

Annex 1 | *Country Background*

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Country background

Kyrgyzstan, officially called the Kyrgyz Republic, is a small, mountainous country in Central Asia with a population of around 5 million people. Kyrgyz Republic shares borders with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Kyrgyz Republic gained its independence in 1991 after the downfall of the Soviet Union. About 80 percent of the population are ethnic Kyrgyz. The other 20 percent consists of ethnic Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Tatars, Tajiks, Kazakhs, Dungans, Koreans, and other groups. Kyrgyz overwhelmingly consider themselves Muslim.

Kyrgyz is the state language, but Russian functions as an official language. Until the 1930s, almost all Kyrgyz led a pastoral-nomadic lifestyle in the mountains of Central Asia. Traditionally, Kyrgyz pastoralists lived in portable wooden yurts and practiced seasonal migration with their livestock by moving vertically between low land and high mountains. Their livelihood was very much dependant on the domestic animals they raised, such as horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and camels. Horses and camels were the main means of transportation. Since the mountain environment of the region is best suited for livestock raising, the traditional economy was based on livestock production. In the 1930s, due to the Soviet Union's forced sedentarization and collectivization policies in Central Asia, the majority of nomadic Kyrgyz adopted a sedentary lifestyle, gave up their livestock to the state, and took up farming. This major transformation from nomadic to sedentary and urban life brought many positive and negative changes to the traditional economy, and to traditional culture. During 70 years of Soviet rule, the Kyrgyz became literate, established their own republic within the Soviet Union—the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic—the Kirghiz SSR, built cities and towns, developed a national leadership and intelligentsia, created arts and culture that was national in form and socialist in content, and developed a plan-based economy based on agriculture and livestock production. One of the negative impacts of Soviet rule in Central Asia was the russification of non-Russian nationalities in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to the lack of Kyrgyz language schools and daycare centers in cities and towns, many Kyrgyz forgot their native language and had little or no interest in Kyrgyz traditional culture and history. Russian was required for all government positions and professional jobs. Upon gaining its independence in 1991, Kyrgyz Republic, like all other newly emergent independent nation states of the former Soviet Union, experienced a major national and cultural revival. In 1989, influenced by the ideas of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* reforms, the Supreme Council of Kirghiz SSR adopted a new law which gave the Kyrgyz language the status of a state language. People began to develop strong sense of national identity and interest in their past history and traditional culture. Kyrgyz nomadic heritage and oral tradition served as key markers of national identity, national symbols and ideology for independent Kyrgyz Republic.

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kyrgyz Republic

Following the ratification of the 2003 Convention in 2006, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic through its various bodies is actively involved in safeguarding of cultural heritage in the country. At the institutional and administrative levels the Ministry of culture and information of the KR and Academy of Science are the responsible bodies for safeguarding and development of cultural heritage, including intangible heritage. It should be noted that NGO and local communities play an important role in safeguarding of the ICH.

The Government has also taken legislative measures to safeguard the cultural heritage of the country. At present, the law on safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage are being elaborated.

The Ministry of culture and information of the KR, National Academy of Science of the KR, and Kyrgyz National Commission for UNESCO in cooperation with NGO, experts, bearers and practitioners of the ICH has developed the plan of activities for safeguarding and promotion of the ICH.

List for endangered Intangible Cultural Heritage

The National urgent safeguarding list of ICH is being elaborated by experts from Academy of Science, NGO and local communities. The main threats to the ICH elements continued transmission are caused by the following reasons:

- Influence of urbanization and industrialization – young people leave rural areas for cities and lose their interest to the values of their cultural heritage. Young people captured by mass culture do not understand the importance of their cultural heritage and are not eager to keep and transmit the traditions of their ancestors. It often happens that an old master has nobody to transmit his/her knowledge and skills, and secrets of traditional techniques can be lost forever;
- Transition period, political and social upheavals in the country have a negative influence on culture and cultural heritage.

International assistance and cooperation in the field of intangible heritage

We need assistance and cooperation in the following areas:

- a) in the fields of capacity-building and documentation/research;
- b) in creation an electronic network to facilitate the exchange of information on methodologies for the safeguarding of the ICH among experts and other stakeholders;
- c) in examples or guidelines for the design and implementation of the national plan on inventorying of the ICH that take account of the protection of the rights and interests of bearers and practitioners of the ICH.

The inventorying process of intangible cultural heritage

The Kyrgyz Republic has conducted a process of inventorying of ICH since 1930 during the Soviet period on different forms of oral folk and instrumental art, materials on epic heritage, national games, social practices by scientists and ethnographers of the Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, in the course of the last 20 years in our country works on identifying elements of intangible heritage were not implemented. Works on inventorying mainly of episodic and parochial character were conducted by NGO. The lack of human

potential, absence of concrete programmes in the field of training and education of cadres on management of intangible heritage and of the common unified approach have negatively affected a quality of inventorying of intangible heritage.

In the state level, the Ministry of culture and Information of the KR, Academy of Science has a mandate for identifying and documentation of ICH.

At the present, the group of expert, including expert from NGO and bearers and practitioners of the ICH is developing the plan of inventorying of ICH elements in seven oblasts (regions) of the country and questionnaire.

All inventories (governmental and non-governmental) are open to the public and accessible to bearers and practitioners of the ICH. Concerned communities and bearers of the ICH elements have jointly participated in all stages of the process of inventory-making. The main aims this inventories it's safeguarding of the ICH and awareness about importance of ICH.

Inventorying is an ongoing process in Kyrgyz Republic, because of the large number of ICH elements requiring indentifying in all regions of the country and our inventory list will be to regularly update.

The National List (inventory) of ICH elements

The Ministry of culture and information of the KR, Kyrgyz National Commission for UNESCO, Academy of Science and representative from NGO, communities designed the provisional National List of ICH elements in 2008. The National list of ICH of KR is organized according to the following domains:

- (a) oral heritage (folktales, epic, epic songs, proverb);
- (b) performing arts (arts of akyn, dance, folk music);
- (c) traditions, pre-islamic beliefs, rites, festivities related to the life cycle of humanity;
- (d) traditional technique (crafts, national clothes, cuisine);
- (e) national games.

The Ministry of culture and information of the KR and Academy of Science are the responsible organs for this List.

Non-governmental inventories

Due to the limited financial recourses, the Government of the KR welcomes joint inventory-making projects with NGO. At this time, the following main NGOs has inventory:

The inventory of the Public Foundation "Central Asian Crafts Support Association's ResourceCenter"(CACARC-kg)includes information concerning the traditional crafts elements. The inventory project was covered by CASARC-kg and international organizations.

The inventory of the Public Foundation "Aitysh" includes information concerning the performing arts (mainly the domain of arts of akyns). This inventory was covered by Public Foundation "Aitysh" and the Government.

The inventory of the NGO "Aigine" includes information concerning the knowledge about pre-islamic beliefs. The Christensen Fund was the main sponsor for this inventory project.

Intangible Heritage Lists

The Art of akyns, Kyrgyz epic tellers, was proclaimed by UNESCO a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 and in 2008 incorporated in the RL; in 2009 Kyrgyz Republic participated in preparation of the multinational nomination “Nooruz (New Year) celebrations” and was included in RL (please see Annex 4).

The nomination file “Ala-kiyiz and Shirdak: Art of Kyrgyz traditional Felt Carpets” was submitted for the inscription onto USL in 2012.