

VERIS

Toolkit for Social Integration through **Intangible Cultural Heritage** and Safeguarding of **Cultural Memory**

Supporting Syrian Refugees in European Contexts

CIVIS Open Lab Project

*Based on fieldwork with Syrian refugees in Romania, Switzerland, Jordan & Lebanon and IDPs in Syria
2021–2025*

Led by the University of Lausanne, in partnership with the University of Bucharest and University of Glasgow

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For: Social Workers & NGOs | Policy Makers | Cultural Institutions | Community Organizers & Refugees | Universities

Preface: Why This Toolkit Exists

This toolkit was born from listening. Between 2025 and 2026, the VERIS project — a CIVIS Open Lab initiative and the Collart-Palmyre project, launched by the University of Lausanne in 2017— gathered the testimonies of Syrian refugees and displaced persons in Romania, Switzerland, Jordan, and Lebanon. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with men and women who had left Syria due to war, navigating journeys through Turkey, Germany, Greece, and beyond. The information was separately collected from VERIS and Collart-Palmyre, two different projects, with different and independent outputs, but entirely relevant for inspiring this toolkit. Sensitive information related to trauma was collected by our researchers in partnership with two experts, Adrian Socol, from the University of Bucharest, within the framework of the VERIS project, and Jenny Maggy, the sociologist of the University of Lausanne, within the framework of Collart-Palmyre.

Highlighting experiences of forced migration, exile, and trauma, this toolkit explores how Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) aids in rebuilding lives. It demonstrates various methods by which intangible heritage fosters social cohesion and renews hope for those beginning anew far from their homelands, particularly for those rarely part of established diasporas, who need help in maintaining cultural memory and identity.

Those conversations revealed a portrait not of passive displacement, but of individuals carrying rich cultural worlds within them—memories of generational craftsmanship, stories shared around family tables, and traditions marking the turn of seasons and life milestones. These constitute what UNESCO defines as **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**: the living, breathing expressions of identity that cannot be reduced to rubble, even when the physical sites that once housed them are destroyed. All the information collected on the occasion of these two projects was obtained by respecting ethical procedures and the consent provided by participants.

One participant, a silenced voice of those who suffered from displacement, said it plainly when reflecting on the ruins of Palmyra, more particularly, of the Temple of Baalshamin, digitally reconstructed and visited through an immersive experience that enabled reflection on ICH, but also on the result of reconstructing erased tangible heritage, even virtually

"Even if you rebuild a building, you build a culture that is more than 2,000 years old. Even if tomorrow your child sees that you did this, they will hold their head a little higher. The future will be greater." — Syrian refugee, Romania

This toolkit translates that insight into practical action. It offers frameworks, activities, and guidance for practitioners, policymakers, institutions, and community members who want to support integration not through assimilation — erasing what people carry — but through recognition: making space for culture as a resource for healing, connection, and belonging, with a particular focus on the Syrian identities. One of the defining features of Syrian culture is its ability to embrace and reconcile multiple identities, cultural values, and spiritual orientations, creating a legacy of pluralism and resilience.

 **How to use this document:** Read the Introduction and Framework first. Then navigate directly to the modules most relevant to your role and context. Each activity is self-contained and can be adapted.

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1. Introduction: Culture as a Bridge, Not a Barrier

1.1. Context – the description is based on the experience we had with refugees living in Romania within the context of our CIVIS Open Lab, VERIS. Therefore, some of the cultural remarks provided by participants are highly influenced by their living ecosystems from Eastern European countries, more specifically, in Romania. The workshop happened in Bucharest with a target group of Syrian refugees living in Romania and that is the experience that inspired the narrative behind our toolkit.

Another inspiring experience was the one led by the University of Lausanne within the framework of Collart-Palmyre Project and the Voices of Palmyra Program. Interviews and feedbacks from refugees have been also occasioned by the programs implemented by the University of Lausanne. The audiences particular to the projects led by the UL were mainly represented by diasporas who performed voluntary migration (people were having intellectual profile, mainly working in the architectural, archaeological fields), but also by refugees dealing with forced migration, and IDPS, internal displaced people (Syrian migrants within the Syrian border). In what concerns the participants to our workshop from Bucharest, the Syrian migrants and refugees were representing a large specter of professional backgrounds: doctors, former teachers, youths interrupting their studies while being forced to leave their country, migrants who started a small business (a Syrian craft shop), independent workers.

When Syrian families fled the war and arrived in Romania, Switzerland, or other European countries and neighbouring countries of Syria, they brought with them far more than luggage. They brought the memory of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and many other old cities— its stone arcades reminiscent, as several participants noted, of old town centres in Constanța and Bucharest. In what concerns Syrians leaving in Romania, they brought the smell of jabrak (stuffed vine leaves), the rhythm of wedding dances from the suburbs of Homs that echoed something familiar in Transylvanian folk music. They brought the joinery techniques of their grandmasters — the interlocking wooden puzzles of Syrian mashrabiyya — and the embroidered fabrics that marked every passage of life from birth to marriage.

Integration policy in Europe has often focused on what refugees must learn and adopt: the host language, legal norms, employment skills. This is necessary, but insufficient. Research (Șerban & Ciachir 2026; Aldegheri et al 2025) consistently shows that sustainable integration — the kind that produces belonging, mental health, and civic participation — also requires that what people already know, are, and carry is seen and valued.

The VERIS project took a different starting point: asking not 'what do refugees need to learn?' but 'what do refugees already have, and how can that become a resource for integration?' The answer, constantly heard, in the interviews, centred on three domains of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

- Storytelling and oral history — the transmission of identity, resilience, and collective memory through narrative
- Crafts and traditional skills — embodied knowledge expressed through making, repairing, creating

- Seasonal traditions — practices of marking time, community, and meaning that ground people across contexts.

Our team considers it is mandatory to keep in mind that Syrian culture is not monolithic, so we invite people to consider the diversity and richness of Syrian identities whenever they adapt the provided scenarios in this toolkit to day-to-day practice.

Some of the material we provide throughout our CIVIS project may be particularly emotionally challenging for learners who are members of marginalised groups, particularly indigenous groups; have experienced forced migration or displacement; have experienced homelessness; have experience of being in care. We recommend listening to the media pieces before sharing them with your learners, exercising caution, and being attentive to their responses and needs.

2. Theoretical Framework: ICH and Social Integration

2.1 What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Unlike monuments or artefacts, ICH is living: it is transmitted between generations, recreated continuously, and provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity.

The five domains of ICH most relevant to this toolkit are:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning place and memory
- Traditional craftsmanship

Of these, the VERIS research findings centre most strongly on three: oral traditions, social rituals, and traditional craftsmanship.

2.2 ICH as a Resource for Integration

Social integration theory distinguishes between structural integration (access to housing, healthcare, employment, education) and cultural integration (mutual recognition, identity affirmation, intercultural exchange). For integration to be sustainable, both dimensions must be addressed.

ICH operates at the interface of these two dimensions. Participating in a craft workshop is both a social activity (building relationships, accessing community) and a cultural one (transmitting skills, affirming identity). Sharing a meal prepared according to traditional recipes both meets a material need and enacts belonging.

Critically, ICH-based integration approaches shift the dynamic from deficit to asset. Rather than positioning the refugee as someone with needs to be met, these approaches position them as a knowledge-holder — someone whose skills, stories, and practices enrich the host society.

2.3 The VERIS Model: Three Pillars

RECOGNITION	CONNECTION	TRANSMISSION
Acknowledging the cultural identity and heritage of newcomers as valid, valuable, and present.	Facilitating encounters between refugee and host-community cultural expressions to build mutual understanding.	Supporting the passing on of cultural knowledge across and between generations, including in diaspora contexts.

These three pillars map onto the practical modules in this toolkit. Recognition is foundational — without it, connection risks becoming extraction (using refugee culture for host-community enrichment without reciprocity). Transmission ensures that integration does not mean erasure.

3. What the Research Tells Us: Key Findings

The following findings are drawn directly from in-depth interviews conducted as part of the VERIS project with Syrian refugees based primarily in Romania, ranging from recent arrivals to those who had been in Europe for a decade or more. The interviews explored experiences of uprooting, resilience, cultural memory, and reactions to virtual reality reconstruction of destroyed heritage sites such as the Temple Baalshamin of Palmyra.

3.1 Separation and Loss Are Not Only About Place

The most frequently mentioned source of pain was not the physical destruction of Syria, but separation from people — family, community networks, the social fabric of everyday life. One participant described how the stones and buildings can eventually be rebuilt, but the people he knew are simply no longer there in the same way. Another spoke of his mother as the last knowing 'the home of all secrets, the home of love, the home of everything.'

"When I left Syria, I was a young boy. I stayed in many countries, met many people, experienced many things. These situations are what make you strong." — Syrian refugee, Romania

This finding has a direct implication for integration practice: rebuilding a sense of home requires rebuilding social connection, not just providing housing or services.

3.2 Cultural Similarity as a Bridge

What follows for both micro and macro approaches is a sample, not a syllabus — there's more where that came from.

Micro

Micro

Participants repeatedly identified unexpected cultural similarities between Syria and Romania as a significant comfort and facilitator of adaptation. These included:

- **Architecture:** The old city centres of Constanța and Bucharest were described as resembling the old quarters of Damascus and other Syrian cities.

- **Food:** The Romanian sarmale (stuffed cabbage) was recognized as equivalent to the Syrian jabrak, a shared culinary heritage tracing back to the Ottoman period.
- **Music and dance:** Similarities between certain traditional dances in Transylvania and those from the suburbs of Homs were noted.
- **Social values:** Hospitality, warmth toward strangers, and community-oriented behaviour were described as shared values that made Romanians feel 'almost like family.'

"The only difference I can see is the language. When you speak with a Romanian, you feel accepted, as if you are one of them, as if you are in your own country." — Syrian refugee, Romania

This insight points to a powerful integration methodology: beginning with what is shared rather than what is different. Shared food, shared spatial memories, shared social values create entry points for genuine encounter.

