



“Culture Beyond Borders: Empowering Refugees through Cultural Rights for Inclusion and Resilience”

A linked event as part of the Global Refugee Forum 2023

12 December 2023, 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Oslo Room, Hilton Hotel and Conference Center, Geneva, Switzerland

Title:	Culture Beyond Borders: Empowering Refugees through Cultural Rights for Inclusion and Resilience
Theme:	Economic inclusion and Social Protection; Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention
Date:	12 December 2023
Format:	Hybrid
Duration:	1 hour 30 minutes
Venue:	Oslo Room, Hilton Hotel and Conference Center, Geneva, Switzerland
Organizers:	UNESCO, OHCHR and the Swiss Federation
Speakers:	UN agencies (UNESCO, OHCHR, IOM, ILO), refugees participating in projects and initiatives

Scope and description

Context

The cultural rights of migrants and displaced people have received limited attention in human rights discussion to date. In 2023, 110 million people were displaced in the world, 36,4 million of whom were refugees¹. Displaced populations – with the related loss of security, bearings, properties, networks and community-nexus – face increased vulnerability to human rights violations, including violations of their cultural rights, as well as weakening their ability to participate in cultural activities and access to and engage with their cultural heritage resources. While the issue of refugees is often considered from a security or economic perspective, the cultural dimension of leaving one’s home is often overlooked. Whether while in transit or within a host country, refugees are faced with multifaceted challenges and vulnerability factors, from

¹ Refugee Data Finder, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

access to health, education, linguistic and cultural barriers, to security and employment among others. Around the world, setbacks and infringements of cultural rights certainly slow down and potentially jeopardize the capacity of displaced populations, including refugees, to find their place, integrate and contribute to society.

Yet, ensuring the respect of cultural rights can be a powerful lever to address the vulnerability of refugees and enhance social inclusion and cohesion in host communities, in a context where displacements are increasing as a result of global challenges such as conflicts and natural hazards. While displacement often entails the disruption of cultural practices and identities, enabling displaced populations to sustain their cultural practices is essential for their resilience and sense of dignity. **Empowering refugees**, especially youth and women, through education, training, and cash-for-work projects related to cultural heritage, supports livelihoods and job creation. Likewise, allowing refugees to access cultural services and participate in cultural life, including that of the host country and of other communities, is essential to enable intercultural dialogue, and foster social cohesion, thereby preventing conflict and contributing to building peace. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is of importance in that it reiterates that: “Refugees and migrants are entitled to the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, which must be respected, protected and fulfilled at all times.”²

As part of the UN Common pledge 2.0 on refugee inclusion to be presented at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, UNESCO commits to strengthening consideration of refugees’ needs in UNESCO’s programme for culture in emergencies, thereby contributing to the fulfilment of refugees’ cultural, economic and social rights, recognizing that culture can play an instrumental role for the social integration, economic development and empowerment of refugees.

Objectives

In this context, the proposed panel discussion aims to shed light on the critical importance of protecting cultural rights of refugees and displaced people as a central component of their fundamental human rights, together with civil, political, social and economic rights, and a cornerstone of sustainable and peaceful societies. Jointly organized by UNESCO and OHCHR, as part of the Interagency Platform on Culture for Sustainable Development, the event will also build on ongoing policy processes in that area. In particular, the event will build on the commitments enshrined in the Declaration adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development - MONDIACULT 2022, adopted unanimously in September 2022, which calls on countries to guarantee equal access to cultural life, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The event will also follow-up on the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on “Cultural rights and migration”, published in February 2022, as well as on the outcomes of the Geneva Dialogue “Bringing forward cultural rights: what’s next after MONDIACULT?”, organized by the Swiss Commission for UNESCO in April last. Finally, the event will enhance existing projects and processes conducted on the ground by UNESCO, OHCHR or ILO to protect cultural rights of refugees and displaced people.

Expected outcome of the linked event

The special event is expected to kickstart the shaping of a preliminary roadmap on refugees and cultural rights, to be further developed and implemented as part of the UN Common pledge 2.0 on refugee inclusion.

² In Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, “Cultural rights and migration”, February 2023, [A/HRC/52/35](#)

Format and Participants

5 minutes	Welcome address <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary General, Swiss Commission for UNESCO
5 minutes	Opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Alexandra Xanthaki, United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights
60 minutes	Roundtable discussion <p><i>Moderator: Ms Emmanuelle Robert, Programme Specialist for Culture, UNESCO</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Marie McAuliffe, Head, Migration Research and Publication Division, International Organization for Migration (IOM)• Mr Chris Donnges, Head, Job Creation through Public Investment Unit, International Labour Organisation (ILO)• Mr Claude Cahn, Human Rights Officer, Indigenous Peoples and Minorities, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)• Mr Luis Enrique López-Hurtado Orjeda, Coordinator, Culture Sector, UNESCO Office in Lima (Peru) (<i>online</i>)• Mr Fernando Ramos Leal, luthier and cultural manager in Arequipa (Peru) (<i>online</i>)• Mr Jean-Marie Ishimwee, Director, Youth Voices Communities (Kenya), member of the Future With Wakimbizi Campaign• Mr Luka Isaac, President of the Minawao refugees (Cameroon) (<i>online</i>)
15 minutes	Question and answer session
5 minutes	Closing remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Paola Leoncini Bartoli, Director, Cultural Policies and Development, UNESCO

Venue, date and modality

The event will be held on 12 December 2023 from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m.

The event will be held in the Oslo Room at the Hilton Hotel and Conference Center and will be open to the public.

The event will be conducted in hybrid modality and will be livestreamed with a view to engage more broadly partners and communities in shaping and implementing the preliminary roadmap.