

# Survey of Ukrainian Folklore Archive Custodians (2024)

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## Introduction

Between July and September 2024, the Center for Folklore Archiving and Digital Preservation conducted an online survey among Ukrainian folklorists and archive custodians. The questionnaire was disseminated via the folklore.kh.ua website and social media channels to assess the state of folklore archives amid heightened risks posed by war and limited preservation resources. A total of 13 archive custodians responded. These included private collectors, members of non-profit cultural organizations, museum staff, and one academic archive representative. Respondents provided information on who holds their collections, what those archives contain, how and where the materials are stored, the scope and origin of the collections, how the archives are used or presented, and the challenges faced in safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage.

## Respondent Profile and Archive Characteristics

The survey respondents ranged from individual folklore collectors to representatives of institutions and non-governmental organizations. Roughly two-thirds were private individuals maintaining personal folklore archives, while the remainder were affiliated with museums, cultural centers, or university archives. Their collection sizes varied widely: some custodians reported only a few dozen folklore items in their care, whereas others managed extensive collections comprising several thousand recorded pieces. This wide range reflects both small personal troves and large, long-standing institutional collections. All of the archives are centered on audio recordings of traditional music, songs, and stories, usually accompanied by photographs and video. Many collections also include textual transcriptions or field notes documenting lyrics and narratives. Materials are predominantly stored as digital files on personal computers or external hard drives, and about half of the custodians reported using

cloud storage services as an additional backup. At the same time, older analog and physical media remain in use in several archives – for example, some collections still preserve content on audio CDs, cassette tapes, or even original paper manuscripts from field expeditions. This mix of storage formats indicates that significant portions of folklore data remain at risk of loss if they are not comprehensively duplicated and digitized. The archives collectively span a broad time range and geographic scope. According to the survey data, the recorded materials date back as early as the late 1950s and continue through 2024, covering folk traditions across multiple generations. Geographically, the content comes from a wide array of ethnographic regions across Ukraine – for example, Polissya, Hutsulshchyna, Podillya, Slobozhanshchyna, Poltavshchyna, among many others – rather than being confined to any single village or oblast. One respondent’s archive even includes folklore recordings from neighboring countries such as Belarus and Poland, illustrating the cross-border links of Ukrainian folk culture.

## **Archive Usage and Sharing**

Nearly all custodians have found ways to share or repurpose their archived folklore materials with the public. Roughly a dozen respondents reported posting recordings or informational content on social media platforms or YouTube to reach wider audiences. Several have also presented their collections in physical exhibitions or cultural events, and many have contributed archival audio to contemporary projects such as podcasts, radio programs, and documentary films. One notable case is a custodian who makes their collection accessible through a dedicated folklore website, demonstrating proactive digital dissemination of the material. Only a single respondent indicated that they have never shared or presented their collection publicly, meaning the vast majority are actively engaged in some form of outreach or educational use of their archives.

## **Challenges and Risks**

Respondents highlighted several serious challenges in preserving their folklore archives. Many collections remain stored on personal drives with minimal backup, due in part to scarce funding and resources for robust digital infrastructure. As a result, the risk of irreversible data loss is significant: one folklorist acknowledged losing recordings from three entire field expeditions

because the files had not been duplicated in time. This example underscores how fragile these archives can be without systematic backup and preservation measures. The ongoing war in Ukraine has further heightened fears about the security of these cultural materials. Custodians worry that physical media or locally stored digital files could be destroyed by conflict-related events, theft, or even targeted cyberattacks. This precarious situation emphasizes the urgent need for more secure digital preservation solutions and off-site backups for folklore collections. Even established institutional archives, which typically have better resources than individuals, are now racing to implement additional protective measures—such as comprehensive electronic cataloguing systems and cloud storage—in an effort to safeguard their holdings against both technological obsolescence and wartime threats.

## Conclusion

This survey provides a timely snapshot of Ukraine's folklore archives under duress. It showcases a dedicated community of archivists and collectors who have amassed rich audio-visual records of oral tradition, often with only minimal resources and precarious storage arrangements. The collections documented are remarkably diverse in both chronological and regional scope, and many custodians are actively working to share their content and keep this heritage alive in the public sphere. At the same time, the findings highlight an urgent need for greater support in digitizing and protecting these archives. As war and technological obsolescence continue to threaten irreplaceable folk recordings, investing in modern preservation solutions and broader accessibility will be crucial to ensure that Ukraine's folkloric legacy endures for future generations. Suggested Citation:

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