Macro:

- **Architecture:** The resemblance participants drew between Constanța's old town and Damascus is not a coincidence of the eye — it's a shared inheritance. Much of South-Eastern Europe's historic urban fabric carries the same Ottoman, Byzantine, and Mediterranean layering found across the Levant: narrow streets built for shade rather than traffic, courtyard-facing rather than street-facing houses, and a vocabulary of arches, tilework, and covered markets that predates any modern border. The same pattern repeats across the continent — Plovdiv's old town, Sarajevo's Baščaršija, the Albaicín in Granada — each a European city wearing a visibly Levantine or North African face. At a macro level, this suggests architecture can do quiet diplomatic work that policy documents cannot: it lets someone feel geographically legible in a new country on the first walk through its streets.
- **Food:** Gastronomic connection is not unique to the Syrian–Romanian encounter — it is a recurring feature of migration histories across Europe. Scotland, for instance, is widely credited as the birthplace of chicken tikka masala, a dish invented by South Asian immigrant cooks adapting to local taste and now claimed as a national favourite. These stories point to a broader macro principle: food is one of the fastest and least contentious routes by which a migrant community's heritage becomes woven into a host nation's own sense of itself, often well before other forms of belonging are formally recognised.
- **Music:** Music functions as a connecting element and an occasion for gathering in its own right; rhythm offers something close to a universal language, and its resonance can often be identified in unexpected synchronicity with cultures that place music at the heart of their social bonding — Scottish traditional music, with its own communal and gathering-centred role, being one such example. At a macro level, shared musical forms and occasions provide low-barrier settings for cross-cultural contact, since participation requires no shared language and little explanation.
- **Social values:** The EU's own language of "unity in diversity," neighbourly solidarity, and family as the basic unit of social welfare turns out to have real texture on the ground — it isn't only a slogan on a cohesion-policy cover page. Across much of Southern and Eastern Europe, the same instincts participants attributed to Romanians — checking in on a neighbour, treating an elder's word as weighty, folding

an outsider into a shared meal without much ceremony — are also the load-bearing values of Syrian family and community life. That overlap is precisely why "almost like family" was the phrase that surfaced, rather than something more institutional like "welcoming" or "tolerant." At the macro level, this points to a design principle worth carrying into policy: integration frameworks that lean on existing community and family structures — rather than trying to route everything through formal institutions — are working with the grain of both cultures, not against it.

3.3 Resilience Is Rooted in Community and Practice

When participants described what had helped them survive and adapt, they consistently named two things: community connection (family support, even at a distance; new friendships in the host country) and active engagement (having work, a goal, something to make or do). Passive waiting was repeatedly described as the most corrosive experience.

"When I was in Syria, I felt like a person who has value, who is appreciated, who is perceived differently. I went to work, I was with my family. Now... I just wait. What for? I don't know." — Syrian woman refugee, Romania (waiting for family reunification)

This points to the centrality of active cultural participation — not passive cultural consumption — in integration support. Workshops, co-creation projects, and teaching roles all activate this dimension. One of the participants decided to open an online shop of Syrian Artcraft, inspired by our workshop.

3.4 Virtual Heritage Reconstruction Evokes Complex Emotions

A central element of the VERIS project was introducing participants to virtual reality reconstructions of the Temple of Baalshamin (Palmyra), destroyed by ISIS in 2015. To be mentioned that the 3D model was created within the Collart Palmyre project and add a reference to Patrick's work. Plus mention the methodology of work – immersive experiences to visit the temple virtually reconstructed plus feedback from participants.

Reactions were rich and varied:

- Joy and pride: Several participants expressed deep happiness at seeing Syria's heritage reconstructed, even virtually.
- Sadness or anger: The reconstruction also triggered grief — for what has been lost, for the impossibility of returning.
- Hope: Many read the act of reconstruction as a message that people care, that the culture is not forgotten.
- Identity affirmation: For those from Palmyra, seeing the reconstructed site was a direct affirmation of their identity and origins.

"It is as if it remembers me of how destroyed Syria is. But also — you really feel like you are living there. It was beautiful." — Syrian refugee, Romania

"I felt that it helps a lot. I feel that people are still trying to rebuild the old heritage. There are people who want to restore things from the past — what a great happiness." — Syrian refugee, Romania

The implication for cultural institutions and digital heritage initiatives is clear: virtual reconstruction of ICH is not merely a technical or archival exercise. It is an act of recognition with profound emotional and social effects.

3.5 Wisdom Gained: Values That Transcend Displacement

Participants articulated deep insights forged through their experiences. These included:

- The value of the present moment:

"Life is not what you want it to be. Life is just the moment you are living in." — Syrian migrant, Lausanne

- The importance of human relationships over material things:

"Before, I thought what mattered were material things. Now I know that moral values are more important." — Syrian migrant, Lausanne

- Gratitude for safety: Simple safety — freedom from bombing, from checkpoints, from arbitrary arrest — was named as a gift now understood.
- Patience as a survival skill: The capacity to wait, to not crumble, was described as a learned strength.

These wisdom traditions, born of extraordinary experience, are themselves a form of living heritage that communities and practitioners can honour and draw upon.

4. Module A: Storytelling & Oral History

Learning objectives:

LO1. Explore storytelling methods that feel safe and constructive in the participants' journey

LO2. Develop practical skills in eliciting, recording, and preserving personal and collective narratives as forms of intangible cultural heritage.

Expected outcomes:

EO1. To have storytelling methods leading to artistic products.

EO2. To generate new intangible cultural heritage emerging from creative disclosure and narrative testimonials that can embed performance and artistic methods of confession.

Honouring the narratives that carry identity, resilience, and collective memory

Why Storytelling?

The interview process itself demonstrated the power of storytelling as an integration tool. Giving refugees space to narrate their own experience — on their own terms, at their own pace — consistently produced moments of dignity, clarity, and connection. As one student interviewer observed after conducting an interview:

"The interview became a mirror of strength, fragility, and the quiet search for meaning after a traumatic event." — BA Student in Philosophy, Romania

Oral history also serves a documentation function: preserving the testimonies of those who lived through Syria's war ensures that future generations — including the children of the diaspora — have access to their heritage. Several participants spoke explicitly about the importance of cultural transmission to their children.

Storytelling is also in our view a way to increase intangible cultural heritage.

"Even if it is only virtual, even if tomorrow my child sees that you did this, they will hold their head higher. At least my child can know this." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Key-questions

Here are the questions we designed for the storytelling atelier and the sessions of philosophical counselling.

Thematic Areas

1. Identity and Roots
2. Trauma and Loss
3. Uprooting
4. Adaptation and Culture
5. Relationships and Support
6. Post-Traumatic Growth
7. Symbols and Meaning
8. Spirituality and Inner Reconstruction

1. What did the process of uprooting mean to you? How did you experience separation from your homeland, community, and culture?
(*theme: identity and loss of meaning*)

2. What was difficult for you before your uprooting, but now seem relatively easy considering what you've been through?
(*theme: resilience and perspective shift*)

3. What have you done during this period that demonstrates your strength in facing difficult moments?
(*theme: inner strength and affirmation*)

4. What elements of Syrian culture helped you cope with suffering and find meaning? What has been healing for you?
(*theme: culture as a therapeutic resource*)

5. Have you found aspects of Syrian culture in Romania that helped you adapt? If so, which ones?
(*theme: cultural continuity and integration*)

6. What do you now understand about what it means to be human – that you didn't understand before going through these difficulties? (*theme: human wisdom and moral reflection*)

7. What do you appreciate more in the present and you didn't before?
(*theme: appreciation of life*)

8. What do you think is the deepest wisdom you can carry with you from this experience? (*theme: transformation, meaning, and commitment*)

9. What new activities would you like to engage in now, if there were no limitations?

(*theme: dreams, reconstruction, new possibilities*)

10. When you look at a heritage such as the Temple of Palmyra, what does it awaken in you? What does it remind you of, or what does it mean to you today? Do you have any personal memories with the Temple of Baalshamîn? If yes, can you relate the context? If no, how does it feel to meet virtually a place connected to your roots, but that you have never seen before?

(*theme: symbol, memory, and identity reconnection*)

11. What emotion came first after seeing the reconstruction of the temple? (e.g. fear, nostalgia, enthusiasm etc.)

12. Do you think it is important to reconstruct – even virtually – erased or destructed cultural heritage?

13. What (dis)advantages (**Pros and cons**) do you think the virtual reconstruction of lost heritage provides, unlike the real one?

14. Is there any artistic/ cultural symbol that you cherish in particular? What is the story behind it?

The Need for Co-Facilitation

Storytelling ateliers dealing with memory, displacement, and loss cannot be safely or meaningfully facilitated by a single perspective alone. What matters is not a fixed pairing of disciplines, but that the facilitation team jointly covers two distinct functions: a *meaning-making* role — someone able to frame questions of identity, memory, and belonging with depth, without reducing participants to case studies — and a *psychosocial safety* role — someone able to read the room, recognise signs of distress, and hold appropriate boundaries around what is safe to explore in a group setting. In the VERIS pilot, these two functions were held by a philosopher with expertise in biopolitics and philosophical counselling and a psychologist specialised in trauma; other contexts might draw instead on an oral historian paired with a social worker, a heritage educator paired with a community psychosocial worker, or an intercultural mediator paired with a counsellor. What should not vary is the underlying principle: meaning-making expertise without psychosocial attentiveness risks pushing participants past what they are ready to share, while psychosocial caution without meaning-making depth risks flattening the storytelling into a purely clinical exercise. Where only one function can be resourced, the facilitator should at minimum be aware of the gap and build in a referral pathway to trauma support, as outlined in the Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation supplement.

Activities

Activity A1: My Journey, My Wisdom: Community Storytelling Circles

ICH Domain: Storytelling & Oral History | **Audience:** NGOs, Community Groups | **Time:** 90–120 minutes

Objective

To create a structured, safe space for refugees to share their stories of uprooting, resilience, and cultural memory with peers and community members, building social connection and affirming identity. Our advise would be to work, at this step, with a professional therapist.

Steps

1. Set up a circular seating arrangement for 8–12 participants (mixed refugee and host-community where possible).
2. Open with a brief introduction to the purpose: this is a space for listening, not advice-giving.
3. Introduce a simple prompt drawn from the VERIS interview guide: 'What did you bring with you from your homeland that no suitcase could hold?'
4. Allow 3–5 minutes of quiet reflection before anyone speaks.
5. Each person discloses/creates a story about the item and a character using the item (it could be themselves or a narrative using an invented character if they do not feel comfortable speaking about themselves) for 3–5 minutes without interruption. Others listen actively.
6. After all have spoken, open a brief collective reflection: 'What surprised you? What did you recognise in someone else's story?'
7. Close with an optional commitment: one small action each person will take to honour something from their story.

