

Overview of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) safeguarding process in Estonia and measures undertaken to implement the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Following the accession to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, the Ministry of Culture designated **the Estonian Folk Culture Centre** as the main body responsible for the implementation of the Convention. The centre participates in the process of developing and carrying out cultural policy, organizes training courses and administers ICH support programmes. A department of ICH (with three professional posts) acts as the national focal point for implementation of the Convention: it organizes awareness-raising and training activities, advises communities and administers the national inventory of ICH.

Main responsibilities of the ICH Department:

- organizes awareness-raising and training activities;
- advises the communities;
- administers the national inventory of ICH;
- manages the support programme for compiling the entries to the ICH inventory;
- coordinates the work of the Estonian ICH Council;
- manages the Storytelling School.

ICH specialists work in close collaboration with other staff members of the centre and its regional network of 16 folk culture specialists (one in each county of Estonia and one in the capital Tallinn); relevant institutions at the national, regional and local levels; and NGOs and communities.

In 2009 the Minister of Culture of Estonia established a new advisory body – the **Estonian Council for the ICH** - which brings together some 20 experts. The council offers strategic advice for safeguarding, development and promotion of ICH in society, and approves the entries for the national ICH inventory. The ICH Department of the Folk Culture Centre functions as the secretariat of the council.

Local institutes in different regions of Estonia (Võro, Seto, Kihnu, Mulgi) operate with state support as focal points for safeguarding regional diversity, and local language and culture. They share all study results with the community concerned through publications, a webpage and direct interaction with community leaders and other interested members.

Universities and cultural research institutions work in various fields of ICH. Many of their projects are related to communities and are designed to benefit the communities. Researchers who do field work and work with communities often see it as their duty to share the results with the community and allow them to benefit. Communities actively use published research material as well as material compiled by students.

The UNESCO Chair on Applied Studies of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the University of Tartu was established in July 2018. The goal of this unit of research and international postgraduate teaching at the MA and PhD levels is to build a bridge between the academic world, civil society, local communities and policy-makers. Studies in the fields of ethnology and folkloristics, complemented with applied anthropology and cultural management, have been reinforced by the recent establishment of the new English-language Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies programme. This programme carries the mission to train specialists who are well versed in scholarly approaches to intangible cultural heritage and competent in using this expertise creatively in academia and beyond. Professor Kristin Kuutma, PhD, the chair holder, has focused her research and publications on intangible heritage matters and politics while also representing Estonia at meetings and activities related to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Ministry of Culture in cooperation with local communities has established **seven regional ICH support programmes** that have created the framework and conditions for safeguarding ICH. The regional ICH support programmes were established in 2000 and since 2012 they are administered by the Estonian Folk Culture Centre. These programmes are not firmly structured in their elements and strategies in order to take into account the changing nature of ICH and to give the communities a chance to decide which elements of their heritage need support and how to best safeguard them. As communities are not just bearers of ICH entitled to assistance but also the primary parties responsible for safeguarding their own ICH, it is up to them to develop projects according to their needs and ideas and to apply for funding. This approach has proved to be an effective means to encourage community action and a valuable safeguarding tool. It is worth noting that regional ICH support programmes have had a positive influence on other regions. Therefore, it has been proposed to further widen the scope of this measure.

In general, all seven regional programmes have the same aims for safeguarding intangible and preserving tangible heritage, revitalising ICH, increasing the number of people who participate in local culture and strengthening the ties between young people and their

ancestors' language and cultural heritage. The most common examples of supported activities include organisation of cultural events related to traditional culture; presentation of workshops, training courses and seminars; and compilation and publication of books and CDs, many of them in the local language. Modern interpretations of traditional music, handicrafts, art and literature are also eligible for support. Representative bodies of tradition bearers may apply for operating support in order to pursue their activities. Supporting the role of ICH in the local economy is growing increasingly important. Finally, research activities, especially community cooperation with research institutions, are supported.

The budget of seven regional support programmes

Budgets 2018	
Vana-Võrumaa	€81 343
Mulgimaa	€90 173
Setomaa	€141 820
Kihnu island	€83 703
Islands	€76 156
Peipsiveere	€46 657
Virumaa	€67 020
All budget	€586 872

Other ICH support programmes administered by the Estonian Folk Culture Centre are:

- the support programme for folk festivals,
- the support programme for national costumes,
- the support programme for regional cultural activities and compiling entries for the Estonian inventory of ICH,
- the support programme “Theater in the countryside”,
- the operating support for folk culture partner organisations.

