 Report of the [United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights](#), Artificial Intelligence and Creativity, has highlighted the importance of meaningful participation, cultural diversity, transparency and community consent in the development and use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence. Moreover, drawing on UNESCO's initiatives '*Dive into Heritage*', and '*Leveraging the Support of UNESCO's Networks on Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies*', it is strongly believed that digital innovation must strengthen the rights of communities to maintain, develop, and transmit their heritage on their own terms.

The symposium invites to reflect on how accredited NGOs, communities, cultural practitioners, researchers and institutions can ensure that digital transformation supports inclusive safeguarding and advances cultural rights. We will focus on community-centred approaches to safeguarding living heritage in the digital age, including the following areas:

Inclusive governance and community participation: Methods and mechanisms that ensure communities, groups and individuals actively shape decisions regarding the digital safeguarding, dissemination and governance of living heritage. Particular attention is encouraged regarding underrepresented, minority, Indigenous, migrant, youth and other marginalized communities.

Digital inclusion and equity: Initiatives that address digital divides and inequalities in access to technologies, capacities, resources and decision-making processes affecting living heritage safeguarding.

Artificial intelligence, cultural rights and ethical innovation: Experiences, challenges and critical reflections regarding AI and other emerging technologies in relation to living heritage safeguarding. How can innovation be guided by cultural rights, community participation and transparency?

Communication, representation and access: Community-based strategies for presenting, interpreting and disseminating living heritage through digital media, museums, archives, libraries, cultural centres and online platforms. How can digital technologies enhance visibility while respecting cultural diversity and community control?

Digital documentation and inventorying: Approaches that enable communities to participate actively in the identification, documentation and digital representation of their intangible cultural heritage. This may include community-led documentation initiatives, participatory archives, digital inventories, and ethical approaches to data management.

The aim of the symposium is to examine how NGOs and ICH communities can work together to ensure that digital transformation contributes to more inclusive, equitable and community-driven safeguarding practices.

Following these topics, the symposium will address the following questions:

- How can NGO's contribute to ensure equitable access to digital technologies for safeguarding living heritage?
- What opportunities and risks do digital technologies present for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage?
- How can community consent, participation and cultural rights be protected in digital documentation, archiving and dissemination processes?
- How can the communities, groups and individuals concerned remain at the centre of safeguarding efforts and retain control over the digital use and representation of their heritage?
- How can AI and other emerging technologies support safeguarding without diminishing cultural diversity, community agency or traditional knowledge systems?
- What methods have proven successful in enabling inclusive participation of marginalized, minority, Indigenous, migrant, youth or other underrepresented groups?
- How can digital tools contribute to intergenerational transmission while maintaining cultural context and meaning?

- What challenges, ethical dilemmas or unintended consequences have emerged in digital safeguarding initiatives, and how have they been addressed?
- How can NGOs contribute to strengthening digital literacy, digital inclusion and equitable access within safeguarding processes?
- What new models of collaboration between communities, NGOs, cultural institutions and technology developers show promise for the future?

The symposium invites 250-word proposals addressing one of the issues or questions above, accompanied by a 150-word biographical note. These must be submitted via the online form available at the end of this call. The proposals can include current projects, research findings, policy initiatives, community-led programmes, digital safeguarding practices, critical reflections, case studies, pilot projects or lessons learned from past experiences. We are interested in examples that demonstrate innovative and inclusive approaches to safeguarding living heritage in the digital age, as well as critical reflections on the limitations, risks and ethical challenges associated with digital technologies and artificial intelligence

Presentations of different formats are welcome. Formats may include:

- Standard presentation (10 minutes),
- Video presentation (10 minutes),
- Roundtable discussion,
- Short presentation combined with participation in a panel discussion,
- Poster presentation (physical or digital),
- Hands-on demonstration of a tool, method, platform or safeguarding practice.

We particularly welcome formats that foster dialogue, knowledge exchange and active participation, and that highlight the voices, experiences and perspectives of communities, groups and individuals concerned with their living heritage. Presentations will be in person and online. To allow NGOs in different time zones to participate, if the proposal is accepted, it will be possible to send a prerecorded 10-minute video of the presentation that will be projected during the symposium.

Proposal Submission Deadline: 09 October 2026

Notification of Acceptance: 27 October 2026

ICH NGO Forum Symposium 2026 Organizing Committee:

Marilena Alivizatou, Jana Ambrózová, Martín Andrade-Pérez, Océane Lesot, Léonce Ki, Carley Williams
In collaboration with the Executive Board of the ICHNGO Forum

Advisory Committee:

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Submission Form:

<https://forms.gle/h4Sgbu4eRemgH64j7>