8. Create a small exhibition with the artistic products resulting from this workshop (visual auditory, works of art mirroring experience disclosed in an (im)personal voice – using a character, narrative scenarios, a small booklet with the stories gathered, a podcast including the stories recorded)

Facilitator's Note

Do not try to 'solve' or 'help' during the sharing phase. The power is in witness. If someone becomes distressed, pause gently and offer a break rather than rushing to comfort.

Allow participants to speak impersonally or to represent themselves through a character when sharing.

Voice from the Field

"I am still the same person who was born and grew up. The same values, the same views on life. Nothing has changed. I am who I am." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Activity A2: Cognitive toponymy: A Memory of Place Workshop

ICH Domain: Storytelling & Oral History | **Audience:** Cultural Institutions, Schools, NGOs |

Time: 2–3 hours

Objective

To use spatial and architectural memory as a bridge between Syrian and host-country cultural landscapes, activating personal heritage narratives through shared visual exploration.

Steps

1. Gather large-format maps or projected images of both Syrian cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Palmyra) and local host-city neighbourhoods.
2. Invite participants to identify places that evoke personal memories — school, market, family home, a landmark, a place name.
3. Facilitate a paired sharing exercise: each participant shares their Syrian spatial memory with a host-country partner who shares a comparable local memory.
4. Guide a discussion: 'What similarities did you discover? What surprised you?'
5. Participants create a small 'heritage map' — a hand-drawn or collage representation of places that matter to them, past and present, using printed images from magazines or cultural items belonging to Syrian heritage.
6. Maps are displayed together as a collective exhibition.

Facilitator's Note

Prepare by researching Ottoman-era architectural connections between Romanian and Syrian cities — the documented similarities (Constanța/Damascus, Transylvanian dance forms) are powerful conversation starters grounded in real history, not sentiment.

Alternatively, the trainer could ask the participants, if they feel comfortable enough, to reconstruct the journey of displacement and forced migration by using physical images and maps that could be linked to visualise transitions.

Voice from the Field

"The architecture in the old centre of Constanța looks very similar to the old centre of Damascus. It helps you see something familiar, something you already know somehow." — Syrian refugee, Constanța, Romania

Activity A3: Living Archive: Oral History Documentation by Conducted Interviews

ICH Domain: Storytelling & Oral History | **Audience:** Universities, Libraries | **Time:** Ongoing (minimum 3 months)

Objective

To create a community-controlled archive of refugee testimonies, wisdom traditions, and cultural memories that can be accessed by future generations and used in integration programming.

Steps

1. Establish a small project team including at least two refugee community members as co-researchers.
2. Train participants in basic oral history interview techniques (informed consent, active listening, open questioning).
3. Conduct recorded interviews with willing community members, using translated versions of the VERIS interview protocol as a starting framework.
4. Transcribe and translate recordings with community approval.
5. Co-design the archive format: printed book, digital platform, community exhibition, or all three.
6. Host a launch event that celebrates the archive as a community achievement. Invite participants, their relatives, if available, friends, create a safe space for exhibiting experiences and linked testimonies.

Facilitator's Note

Ensure rigorous informed consent procedures, especially regarding how testimonies will be stored and shared. Participants must retain the right to withdraw or redact at any point. Refugee participants should be compensated for their time and expertise — this is skilled work.

Resources for after-care should be provided, some of the experiences shared might be particularly emotionally challenging for participants.

Voice from the Field

"Life goes forward. Live as much as you can, because you will die anyway, and love as much as you can, because in the end you are alone." — Syrian refugee, Romania

5. Module B: Crafts & Traditional Skills

Learning objectives:

LO1. To fill the gap between tangible and intangible cultural heritage through traditional art crafts, and to keep cultural memory alive as an essential part of the cultural identities.

LO2. To expose participants to the universal language of arts.

Expected outcomes:

The recognition of know-how as enhancement of self-confidence in a multicultural world.

To perform and engage communication tools that do not involve language or linguistic barriers.

Making as knowing: hands-on heritage as a pathway to dignity and connection

Why Crafts?

Traditional craftsmanship holds a unique place among the domains of ICH because it is simultaneously cognitive, physical, social, and economic.

On the one hand, within the framework of Collart-Palmyre Project, the work with NGOs — in both Syria, and in the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, demonstrate this multiplicity: embroidery workshops function as income-generation, psychosocial support, cultural transmission, and social bonding all at once. More specifically, sewing was perceived as a connective thread.

On the other hand, within the framework of VERIS, researchers closely worked with JRS - Jesuits Refugee Service.

As demonstrated in the Collart-Palmyre Project, embroidery also give a way to materialise cultural memory and memories in a tangible object that become the support of these memories.

One participant described the Syrian technique of interlocking wooden joinery — pieces cut so precisely that they hold together without nails or glue, surviving even earthquakes — as a symbol of Syrian cultural identity. Another, from Palmyra, spoke of the stones of his city:

" You feel that whoever made this architecture did it with emotion, did it with their heart, without anything else. They put their soul in there." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Craft also offers a pathway into connection that does not require shared language. Sitting alongside someone, watching their hands, asking questions through gesture and example — this is a form of cultural encounter accessible even in the earliest stages of linguistic integration.

Activities

Activity B1: Hands Together: Cross-Cultural Craft Exchange

ICH Domain: Crafts & Traditional Skills | **Audience:** NGOs, Cultural Institutions | **Time:** Half-day workshop (3–4 hours)

Objective

To facilitate a hands-on exchange of traditional craft skills between refugee and host-community participants, positioning refugees as teachers and knowledge-holders.

Steps

1. Identify two or three refugee participants willing to teach a traditional craft skill (embroidery, weaving, traditional cooking, woodwork, tile painting).
2. Pair each craft teacher with 4–6 learners from the host community.
3. Begin with a brief story from the teacher: where did this skill come from? Who taught it to you? What does it mean?
4. Move into hands-on learning: the refugee participant teaches the technique step by step.
5. Midway, invite reflection: what is difficult? What is surprising? What is similar to techniques you know?
6. Close by displaying the completed works together and hosting a short sharing circle.

Facilitator's Note

This activity deliberately inverts the usual power dynamic of refugee-as-recipient. Prepare host-community participants for this: some may feel uncomfortable being taught by someone they perceive as vulnerable. Brief them beforehand on the purpose and importance of the role reversal.

It is not always the case, but this scenario might support transgenerational learning in a multicultural environment.

Voice from the Field

"When we were in Syria, people were sociable and hardworking. We work, we stay, we talk, we are always next to someone. Connection. Community helps a lot." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Activity B2: Embroidery as Memory: The Stitched Story Workshop

ICH Domain: Crafts & Traditional Skills | **Audience:** NGOs, Psychosocial Support Programmes, Cultural Institutions | **Time:** Recurring weekly sessions (6–10 weeks)

Objective

To use traditional Syrian embroidery as a medium for psychosocial wellbeing, cultural transmission, and income generation, drawing directly on the VERIS project and its work with JRS, or on the Collart-Palmyre Project.

1. Source traditional Syrian embroidery materials and patterns, working with community members to ensure authenticity.
2. Establish a weekly gathering space — ideally in a community centre or cultural institution, not a clinical or administrative setting.
3. Begin each session with an informal check-in over tea or coffee.
4. Introduce the week's pattern or technique with its cultural context: what does this pattern represent? Where is it found in Syria?
5. Participants work on their own pieces while sharing conversation; facilitators encourage but do not direct.

Alternatively, they could share one piece working together.

6. Over the weeks, pieces accumulate into a collective textile work that can be exhibited.
7. In the final session, hold a celebration that includes the option for participants to sell or gift their work.

Facilitator's Note

The embroidery is the vehicle, not the goal. The goal is regular, safe, culturally-grounded social contact. Be flexible: some weeks participants will embroider, others they will mostly talk. Both are the programme.

We warmly recommend to use a traditional cross-stitch (Syrian-Palestinian). It will enhance the cultural engagement of participants, strengthening the survival of ICH.

Voice from the Field

"I was a teacher in Syria. When I was there, I felt like a person of value, appreciated, perceived differently. Now I just wait. What for? I don't know." — Syrian woman refugee, Romania

Activity B3: The Craft Economy: From Workshop to Market

ICH Domain: Crafts & Traditional Skills | **Audience:** NGOs, Local Authorities, Economic Integration Programmes | **Time:** 3–6 months programme

Objective

To support refugees in transforming traditional craft skills into sustainable economic activity, combining cultural heritage with livelihood development.

Steps

1. Conduct a skills audit with interested refugee participants: what traditional craft skills do people hold? What materials and tools are needed?
2. Provide basic training in business skills, pricing, and local market knowledge (in partnership with an economic integration organisation).
3. Connect participants with local craft markets, design festivals, and cultural events as initial sales opportunities.
4. Work with a local cultural institution to provide exhibition space for the first showcase.
5. Support participants in developing a simple narrative for their products: the story of the craft, its Syrian heritage, its meaning.
6. Evaluate: what worked? What needs adapting? Document and share findings.

Facilitator's Note

The narrative is often more valuable than the product itself in heritage craft markets. Help participants feel confident telling the story of their work — not as a marketing exercise, but as an act of cultural pride. Ensure fair trade principles are followed: profit should flow to the makers.

Make sure that not only the profit of the sell goes to the producer, but also that third parties (facilitators) involved will not retain any percent of the manufacturers. All revenue has to go to the target group.

Voice from the Field

"If you give me the choice, I would like to travel. But I also want to create something from my hobbies. To give myself more care and more time." — Syrian refugee, Romania

6. Module C: SEASONAL TRADITIONS AND SOCIAL RITUALS

Marking time together: rituals as anchors of identity and spaces of intercultural encounter

Learning objectives

LO1. To learn how to shift from tolerable conviviality to authentic and integrated inhabitancy through social rituals.

LO2. To become aware of the role of spiritual values in the context of integration processes.

LO3. To increase the actual engagement with the unexperienced social rituals of minorities as a method of performing identities and recovering the sense of belonging while living within foreign cultures.

Expected outcomes

EO1. A mutual desire to exchange social rituals based on human joy and sense of community.

EO2. To expand the knowledge on spiritual values within a multicultural, secular world.

Why Rituals?

