

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

# What is UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage? And what's on it?

Feb 8, 2023



Human towers were added to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010.

Image: REUTERS/Albert Gea

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- **UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List now features 678 elements corresponding to 140 countries.**
  - **It covers local practices, representations, expressions and skills.**
  - **The baguette, rumba and human towers all feature.**
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As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the need to conserve the social histories of its diverse communities is more urgent than ever.

UNESCO has announced the latest additions to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which this year includes narrative pottery and bell-shaped garments. The United Nation's [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) was adopted in 2003 and came into effect in 2006.

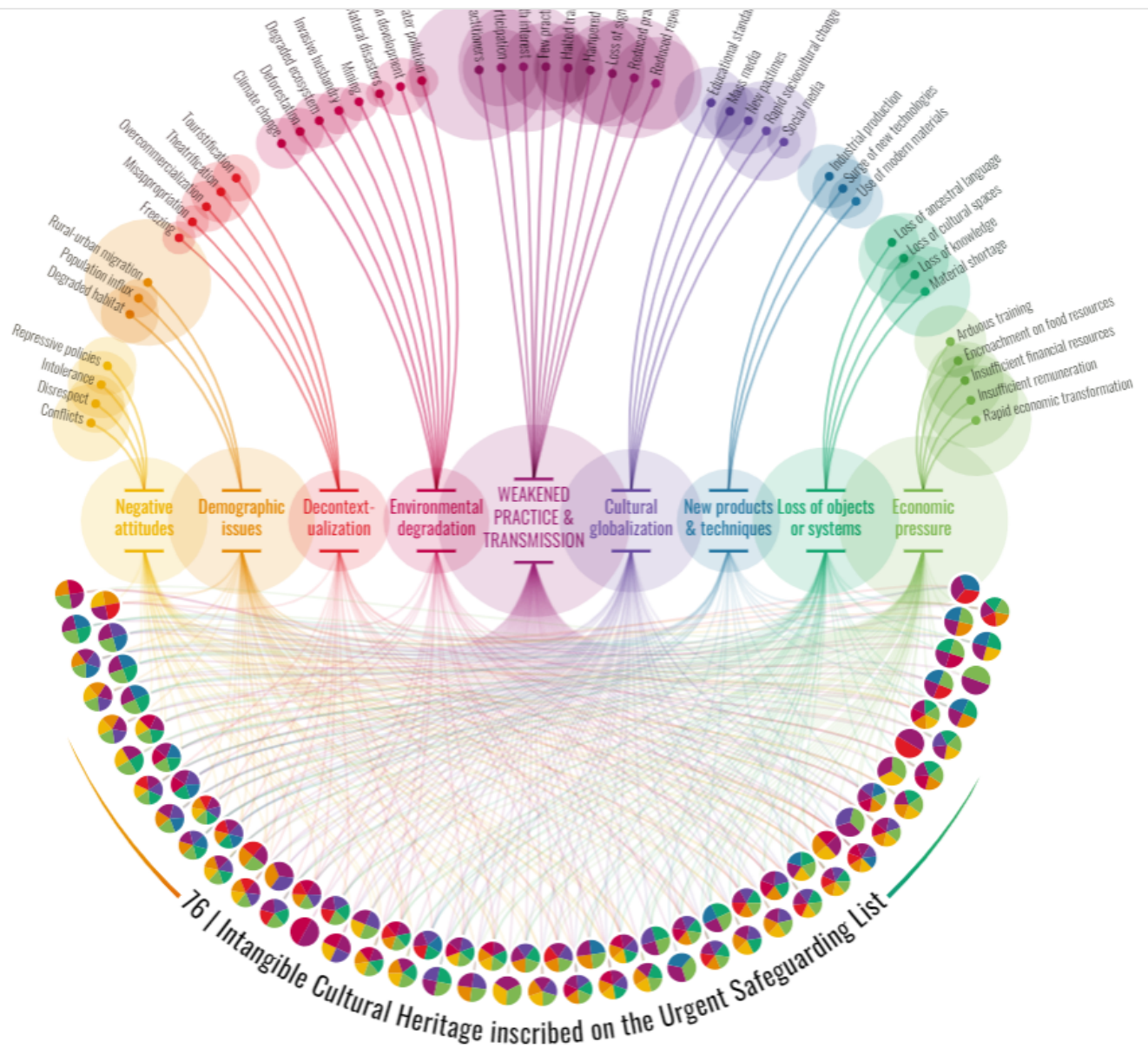
The list, which highlights the customs most at risk, is designed to protect traditions passed from one generation to another, in danger of disappearing from the collective memory.

"Intangible cultural heritage" refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

To be included on the list, UNESCO says intangible cultural heritage should be:

- Inclusive
- Representative
- Community based

There are currently [678 elements corresponding to 140 countries listed](#).



UNESCO has added new elements to its intangible heritage list, which now includes 59 in urgent need of safeguarding. Image: UNESCO.

## What's on the list?

Last year, UNESCO voted to include the "artisanal know-how and culture of baguette bread".

Reflecting on the addition of [France's staple bread](#) to the list, UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay said this "celebrates the French way of life: the baguette is a daily ritual, a structuring element of the meal, synonymous with sharing and conviviality".

She added: "It is important that these skills and social habits continue to exist in the future."

In 2021, UNESCO declared that [Haiti's traditional pumpkin soup known as "soup joumou"](#) is also of intangible cultural value to humanity.

"Soup joumou reminds us of the sacrifices our ancestors made to fight slavery and racism on earth," wrote the country's former foreign minister Claude Joseph on Twitter. "I welcome this news with a lot of pride and emotion."

[sound that mixes the drumming of enslaved Africans with the melodies of Spanish colonists.](#)

"The rumba is used for celebration and mourning, in private, public and religious spaces," UNESCO said in its citation for the music's addition to its list of assets of intangible cultural value to humanity.

## Human towers

[Human towers, or 'castells', were added to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010](#) as an "integral part of (Catalan) cultural identity". This 18th century tradition has now become a biannual event, where people compete to form the most complex structure in Tarragona's bullring.

## Intangible cultural heritage under threat

In December 2022, 39 elements were added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Four elements were highlighted as in urgent need of safeguarding, these are:

### **Viet Nam: [Art of pottery-making of Chẵm people](#)**

Chẵm pottery products are made by women and viewed as an expression of individual creativity based on the knowledge transmitted within the community.

### **Chile: [Quinchamalí and Santa Cruz de Cuca pottery](#)**

A source of social and economic autonomy, the [Quinchamalí and Santa Cruz de Cuca pottery](#) method highlights women's non-subordinate role in gender relations.

### **Albania: [Xhubleta, skills, craftsmanship and forms of usage](#)**

The [Xhubleta](#) is a handcrafted garment worn by highland women and girls in Northern Albania, that is characterised by its undulating bell form.

### **Türkiye: [Traditional Ahlat stonework](#)**

Traditional Ahlat stonework involves the extraction of volcanic Ahlat stones. The stones are then shaped into artefacts and structures, UNESCO says.

[The importance of indigenous knowledge](#) to future nature conservation practices was highlighted at Davos 23 in January. In the session, '[Don't Let Greenwashing Fears Stall Credible Action](#)', experts impressed the need to ensure indigenous rights over territories to protect ecosystems and ways of life.

This backs up the guidance from the World Economic Forum's new report [Embedding Indigenous Knowledge in the Conservation and Restoration of Landscapes](#).



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 Davos  
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