The Estonian inventory of ICH - an instrument for safeguarding, valuing and promoting of ICH

Work on the national ICH inventory has been a useful tool to encourage community action. It has encouraged people in many parts of Estonia to reflect on and safeguard their intangible cultural heritage. The aim of the inventory is not to showcase the most eye-catching and ear-striking elements of ICH but to recognize the inherent value of such heritage to its bearers and practitioners as well as to society at large. The national inventory of ICH in Estonia represents the dynamic living heritage of the different communities in Estonia and encourages heritage bearers to look at their traditional cultural elements more broadly.

This new inventory does not directly build on existing databases in order to ensure community participation and that the inventory focuses on ICH as living heritage. The purpose of the inventory is to serve the interests of local communities, and every entry is based on research prepared by the representative of a given community. The inventory takes time to evolve but can never be completed as intangible cultural heritage itself is constantly changing and evolving.

Work on the inventory began in 2007, in close collaboration with researchers from the University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literature Museum. The online inventory (www.rahvakultuur.ee/vkpnimistu) was unveiled to the public in 2010.

Intended to serve the interests of communities at the national level, it is, for the moment, available in Estonian language only.

Basic facts:

- one national inventory
- online inventory
- communities have a central role – a bottom-up approach
- does not build on existing databases

- 4 types of entries

The main criterion for inclusion is the desire of a community to include a particular element. Other criteria are that it corresponds to the definition of intangible cultural heritage; is an element of living heritage important for its community today; and has been passed on from generation to generation. As for viability, each entry must include information on its sustainability, including modes of transmission, the threats it faces (if any), safeguarding measures and their impact. Communities can share their good safeguarding practices. The inventory making is a bottom-up process and communities themselves compile entries for the inventory, decide if they want their intangible cultural heritage to be included, which elements, and how they wish to present them. This ensures the respect of customary practices governing access to elements of intangible cultural heritage. Relevant community organisations also participate in identifying and defining intangible cultural heritage. All entries will be updated every five years by the people who compiled them.

The inventory is structured in a twofold way to present different types of entries as well as different ICH domains.

Different types of entries in the inventory:

The main entry, describing the element of intangible cultural heritage, can be linked to three types of additional entries:

- individual practitioners;
- organisations connected with the element;
- places or regions that are important for this element.

The additional entries are always subordinate to the main entry of an element and cannot exist independently. However, every individual, organisation, place or region can be connected to as many elements of intangible cultural heritage as needed.

Different ICH domains in the inventory:

settlement; way of life; living environment; management of natural resources; food and nutrition; crafts; language and poetical genres; customs and religion; pastime and playful activities.

All entries concerning an element are linked to one or more thematic domains that they represent. The list of domains and sub-domains was developed specially for the inventory.

The entries follow a fixed structure. They include short analytical texts and audio-visual materials.

The structure of an entry:

- Description – present and past (text)
- Links to other entries
- Sustainability – transmission, possible threats, safeguarding activities so far (text)
- Additional information – photos, videos, audio, text files, references (books and webpages)
- Sources on which the entry is based

The Estonian Folk Culture Centre encourages communities to compile entries for the inventory. It also acts in an advisory capacity concerning the format of the entry and the necessity to provide informed consent letters of the practitioners and organisations representing the ICH element concerned. The Estonian Council for the ICH approves entries of the elements to national inventory of ICH.

The first entries were compiled by Hiiumaa island and Võrumaa region in South Estonia. These communities were already actively safeguarding and promoting their ICH and were interested in working with the inventory. The first entries from Hiiumaa included regional nicknames for local inhabitants of the island, making beer at home, rocking in a rocking-chair and skills of making a roundpole fence. Võrumaa presented such cultural expressions as Võru language, smoke sauna tradition, building and playing Teppo-type instruments called eesti lõõts (Estonian accordion), funeral customs.

- ❖ At the end of 2018 the inventory includes about 100 ICH elements

In the course of the nine years that the Estonian national inventory of ICH has been open to the public, it has gathered about 100 different elements of ICH practised in Estonia. The elements described are from different ICH domains; some elements are commonly known in Estonia, some are less inclusive, and many are attractive and festive, while most are seemingly mundane – however, all of them are important to their practising communities. To describe and verbalise the meaning of something as elusive as ICH needs concentration and work, but there is no doubt that it can be done best by the heritage bearers and practitioners themselves.