Rituals — the regular, shared practices through which communities mark time, transition, and meaning — are among the most powerful carriers of identity. They are also among the most fragile in displacement: without community, without familiar spaces, without the ingredients or music or language that give them form, rituals cannot be performed as they once were.

Yet the need for ritual does not disappear. One participant in the VERIS interviews spoke of the Syrian commitment to multi-cultural coexistence:

"We were always from many religions, many backgrounds, many traditions. So we always looked at the person as a human being. We did not care so much about what they are or what they represent." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Another participant, reflected on the differences with Romanian culture around food and alcohol, but did not frame these as barriers — rather as elements requiring thoughtful navigation.

Integration programming often avoids the domain of spiritual practice, treating it as private or sensitive. The VERIS research suggests this avoidance is a mistake: shared ritual — even across spiritual differences — is one of the most powerful available tools for building genuine community, especially within the framework of ICH.

Activities

Activity C1: Table of Many Cultures: Shared Festive Meals

ICH Domain: Religious & Seasonal Rituals | **Audience:** NGOs, Community Groups, Cultural Institutions) | **Time:** 3–4 hours (one session or recurring)

Objective

To use the shared preparation and eating of traditional foods as a ritual of encounter, drawing on the profound role of hospitality and communal eating in Syrian culture and its resonance in Romanian society. We do not believe that the comparison with Romania could be too restrictive for implementation in other European countries, at least, not in Eastern ones.

Steps

1. Invite refugee and host-community participants to co-prepare a shared meal from both culinary traditions.
2. Before cooking, hold a brief sharing circle: what dish are you making, and what is its story? When is it traditionally prepared? Who taught you?
3. Cook together in a shared kitchen space, with explicit invitation for exchange of technique and knowledge.
4. Share the meal together at a common table, with continued informal conversation.
5. Optional: link the meal to a calendar moment — a Syrian religious or seasonal holiday, a Romanian festival — and share the significance of both.
6. Close with a reflection: 'What did you discover that you didn't expect?'

Facilitator's Note

Food is never 'just food.' Be attentive to halal requirements, dietary restrictions, and the emotional significance of certain dishes — for some participants, preparing a dish from home may be joyful; for others, it may trigger grief. Create space for both.

Context here is based on the creation of this activity in the Romanian setting, however the methodology can be applied in other parts of the world.

Voice from the Field

"Hospitality, kindness, people who truly wish you well — I found that a lot in Romanian culture. And the way of living here is very close to Syria. It is almost like going back to 2015." — Syrian refugee, Romania

Activity C2: Calendar Bridges: Marking Shared and Different Times

ICH Domain: Religious & Seasonal Rituals | **Audience:** Cultural Institutions, Schools, Community Centres | **Time:** Year-round programme (monthly events)

Objective

To create a shared community calendar that acknowledges both host-country and refugee community significant dates, building mutual awareness of each other's ritual lives.

Steps

1. Co-design a community calendar with refugee community members that includes both national and Syrian significant dates (such as Christmas< Easter; Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Nowruz, Syrian Mother's Day, alongside other national and religious holidays). Wherever your activity is happening, adapt the national calendar accordingly. It is important to blend religious and secular celebrations for an inclusive conviviality.
2. For each significant date, design a simple event: a shared meal, a storytelling session, a craft activity, or a cultural presentation.
3. Ensure events are co-hosted: a refugee community member and a host-community member share the facilitation role.
4. Document each event in photographs and brief written notes — these become part of a community heritage record.
5. At year's end, hold a celebration reviewing the calendar's journey.

Facilitator's Note

Avoid framing this as 'learning about different cultures' — a dynamic that can position refugee culture as exotic. Frame it instead as 'sharing our times' — a mutual acknowledgement of what matters to each community.

Voice from the Field

| "The most important thing is to be safe. To be calm. That is it." — Syrian woman refugee, Romania

Activity C3: Rites of Passage: Supporting Life Transitions in Exile

ICH Domain: Religious & Seasonal Rituals | **Audience:** Social Workers, NGOs, Psychosocial Support | **Time:** As needed (event-based)

Objective

To support refugee individuals and families in marking significant life transitions — births, weddings, graduations, deaths, and anniversaries — in ways that honour their cultural and religious traditions even in the absence of the full community context.

Steps

1. Develop an awareness among caseworkers and social workers of the life events that hold particular ritual significance for Syrian identities.
2. Establish a 'rites of passage support fund' that can provide modest resources for community celebration of significant events.
3. Connect refugee families with community members who share their cultural background and can help facilitate culturally appropriate rituals.
4. Where a death has occurred in Syria that a refugee was unable to witness or commemorate due to displacement, create space for a delayed commemorative gathering.
5. Train frontline workers in the significance of these rituals and how to ask sensitively about them.

Facilitator's Note

The inability to be present at the funeral of a loved one — which came up in multiple VERIS interviews — is a profound unresolved grief for many refugees. Do not underestimate the healing power of even a simple, belated act of commemoration.

Voice from the Field

| "My grandmother died in Syria without me being able to return to see her, to bury her, to be present at her commemoration. What does not kill you makes you stronger, but these are the things that mark you." — Syrian refugee, Romania

7. Module D: CREATIVE METHODS OF EMOTIONAL PROCESSING

Giving experience a voice without demanding the cost of direct testimony

Learning objectives

- LO1. To introduce dramatic distancing and persona-based methods as trauma-informed pathways for emotional processing within ICH practice.
- LO2. To equip facilitators with creative techniques that allow participants to voice difficult experiences without requiring direct autobiographical disclosure.
- LO3. To recognise creative externalisation as a culturally portable, ICH-compatible practice that respects participants' authorship over their own narratives.

Expected outcomes

- EO1. Participants engage with emotionally charged material with reduced risk of re-traumatisation and an increased sense of agency over what is shared and what is held back.
- EO2. Facilitators develop a working repertoire of distancing techniques — character, mask, object, third-person voice — that can be adapted across cultural contexts and group compositions.
- EO3. Emergent creative outputs (characters, stories, objects, performances) that themselves contribute to a living archive of ICH while remaining under participant control.

Why Creative Methods?

The modules preceding this one centre direct testimony — the spoken story, the named memory, the recognised practice. For many participants this directness is itself healing. For others, it carries a cost that integration programming has too often underestimated. Speaking in the first person about loss, displacement, witness, or violence can re-open the very wound that creative engagement was meant to soothe.

The methodological tradition developed at the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Education, Languages and the Arts (RIELA) at the University of Glasgow — in long collaboration with indigenous communities and refugee groups across multiple research and practice contexts — offers a different entry point. Drawing on narrative therapy, applied theatre, and the deep oral traditions that already use mythic figures, ancestral voices, and trickster characters to hold difficult community truths, this work proposes a simple but powerful inversion: the experience is

offered not in the first person, but through a character, an object, a third-person voice, or a collective persona that the participant authors and controls.

This is not avoidance. The mask reveals as much as it conceals. In workshop settings with displaced and marginalised populations, facilitators have repeatedly observed that participants who could not yet say ‘I’ about an experience could nonetheless give that experience to a character — and through the character, articulate truths of striking precision. The character can carry what the speaker cannot yet hold alone. Critically, the character can also be set down at the end of the session in a way that a first-person testimony cannot.

These methods are also a strong cultural fit for ICH work. Many of the oral and performance traditions that participants already carry use precisely this kind of distancing as their primary mode: the Syrian hakawati storyteller performing as historical or legendary figures; Bedouin poetic recitation that voices the experience of a whole tribe through a single persona; lament traditions in which a designated mourner gives voice to collective grief; the long-standing role of personified animals and ancestors in indigenous storytelling worldwide. We are not introducing a foreign technique. We are inviting participants to use, in a new setting, modes they may already recognise — and to recognise these modes as living ICH in their own right.

💡 A note on distancing: dramatic distancing is not the opposite of authenticity. Across narrative therapy, applied theatre, and trauma-informed arts practice, distance is understood as the condition under which deep authenticity becomes safely possible. The character is not a substitute for the self; it is a vessel that lets the self speak.

Activities

Activity D1: The Character Speaks — Persona-Based Storytelling

ICH Domain: Storytelling, Performance & Oral Tradition | **Audience:** NGOs, Cultural Institutions, Psychosocial Support, Schools | **Time:** 2–3 hours

Objective

To create a structured creative space in which participants build a character and offer experiences, observations, or testimony through that character’s voice, supporting emotional processing without requiring direct first-person disclosure.

Steps

1. Open with a short framing conversation about traditional storytellers — the hakawati, the bard, the village elder, the storyteller in the round — and the long-standing role of characters as carriers of community truth.
2. Invite each participant to build a character using a simple worksheet: name, age, the place the character comes from, one thing the character loves, one thing the character has lost. The character may share traits with the participant or be entirely separate — the choice is theirs and is not interrogated.
3. Allow 15–20 minutes of quiet character development. Optional: provide simple materials (paper, fabric scraps, found objects) so participants can give the character a small physical token if they wish.
4. In small groups of three or four, each participant introduces their character in the third person (“This is Layla. She is forty-three. She left her city in 2014...”) and answers questions from the others, still in the third person.
5. Move to a deeper prompt, chosen with the group and adapted to context: “Tell us about a journey your character has taken.” “Describe something your character carries.” “What does your character wish someone had said to them?”
6. After sharing, close with a deliberate setting-down ritual: each participant places the character’s token, or the worksheet, in a designated space in the room. The character is honoured and acknowledged as remaining there.
7. Optional closing reflection in the first person: “What was it like for you to give voice to your character today?” — but only if the group is ready and only by choice.

Facilitator’s Note

Do not, at any point, ask participants whether the character is “really” them. The whole power of the method depends on that question never being put. Participants understand themselves perfectly well; the third-person voice is the form in which truth is offered, not a disguise that needs unmasking. Where a participant moves spontaneously into the first person, welcome the shift without remarking on it; where they remain in the third person, hold that space without pressure.

This activity sits comfortably alongside Activity A1 (Community Storytelling Circles) and can be offered as a gentler alternative for participants who find direct circle storytelling too exposing. Co-facilitation with a trained therapist or counsellor is strongly recommended.

Voice from the Field

"When I spoke as her, I could finally say the thing. She could carry it. I could not." — Workshop participant, paraphrased and shared with consent (RIELA-affiliated practice)

Activity D2: Choral Voices — The Collective Character

ICH Domain: Storytelling & Performance | **Audience:** Community Groups, NGOs, Schools, Applied Theatre Practitioners | **Time:** Half-day (3–4 hours)

Objective

To support a group in co-creating a single shared character whose story emerges from the contributions of all participants, distributing emotional weight across the collective and producing a piece of communal creative work.

Steps

1. Begin with a brief introduction to choral and collective storytelling traditions — the Greek chorus, the communal recitation traditions of the Levant, the way an oral history sometimes belongs to no single voice but to a community.
2. Invite the group to co-name and co-describe a single character. This may be a person, a family, a village, or even a place personified. Build the character on a flipchart with everyone contributing one detail at a time. No detail is rejected.
3. Once the character is built, pose an open question: "What has happened to her?" or "What does she remember?" Each participant in turn offers one sentence in the third person, building the character's life and history as a chain.
4. Where the group's energy permits, repeat the round with a more emotionally weighted prompt: "What does she carry that nobody else sees?" or "What did she lose along the way?"
5. The accumulated sentences are read back to the group in sequence as a single piece — by the facilitator, or, with permission, by participants in turn. The character's story is now a piece of choral writing belonging to no individual.

6. Discuss as a group what the character has revealed and whether the group wishes to keep her — develop her further across sessions, perform her piece publicly, or set her aside with respect.

Facilitator's Note

The collective character is particularly suitable for groups with mixed levels of confidence or readiness to share. The shy contributor's single sentence sits alongside the more practised speaker's contribution as equal material. No single person is responsible for the character's experiences; she belongs to the whole circle.

Be careful with the prompts. The first round should be neutral or expansive ("What does she love? What does she remember from childhood?") before moving to anything emotionally weighted. Always finish with a generative or hopeful prompt ("What does she still want?") rather than ending on a wound.

Activity D3: The Object Speaks — Material Witnesses

ICH Domain: Crafts & Performance | **Audience:** Cultural Institutions, NGOs, Schools, Heritage Practitioners | **Time:** Two sessions of 2 hours each, one week apart

Objective

To use a participant-made or participant-chosen object as the spokesperson for an experience, drawing on the long-established ICH-relevant practices of mask, puppet, and votive object as carriers of community memory. This activity connects directly to the craft methods of Module B and the storytelling methods of Module A.

Steps — Session One: Making

1. Open with images and short discussion of object-based storytelling traditions: the karagöz shadow puppet, the votive offerings hung at shrines and trees, the ceremonial mask in performance and lament, the keepsake carried out of a homeland.
2. Invite participants to make or select an object that will become a witness or speaker. Materials should be simple and forgiving — cloth, clay, paper, found objects, embroidery. The object does not need to be skilled or beautiful; it needs only to feel right to its maker.

3. Allow extended time — 60–90 minutes — for making, with quiet music, refreshments, and minimal facilitator intervention.

Steps — Session Two: Speaking

4. In a circle, each participant places their object in front of them. The participant speaks for the object in the third person: “This is what she has seen. This is what she remembers. This is what she would say if she could speak.”
5. Listeners may ask questions of the object, not the participant. The participant answers as the object’s voice.
6. Where appropriate and with explicit consent, the objects may be photographed and exhibited as a collective installation, with each participant supplying a short third-person caption. The exhibition is then itself a new piece of ICH co-produced by the group.

Facilitator’s Note

The object provides a particularly stable form of distancing because it remains physically present after the session ends. Participants frequently report that the object continues to “hold” what was given to it in the workshop, in a way that a spoken story cannot.

Be attentive to the ritual dimension of the closing phase: the object should be placed somewhere with care at the end, not packed away hurriedly. If the participant wishes to take it home, support that. If they wish to leave it in the workshop space, the space should honour it.

This activity pairs well with Activity B2 (Embroidery as Memory) and Activity A2 (Cognitive Toponymy); the object made here can be the same piece worked across multiple sessions.

 Key principle for Module D: the participant is always the author. The character, the choral voice, and the object are not techniques applied to the participant — they are tools the participant is being invited to take up. The facilitator’s role is to introduce the tools, hold the space, and step back.

8. Module E: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM THE FIELD TO TEACHING

A CIVIS experience — turning community-based fieldwork into shared academic practice

Learning objectives

- LO1. Translate field-based experience with displaced communities into teachable, transferable frameworks that can be integrated into university curricula and practitioner training.
- LO2. Critically reflect on the ethical and methodological challenges of moving knowledge from lived community practice into academic and institutional settings, without flattening it into an abstracted case study.
- LO3. Build durable pathways — including micro-credentials, joint teaching modules, and cross-institutional collaboration — that allow field-generated knowledge to circulate within a university alliance such as CIVIS.

Expected outcomes

- EO1. Participants will be able to design a taught session, workshop, or curriculum unit that draws directly on field experience with displaced or marginalised communities, while preserving the voice and agency of the communities involved.
- EO2. Participants will be able to identify the specific risks of academic knowledge extraction (tokenism, decontextualisation, loss of community ownership) and apply concrete safeguards when designing teaching materials.
- EO3. Participants will have practical familiarity with at least one mechanism for formal recognition of field-based learning (e.g. micro-credentials, ECTS-linked modules) and how to propose or adapt one within their own institution.
- EO4. Participants will be able to identify and initiate opportunities for cross-institutional teaching collaboration within a multi-university alliance.

Why Knowledge Transfer to Teaching?

The modules preceding this one are field methods: ways of working directly with displaced communities to safeguard, transmit, and process cultural heritage. Module E addresses a different but equally essential question — what happens to that knowledge once the workshop ends? Field-generated insight that stays only in the field, however rich, benefits a single cohort once. Knowledge that is deliberately carried into teaching — curricula, micro-credentials, joint courses across partner universities — continues to generate value for students, practitioners, and future community partners long after any individual project has closed.

The CIVIS Alliance, as a network of universities committed to shared Open Lab methodology, offers a specific and unusually favourable structure for this kind of transfer. Findings piloted at one CIVIS institution can be adapted and re-taught at another; a micro-credential designed at one university can, in principle, be recognised across the alliance; a round table or showcase at an event such as CIVIS Days becomes a mechanism for translating field practice into a shared institutional conversation rather than a single university's isolated output.

This transfer is not automatic, and it is not ethically neutral. Moving from field to classroom risks turning people into case studies and community knowledge into institutional property. Module E is built around holding that risk in view at every step — asking not only 'how do we teach this?' but 'who is credited, who consents, and who continues to benefit once the teaching unit exists?'

💡 A note on framing: knowledge transfer here does not mean exporting field data into a lecture. It means building teaching structures that keep the community's own voice, consent, and authorship intact — including, wherever possible, inviting community co-researchers and mediators into the teaching space itself, not only into the source material.

Activities

Activity E1: From Fieldnotes to Syllabus — Co-Designing a Teaching Unit with CIVIS Partners

ICH Domain: Pedagogy & Knowledge Transfer | **Audience:** University Faculty, Curriculum Designers, CIVIS Open Lab Coordinators | **Time:** Two half-day workshops, one month apart, cross-institutional

Objective

To enable faculty from two or more CIVIS partner universities to jointly translate field-based material — interviews, workshop outputs, heritage reconstructions — into a teaching unit that can be taught, with local adaptation, at more than one institution.

Steps

1. Select a bounded piece of field material (one theme, one module, one case) as the shared basis for the teaching unit, rather than attempting to cover an entire project.
2. Map the material against each partner institution's own disciplinary contexts and existing courses, identifying where it fits naturally rather than forcing a single template onto different curricula.
3. Draft a shared session plan collaboratively, with each institution contributing framing questions relevant to its own students and academic culture.
4. Build explicit community-voice safeguards into the unit: confirm what has consent to be taught, how community contributors are credited, and where direct testimony versus paraphrase is appropriate.
5. Pilot the unit at one institution first, with a co-facilitator from the partner institution observing where possible.
6. Exchange feedback across the partner universities and adapt the unit before it is taught at the second institution.

Facilitator's Note

Resist the temptation to build a single 'universal' teaching unit. What travels well across CIVIS institutions is the underlying method and ethical framework, not a fixed slide deck — the specific framing should be allowed to shift with each institution's students and disciplinary language.

Ensure any community co-researchers or intercultural mediators whose material is used are credited by name (with consent) in the syllabus itself, not only acknowledged verbally in class.

Activity E2: The CIVIS Open Lab Micro-Credential — Recognising Field Learning

ICH Domain: Institutional Recognition & Lifelong Learning | **Audience:** Programme Coordinators, Registrars, Junior Researchers, Student Participants | **Time:** One semester, design-to-pilot cycle

Objective

To design and pilot a micro-credential that formally recognises student or practitioner learning gained through participation in field-based, community-engaged work of the kind VERIS undertook, following the model already piloted between UNIL and UNIGE.

Steps

1. Define the specific competencies the credential will certify — for example, intercultural facilitation, ethical fieldwork practice, or trauma-aware community engagement — rather than a generic 'participation' credential.
2. Map these competencies against an ECTS credit value in dialogue with the registrar's office, using existing micro-credential frameworks at partner institutions as a starting template.
3. Design an assessment method proportionate to the credential's weight — typically a reflective portfolio and a supervisor sign-off, rather than a written exam.
4. Pilot the credential with a small cohort of students or junior researchers across two CIVIS institutions simultaneously, to test cross-institutional recognition from the outset.
5. Gather structured evaluation data from the pilot cohort and supervising faculty.
6. Submit the credential for formal institutional approval, using the pilot data as evidence of learning outcomes achieved.

Facilitator's Note

Start the accreditation conversation with registrars and quality-assurance offices earlier than seems necessary — formal recognition pathways move on institutional, not project, timelines, and this is consistently the longest step in the process.

Where possible, involve a student or junior researcher who went through the original field experience in co-designing the credential's assessment criteria; they are best placed to say what was actually learned.

Activity E3: CIVIS Days Showcase — Presenting Community Knowledge to an Academic Alliance

ICH Domain: Dissemination & Co-Presentation | **Audience:** Researchers, Community Practitioners & Mediators, Student Researchers, CIVIS Alliance Representatives | **Time:** Two to three preparation sessions, culminating in a live or public presentation

Objective

To prepare and deliver a joint presentation for a CIVIS-wide audience — such as CIVIS Days — that brings together academic researchers, intercultural mediators, and, wherever possible, community co-researchers as equal co-presenters, rather than positioning community members as subjects being presented about.

Steps

1. Identify co-presenters together, ensuring the team includes community voice — an intercultural mediator or community co-researcher — alongside academic staff, from the earliest planning stage.
2. Agree collectively what story the presentation will tell and how attribution and credit will be handled, before any slides or materials are drafted.
3. Rehearse using language accessible to a mixed academic and public audience, checking that no contributor is left presenting only in a supporting or illustrative role.
4. Deliver the presentation at CIVIS Days or an equivalent alliance-wide venue, with each co-presenter speaking in their own capacity.
5. Gather feedback from CIVIS partner institutions afterwards specifically aimed at identifying follow-on collaboration, so the showcase becomes a beginning rather than a closing event.

Facilitator's Note

Treat co-presentation as a mark of equal standing, not a gesture: a community mediator introduced as an expert alongside academic staff — as happened when a VERIS intercultural mediator was recognised alongside project academics in the CIVIS Open Lab Portrait Gallery — signals something different than the same person appearing only as an interpreter or logistics support.

Avoid treating a single showcase appearance as sufficient. The strongest outcomes come from using the event to open a next collaboration, not as a one-off close to the project.

Voice from the Field

"Being asked to speak as myself, not just to translate for someone else, changed what the room understood about who actually held the knowledge."
— CIVIS Open Lab practitioner, paraphrased and shared with consent

💡 Key principle for Module E: the classroom is not the last stop for field knowledge — it is a relay point. A teaching unit, a micro-credential, or a CIVIS Days showcase should each be designed to open the next collaboration, not to close the project out.

💡 A budgetary estimation for all the modules, including detailed costs, is available [here](#).

9. Guidance for Specific Audiences

For Social Workers & NGOs

Your primary role in ICH-based integration is creating and protecting the conditions for participation. This means:

- **Assessment:** Before designing programmes, conduct a cultural assets mapping with your service users. What skills, traditions, and practices do they bring? Where do they find meaning? E.g. Mapping cultural assets
- **Staffing:** Hire or partner with people from the communities you serve, not just as translators but as cultural consultants who can advise on the appropriateness of approaches. E.g. Building cultural brokers into your team
- **Urgency:** Bureaucratic waiting — for documents, for family reunification, for work permits — is among the most damaging experiences for refugees' wellbeing. ICH-based programming must be available during this period, not only after 'integration' has formally begun. E.g. Addressing waiting
- **Evidence:** Document the cultural activities you support and their outcomes. The field of ICH and integration needs more practical evidence, and your work contributes to it. E.g. Documenting and sharing

 **Key principle for NGOs:** Position cultural heritage programming not as a 'nice extra' but as a core component of psychosocial support and social integration. Partners should budget and staff it accordingly.

For Policy Makers

The VERIS research findings have several direct policy implications:

- **Existing integration funding streams should explicitly include cultural heritage activities as eligible expenditures. The evidence base for their effectiveness in psychosocial support and community cohesion is growing.** E.g. Fund ICH-based integration programmes

- **Community centres, libraries, and cultural institutions are essential infrastructure for integration. Policies that reduce access to these spaces disproportionately harm refugee communities. E.g.** Protect and extend cultural spaces
- **Many refugees hold highly skilled craft knowledge that has no formal equivalent in European accreditation systems. Develop recognition pathways. E.g.** Recognise traditional skills in accreditation frameworks
- **Policies on integration, heritage, and culture that do not include the voices of refugee communities will systematically miss their needs and assets. E.g.** Ensure refugee participation in cultural policy
- **Refugee-carried intangible cultural heritage is currently absent from most national and EU safeguarding frameworks, leaving it undocumented and unprotected against loss across generations. Extend ICH safeguarding frameworks to displaced and refugee-carried heritage**

"A single decision from someone in a large and important country can change the lives of millions of people. We who are strong must not forget those who are weak." — Syrian refugee, Romania

For Cultural Institutions

Museums, galleries, libraries, theatres, and heritage sites have a unique and underutilised role in refugee integration. Our conviction is that cultural institutions can be sites of profound emotional and identity work for displaced communities.

- **Make your collections accessible to refugee communities, with guided programming that invites dialogue between Syrian and European heritage collections. E.g.** Open your collections
- **Invite refugee community members to co-curate exhibitions about their own heritage. Move beyond the logic of 'displaying the Other' toward collaborative knowledge production. E.g.** Co-curate, do not just display
- **VR, 3D scanning, and digital reconstruction of destroyed Syrian heritage are powerful tools — but only when accompanied by sensitive facilitation that honours the complex emotions these technologies evoke. E.g.** Use technology thoughtfully
- **Cultural institutions can provide neutral, welcoming, and prestigious spaces for cross-community events. Use your own space. E.g.** Become a community anchor
- **Engage tangible heritage and performative artistic undertakings to build community resilience and strengthen memorial culture. E.g.** Workshops of embroidery and ateliers

 **For museum and heritage professionals:** The reconstruction of destroyed heritage is not only an archival act. For communities in exile, it is an act of recognition and respect. Design VR and digital heritage experiences with this emotional dimension at the centre.

For universities

Universities should follow the vocation of creating communities through knowledge and supporting them by including diversity and multiculturalism within the framework of educational programs. As centers of research and knowledge creation, universities should host opportunities for embodying practical research to theoretical approach within interdisciplinary curricula. Nowadays we need programs focused on intensive teaching and research of migration, displaced communities, imaginary homelands, social integration and diasporas facing a global world with multiple moral and cultural milestones. The CIVIS philosophy provides a core-principle: research should have a social impact extended beyond the academic field. By this, the CIVIS Alliance becomes more civic than any other academic network.

- **Universities must move beyond refugees communities as research subjects and work with them instead as co-creators of knowledge.** E.g. Treat minorities as dignified partners of dialogue and not as impersonal inspiration for research.
- **ICH involves interdisciplinary perspectives that blend values, beliefs, attitudes, rituals and performative practices of cultural identity.** E.g. Go beyond cultural studies and involve many disciplinary fields: philosophy, sociology, archaeology, heritage studies.
- **Alternate traditional and innovative pedagogy with open labs designed to increase the focus on how target-communities interact and value their intangible cultural heritage.** E.g. Use research to create new classes adapted to real situations of migratory experiences and engage social partners such as NGOs and cultural institutions.
- **Allow especially BA and MA students to complement their curricula by selecting classes providing (micro)credentials for a European educational modern experience.** E.g. Design classes based on micro-credential as they maximize benefits not only for enrolled students, but also for community, providing a more accessible framework to engage third parties. There might be an excellent opportunity to create educational audiences by engaging both home students, foreign students and migratory students at once.

For Community Organizers & Refugees

This toolkit is ultimately for and with you. The activities described here are not designed to be done to refugee communities, but with them. Some specific guidance:

- **Your knowledge, skills, and stories are not just valid — they are needed. This toolkit asks you to share them, on your own terms, at your own pace. E.g.** You are the one who knows the whole story that you authentically lived.
- **Not every tradition needs to be shared with the host community. Some things are intimate and private. This toolkit supports your right to decide what you offer and our privilege to embrace your confidence and trust. E.g.** You have the right to choose what you share, we are offering a safe environment and a social space where you are not only welcomed, but mostly valued.
- **If none of the activities described here fit your community's needs, design your own. The framework (Recognition, Connection, Transmission) is a guide, not a prescription. E.g.** Build your own programme, be as creative as you feel.
- **If you use this toolkit to facilitate activities, consider running a train-the-trainer session: share your learning with other community members so that the knowledge stays in the community. E.g.** Teach the teachers. Provide sustainable education for both trainers and target-groups.

10. Educational Uses: Universities, Schools & Heritage Education Programmes

While the modules in this toolkit were developed through direct fieldwork with displaced communities, their pedagogical value extends well beyond the original integration context. Educators across the CIVIS network — in universities, schools, and heritage institutions — can draw on this toolkit as a teaching resource in its own right, independent of running a live refugee-facing programme.

Higher Education

Adapt individual modules (A–E) as standalone seminar units within courses on migration studies, heritage studies, applied ethics, or intercultural communication. E.g. Use Module A's storytelling framework as a practical session within a broader oral history methods course.

Use the toolkit as a live case study for teaching participatory and ethical research design. E.g. Assign the Ethical Guidelines section as a discussion text on extractive versus co-authored research practice.

Pair with Module E to give students a model for how field research becomes teaching material, closing the loop between fieldwork and classroom.

Schools (Secondary Education)

Adapt low-intensity versions of Modules B and C (crafts, seasonal traditions) for classroom or after-school use with mixed-heritage student groups. E.g. A shortened embroidery or seasonal-story session as part of an intercultural awareness week.

Use the toolkit's framing of cultural similarity (Section 3.2) as a discussion starter, rather than its trauma-facing content, which should remain restricted to trained facilitators.

Heritage Education Programmes

Museums and heritage sites can draw on the toolkit's approach to virtual reconstruction and object-based storytelling (Module D, Activity D3) to design public-facing educational programming around displaced or diaspora heritage. E.g. A guided visitor activity built around 'the object speaks.'

Use the Theoretical Framework (Section 2) to reframe permanent collections through an ICH-and-migration lens for school visits.

💡 A note on scope: not every setting has access to the psychosocial expertise described in the Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation supplement. School and heritage-education adaptations should draw only on the toolkit's lower-intensity content (Modules B, C, and the Theoretical Framework) unless trained psychosocial support is available, per the guidance in the Ethical Guidelines section.

11. Ethical Guidelines

11.1. Ethical Profiling of Target Groups and Mitigation of Emotional Distress

Some of the material and activities included in this toolkit may be emotionally challenging for participants, particularly those with lived experience of displacement, marginalisation, or trauma. This may include individuals who:

- Have experienced forced migration, conflict, or displacement
- Belong to marginalised or underrepresented communities
- Have experienced housing insecurity or homelessness
- Have experience of institutional care or other forms of social vulnerability

Given the nature of memory-based, narrative, and heritage-focused work, participants may encounter content that resonates deeply with personal experiences of loss, identity, or belonging.

We therefore recommend that facilitators:

- Review all materials in advance and assess their suitability for the specific group

- Introduce content with care, allowing space for participants to opt out without consequence
- Remain attentive to participants' emotional responses during activities
- Create a supportive environment where participants feel safe to pause, step away, or disengage if needed

Where possible, facilitators should adopt a trauma-informed approach and ensure that appropriate support pathways are available if distress arises.

11.2. Ethical Principles

Working with the cultural heritage of displaced communities carries specific ethical responsibilities. The following principles must guide all programming based on this toolkit. Beyond these pillars, which are at the heart of any ethical research, you should take into consideration respecting ethical and deontological constraints imposed by your institutions, and obtaining the informed consent of your working group, 48 hours before performing any activity.

Do No Harm

Cultural programming with trauma-affected populations carries psychosocial risks. Storytelling can re-traumatise. Craft workshops can trigger grief. Virtual reality reconstructions of destroyed sites can cause acute distress. All activities should be facilitated by people with basic psychosocial first-aid training, and clear referral pathways to mental health support should be in place.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

Participation in all activities must be genuinely voluntary. Refugees in institutional settings (camps, reception centres, state-managed housing) may feel implicitly obliged to participate. Make optionality explicit and without consequences. Any documentation, recording, or publication of participants' stories, images, or cultural expressions requires specific, informed, and revocable consent.

We offer free access to consent forms samples of the universities involved in the VERIS project:

[Consent form - UNIL](#)

[Consent form - UB](#)

[Consent form - UoG](#)

You may adapt the examples provided following your own needs and restrictions. Please make sure that if the target-group is not fluent in English, the consent form will be translated into the users language. Within the framework of VERIS we had the information sheets (including relevant

data about our research and the focus of our project; recommendations for the trainer – what the trainer should pass as an information to the target group – as well as a broad presentation of our objectives for participants), and the consent form translated into Arabic, English, French and Romanian. Also, we provided the information sheets 48 hours before the activity, so that the members of the target group have sufficient time to analyse the context of the activities we are going to perform together, and the level of sensitivity, before signing the consent forms.

Cultural Sovereignty

The cultural heritage of Syrian communities belongs to those communities. Practitioners from outside the community should not define, interpret, or represent that heritage without the active co-authorship of community members. Avoid the extractive dynamic in which refugee culture is 'mined' for host-community enrichment.

Compensation and Recognition

When refugee community members serve as teachers, cultural brokers, co-curators, or oral history subjects, their labour and expertise should be recognised and compensated fairly. Unpaid 'sharing' of cultural knowledge is a form of extraction.

Intersectionality

Syrian communities are not homogeneous. They include people of different religions, ethnicities, genders, ages, educational backgrounds, and legal statuses. Programming that treats 'Syrian culture' as monolithic will miss the mark. Design activities that are responsive to this diversity.

Data Protection and Safe Custody of Narratives

Recorded testimonies, images, embroidery documentation, and other materials gathered through this toolkit's activities are not neutral data — for participants still navigating displacement, uncertain legal status, or family members remaining in unsafe contexts, their exposure can carry real consequences. All identifiable narrative material must be stored securely, access-restricted to those directly responsible for the programme, and anonymised or pseudonymised by default unless a participant has specifically and separately consented to being named. Where material is shared with partner institutions, media, or researchers outside the immediate facilitation team, this requires its own explicit consent step — prior authorisation for one use does not extend to another. Data retention periods should be defined in advance and communicated to participants, with a clear and accessible route for a participant to request deletion of their material at any time, including after a project has formally ended.

Ethical self-audit: Before launching any activity in this toolkit, ask: Who designed this? Who benefits? Who carries the risk? Are community members co-designers, or only participants? What would change if they were co-designers?

12. Facilitator Guidance Supplement. Trauma-Sensitive Practice in Storytelling and Memory-Based Activities.

Why Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation Matters

Memory is never inert. When Syrian refugees engage in the storytelling, embroidery, and heritage-reconstruction activities at the heart of the VERIS methodology, they are not performing a neutral exercise in cultural inventory. They are reaching into lived experience — into loss, displacement, destruction, and survival — and attempting to give it form, meaning, and continuity. This is potentially one of the most powerful things a facilitator can offer a displaced community. It is also one of the most demanding, and it carries real responsibilities.

The VERIS project has consistently embedded trauma-informed principles within its workshop design, including the presence of a trauma-specialist psychologist during sessions in Bucharest and the careful structuring of activities to allow participants to choose their own depth of engagement. This supplement formalises and expands that embedded practice into explicit guidance for facilitators working with any of the five VERIS Toolkit modules — but especially Modules A (Storytelling and Oral History), C (Seasonal Traditions), and D (Creative Methods of Emotional Processing), where the likelihood of encountering traumatic memory is highest.

The guidance draws on the VERIS team's fieldwork experience across Romania, Switzerland, Jordan (Azraq refugee camp), and Lebanon (Nahr al-Bared), as well as on established frameworks in trauma-informed practice, including the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, UNHCR guidelines on working with forcibly displaced persons, and the psychological literature on narrative exposure and somatic memory.

A note on language

Throughout this supplement, 'trauma' refers not to a clinical diagnosis but to the lived aftermath of events — war, displacement, loss, persecution, the destruction of home and heritage — that have exceeded a person's ordinary capacity to process and integrate experience. Not every participant will be traumatised in a clinical sense. Many will be resilient, resourceful, and fully capable of engaging with difficult memories from a position of stability. The facilitator's role is to create conditions in which both responses — and everything in between — are equally welcome.

12.1. Foundations of Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation

12.1.1. What Trauma-Sensitive Practice Is — and Is Not

Trauma-sensitive facilitation does not require the facilitator to be a therapist, nor to turn a heritage workshop into a counselling session. The distinction is fundamental, and maintaining it protects both participants and facilitators.

Trauma-sensitive practice means:

- Being aware that difficult memories may surface during activities that engage with loss, home, or cultural identity
- Designing the space, pace, and structure of activities so that participants always have meaningful choices about how deeply to engage
- Responding with calm, non-judgmental presence when distress arises, without attempting to interpret, diagnose, or resolve it
- Knowing in advance what support pathways exist, and being ready to signpost participants to them
- Attending to the group's collective emotional temperature, not just individual responses

Trauma-sensitive practice does not mean:

- Treating every participant as a trauma patient
- Avoiding all difficult themes — which would undermine the very purpose of heritage-based memory work
- Requiring participants to share personal stories they do not wish to share
- Providing psychological counselling or therapeutic intervention
- Assuming that all participants from a given community have had the same experiences or the same relationship to those experiences

From VERIS field experience

In the Bucharest workshops, male participants who had not previously encountered embroidery engaged with intense emotional investment, recalling specific memories of mothers and grandmothers embroidering at home, of festival patterns, of domestic interiors now destroyed. These memories arose unbidden, through the hands rather than the mouth. The facilitator's role was not to pursue those memories but to hold the space — to allow them to surface, settle, and be integrated at the participant's own pace.

12.1.2 Five Core Principles

Safety

Participants must be able to trust that the workshop space is physically and emotionally safe before they can engage with difficult material. Safety is not simply declared — it is built, through consistent facilitator behaviour, clear communication about the purpose and boundaries of activities, and genuine respect for participants' right to not engage with any particular element.

Trustworthiness and Transparency

Participants should always know what an activity will involve before they begin it, what will happen to anything they share or create, and who else will see or hear it. Surprise — even well-intentioned surprise — undermines trust in populations who have often experienced betrayal by institutions and authorities.

Choice and Control

Displacement strips people of control over fundamental aspects of their lives. Workshop design should actively restore a sense of agency: participants choose what to share, how much detail to include, whether to use their own name or a pseudonym, and whether to participate in a given activity at all. Silence and observation are legitimate forms of participation.

Collaboration and Mutuality

The facilitator is not an extractor of testimony but a collaborator in a shared act of cultural preservation. Power imbalances between facilitator and participant should be named and minimised where possible — for instance, by facilitators sharing something of their own relationship to heritage or memory before asking participants to do so.

Cultural Humility

Western therapeutic frameworks of disclosure, catharsis, and individual processing do not map neatly onto all participants' cultural understandings of memory, grief, and family privacy. Facilitators should follow the participant's own cultural framing rather than imposing an external one, and should draw on intercultural mediators where available.

12.2. Before the Session

12.2.1. Know Your Participants

Where possible, gather basic contextual information in advance — not case-by-case trauma histories, which are neither appropriate nor necessary for a facilitator to hold, but general awareness: is this a group with recent arrival experiences, are there unaccompanied minors or elderly participants, are there known tensions within the group, is there a shared or mixed country/region of origin.

12.2.2 Brief the Support Team

Wherever the budget and context allow, a trauma-specialist psychologist or experienced psychosocial worker should be present or on call during sessions involving Modules A, C, or D, as was the practice in the Bucharest workshops. Where this is not possible, the facilitator should identify in advance a referral pathway — a named contact, organisation, or hotline appropriate to the local context — and should not attempt to fill this role themselves.

12.2.3 Prepare the Physical Space

- A visible, private space for anyone who needs to step out remains within reach and supervision, without being made conspicuous to the rest of the group
- Seating arranged to avoid anyone feeling cornered or on display; circles generally work better than rows facing a facilitator
- Water, tissues, and a quiet corner available without needing to be requested aloud
- Exits clearly visible and unblocked

12.2.4 Design the Opening Sequence

Begin every session — not only the first — with a short grounding sequence: a reminder of the workshop's purpose, an explicit statement that participants can pause, decline, or leave at any point without needing to explain why, and a brief check-in on how the group is arriving today. This routine, repeated consistently, becomes itself a source of safety.

12.3. During the Session

12.3.1 Reading the Room

Not all emotional activation is the same, and facilitators do not need clinical training to notice the difference between healthy processing and dysregulation. The following distinctions are offered as a practical, non-diagnostic reference.

Signs of activation / distress

- Sudden withdrawal, blank or 'frozen' expression

Signs of healthy processing

- Tears alongside continued engagement and eye contact

- Rapid, shallow breathing or visible trembling
- Disorientation — not tracking where they are or what is happening
- Sudden anger or agitation disproportionate to the moment
- Repetitive, involuntary physical movements

- Voice breaking but speech remaining coherent
- Spontaneous physical comfort-seeking (a hand to the chest, a held object)
- Return to steady breathing after a pause
- Participant able to name what they are feeling

The Window of Tolerance

A useful working concept: each person has a 'window' within which they can experience and process difficult emotion while remaining present and engaged. Outside that window, a person moves into hyperarousal (panic, agitation) or hypoarousal (numbing, dissociation, shutdown). The facilitator's task is not to prevent participants from approaching the edges of this window — meaningful memory work often happens there — but to notice when someone has moved outside it, and to help them return.

A Five-Step Response When Distress Arises

- 1. Stay calm and present. Your own regulated presence is the single most useful tool you have.
- 2. Ground, don't probe. Orient the person to the present moment (the room, their breathing, a physical object) rather than asking what triggered the response or inviting further detail.
- 3. Offer, don't insist. Ask quietly whether they would like to step outside, have water, or simply sit for a moment — and respect a 'no' as much as a 'yes'.
- 4. Protect the group. Continue the session for other participants with minimal disruption; a co-facilitator or support worker should be the one to stay with the individual wherever possible.
- 5. Follow up, don't fix. A brief, private, non-clinical check-in at the end of the session — 'How are you feeling now, is there anything you need before you go' — is appropriate. Deeper follow-up belongs to the referral pathway, not the facilitator.

12.3.2. Module-Specific Guidance (examples)

Module A — Storytelling and Oral History

- Frame prompts around objects, senses, and everyday life rather than events: 'What did your kitchen smell like?' opens memory gently; 'Tell us about the day you left' does not
- State explicitly, before recording begins, that participants can pause the recording, ask for a section to be excluded, or stop entirely at any point
- The facilitator's role during a difficult story is to witness, not to console, correct, or complete the narrative — resist the impulse to fill silence
- Close every storytelling activity with a deliberate transition — a shared object, a piece of music, a brief physical activity — that signals a return to the present

Module C — Seasonal Traditions

Seasonal and festival memory carries a particular complexity: it is often the site of the greatest joy and the sharpest grief simultaneously, since festivals were frequently the settings in which family and community were most present, and are now most acutely absent.

- Frame activities around transmission and continuity ('How would you teach this to a child?') rather than loss alone
- Allow — and name as legitimate — the coexistence of pleasure and grief in the same memory; do not steer participants toward resolving that tension

Module D — Creative Methods of Emotional Processing

This is the highest-risk module, precisely because its purpose is to give form to feeling that may not yet have found words. Non-verbal creative work can surface material faster and more unpredictably than spoken narrative.

- A support worker or psychologist should be present for this module wherever at all possible
- Offer materials and methods without prescribing meaning — do not interpret a participant's creative choices back to them
- Build in more frequent, lighter check-ins than for other modules, since distress here can be quieter and less visible

12.4.: After the Session

12.4.1 Closing Ritual

End every session, regardless of its content, with a consistent closing sequence — a round of one word each, a shared object passed around the circle, a piece of music. This is not decorative; it is a structural signal that marks the boundary between workshop time and the rest of the day.

12.4.2 Facilitator Debrief

Facilitators — particularly co-facilitators working together — should take fifteen minutes after every session involving Modules A, C, or D to debrief with each other: what arose, what each of them noticed, whether any follow-up is needed. Facilitators absorb emotional weight in this work and are not exempt from needing their own support.

12.4.3 Participant Follow-Up

Where a participant showed signs of distress during the session, a brief, warm, non-intrusive follow-up — a message or a word at the next session — signals continued care without pressure to discuss what happened.

12.4.4 Documentation

Record only what is necessary for continuity of care (for example, 'may need a quieter seat next time') rather than detailed accounts of what a participant disclosed. Any such notes should be stored securely and treated as confidential.

12.5. Special Considerations

12.5.1 Cultural Destruction and the VR Session

Virtual-reality reconstructions of destroyed sites carry a distinctive intensity: they present participants with a visually convincing 'return' to a place that no longer exists in that form. A support worker should be present for VR sessions, participants should be briefed clearly on what they will see before the headset goes on, and an easy, low-effort way to exit the experience (a simple hand signal rather than navigating a menu) should be established in advance.

12.5.2 Intergenerational Dynamics

Where children and elders participate together — as in many seasonal-tradition sessions — facilitators should be alert to elders' impulse to protect younger relatives from difficult memories, and to the reverse dynamic of younger participants translating or mediating for elders in ways that place emotional weight on them. Consider offering separate as well as joint activities.

12.5.3 Gender and the Embroidery Space

The VERIS Bucharest workshops found that embroidery, often assumed to be a gendered activity, opened powerful and unexpected memory work for male participants precisely because it was unfamiliar territory, free of the scripts men might bring to more conventional 'storytelling' formats. Facilitators should avoid assuming who will or will not engage with a given creative method, and should be attentive to any self-consciousness men in particular may feel about being observed in the activity.

12.5.4 Remote and Digital Participation

Where sessions include remote participants, facilitators lose the ability to read body language fully and cannot ensure a private, safe physical space on the other end of the connection. Build in more frequent verbal check-ins for remote participants, and agree in advance on a private channel (a chat message, a simple signal) they can use to indicate they need a pause.

12.6. Quick Reference: Pre-Session Checklist

Before

- Support pathway identified and, where possible, a psychologist or psychosocial worker briefed or present
- Physical space arranged for privacy, unblocked exits, and a quiet corner
- Opening grounding sequence prepared

During

- Explicit permission to pause, decline, or leave restated at the start of each activity
- Facilitator watching for signs of activation versus healthy processing
- Five-step distress response ready: stay calm, ground, offer, protect the group, follow up

After

- Consistent closing ritual delivered
- Co-facilitator debrief completed
- Follow-up and documentation limited to continuity-of-care needs, stored securely

13. Monitoring & Evaluation

Measuring the impact of ICH-based integration programming requires indicators that go beyond traditional integration metrics (language acquisition, employment rates, housing stability). The following framework draws on the VERIS research to identify relevant indicators across three levels.

Individual Level

Indicators to track	How to measure
• Sense of cultural identity and pride • Perception of being seen and valued by host community • Social connections (number and quality) • Psychological wellbeing • Active engagement vs. passive waiting • Sense of meaning and purpose	• Pre/post self-report questionnaires • Qualitative interviews (using VERIS protocol) • Observation of participation quality • Facilitator reflective notes and feedback • Participant-generated creative work as evidence • Follow-up check-ins at 3 and 6 months

Community Level

Indicators to track	How to measure
• Host-community attitudes toward refugee neighbours • Cross-community friendships formed • Mutual knowledge of each other's cultural traditions	• Community surveys (pre/post programme) • Focus groups with host-community participants • Event attendance and participation data

- Incidents of discrimination or hostility (decrease)
- Shared community events attended by both communities

- Narrative accounts from community leaders
- Social network mapping

Institutional Level

Indicators to track

- Cultural institutions with active ICH programmes
- Refugee co-curators, educators, or facilitators actively engaged
- Policy references to ICH in integration frameworks
- Funding allocated to ICH-based integration

How to measure

- Document analysis
- Stakeholder interviews
- Budget and HR data
- Policy tracking over time
- Opportunities for future (funded) projects with community impact

 **Learning principle:** Treat evaluation as a learning process, not a compliance exercise. Share findings with participants and let them challenge your interpretations. Their reading of the data is part of the data.

14. Glossary & Resources

Key Terms

Cultural Sovereignty

The right of communities to define, practice, protect, and transmit their own cultural heritage without external appropriation or imposition.

Diaspora

A population dispersed from an original homeland into one or more other countries, whose members maintain a collective identity and an ongoing connection — practical, symbolic, or both — to that homeland, while also building networks and relationships across their countries of settlement. Diaspora is a descriptive, sociological term rather than a legal status, and can encompass both voluntary and forced migration histories.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

As defined by UNESCO: the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage, transmitted between generations and continuously recreated.

Integration

A two-way process of mutual adaptation between newcomers and receiving societies, as distinct from assimilation (one-way adoption of host culture) or segregation (parallel living without contact).

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

Under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), a person or group of persons forced or obliged to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence — in particular as a result of armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters — who has not crossed an internationally recognised state border. Being an IDP is not a formal legal status: IDPs remain citizens or habitual residents of their own country and retain all rights as such. The distinguishing factor between an IDP and a refugee is whether an international border has been crossed, not the severity or cause of the displacement itself.

Migrant

Any person who moves away from their place of usual residence — whether within a country (internal migrant) or across an international border (international migrant) — temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons (IOM Glossary on Migration). Unlike ‘refugee,’ which denotes a specific legal protection status, ‘migrant’ does not by itself indicate whether a person's movement was forced or voluntary.

Oral History

A method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with people who have lived experience of events.

Psychosocial Support

Approaches that address the social, psychological, and cultural dimensions of wellbeing, recognising these as interconnected.

Refugee

Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (extended by the 1967 Protocol), a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside their country of nationality and is unable — or, owing to that fear, unwilling — to avail themselves of that country's protection. Unlike 'migrant,' refugee status is a specific legal status conferred through a formal determination process, entitling the holder to defined protections under international law, including non-refoulement: the principle that a refugee must not be returned to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened.

Social Rituals

Recurring communal practices — including rites of passage, seasonal celebrations, and other festive or ceremonial events — through which communities mark significant transitions and shared identity. Recognised by UNESCO as one of the five domains of intangible cultural heritage.

VERIS

A CIVIS Open Lab research project exploring the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage — particularly virtual reconstruction of the Temple of Baalshamin at Palmyra (University of Lausanne) — in protecting and strengthening Syrian identities and supporting the social inclusion of refugees.

Virtual Heritage Reconstruction

The use of digital technologies (including VR, 3D modelling, and photogrammetry) to recreate or preserve cultural heritage sites, objects, or practices that have been lost or destroyed.

Key Organisations & References

- UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage — the foundational international legal framework for ICH.
- CIVIS University Alliance — the framework within which the VERIS Open Lab project was developed.
- UNHCR — the UN Refugee Agency, whose operational guidance on community-based programming is relevant to this toolkit.

- ETANA (European Transregional Academic Network on the Ancient Near East) — academic resources on Syrian and Near Eastern heritage.
- <https://lines-learning.com>
- <https://sitesunseen.gla.ac.uk>

Suggested Further Reading

- Aldegheri, Esa, Fisher, Dan and Phipps, Alison (Eds.) (2025) *A Handbook of Integration with Refugees: Global Learnings from Scotland*. Multilingual Matters. ISBN 9781800418967
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The visual and graphic structure of this toolkit — including module formatting, thematic boxes, and diagrams — was produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools, under the guidance and review of the VERIS research team, which remains responsible for the final content and accuracy of the material.