



ONLINE MEETING OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC ON THE CULTURAL
SECTOR AND THE PUBLIC
POLICY RESPONSE

22.04.2020



This meeting showed what multilateralism and UNESCO are all about: putting the capacities of individual States to work for the greater good. It built on the dialogue initiated at the Forum of Ministers of Culture in November, in which many of you participated.

AUDREY AZOULAY
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO

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INTRODUCTION

The health crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the entire global cultural ecosystem. The mobility restrictions and confinement measures taken by many countries have drastically curtailed access to culture and have disrupted the cultural sector as a whole. The closures of thousands of World Heritage properties and cultural infrastructure, the cancellation or postponement of events, and the interruption of cultural production and markets will have significant economic and social repercussions going forward on an already fragile sector. The unprecedented nature and scale of this crisis calls for reinvestment, more than ever, in international cooperation and intergovernmental dialogue, in order to unite our efforts and build a shared reflection. Beyond the emergency response, countries are called upon to anticipate the repercussions of the crisis on the cultural sector as a whole, in the medium and long term.

On 22 April 2020, UNESCO brought together over 130 ministers of culture for an online meeting to share their thoughts on the impact of the health crisis on the cultural sector, as well as on potential responses within the framework of their respective policies. As an extension of the Forum of Ministers of Culture organized and hosted by the Organization on 19 November 2019, this online dialogue sparked a massive mobilization of countries, reaffirming the importance of culture in public policies and their commitment to UNESCO's mandate.





Ministers were invited to express themselves through brief interventions to discuss the impact of the crisis on the cultural sector in their respective countries, as well as the policies and measures undertaken or envisaged to mitigate the impact and more broadly support the resilience and recovery of the cultural sector.

This document represents a summary of the interventions of the ministers - most of whom sent the text of their intervention to UNESCO, accompanied by more precise information on the situation facing the cultural sector in their country - highlighting points of convergence and main trends. It recalls the main repercussions of the crisis on the cultural sector mentioned by countries and provides an overview of the types of measures taken and the approach envisaged in response. Lastly, it summarizes the reflections shared by countries concerning the medium-term future of the cultural sector, the role of international cooperation and, more broadly, the inclusion of culture in a renewed vision of sustainable development.



**A world without culture
is a world without a future.**

ERNESTO OTTONE R.
UNESCO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL
FOR CULTURE



A GLOBAL AND SYSTEMIC IMPACT ON THE CULTURAL SECTOR

Profound repercussions for the entire cultural sector

Member States bore witness to the profound and multifaceted impact of the health crisis on their national cultural sectors. They underlined the major challenge this crisis represents for cultural policies, in a context where culture remains a structurally underfunded sector, and is often considered as a secondary priority for public investment, as recalled by Ecuador. The crisis has thus weakened a sector that is already insufficiently supported by public financing, despite the fact that it constitutes, for certain countries, a critical part of the national economy. Ensuring continuity in the funding of public cultural institutions, as mentioned by Ukraine, or simply maintaining the minimum level of public funding for the cultural sector that existed before the crisis, as emphasized by Bosnia and Herzegovina, constitutes a central priority for certain countries, particularly in negotiations over the allocation of national budgets in response to the crisis.

The crisis is affecting all areas of culture globally. Among the sectors mentioned, countries raised concerns about the long-term conservation of cultural heritage and the future of cultural sites where essential restoration work has been interrupted by the crisis, such as in Oman.





COVID-19 has affected cultural consumption in the Republic of Korea [...] weakening the cultural ecosystem.

H. EXC. MR YEONG WOO OH
VICE-MINISTER OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND SPORTS,
REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Likewise, the cessation of tourism weakens the conservation of cultural sites by drastically affecting maintenance budgets, which are directly linked to tourism revenues, and raises questions about the economic future of museums and cultural institutions, both public and private, as Italy pointed out. Many countries, including Canada and Burkina Faso, spoke of the brutality of the economic impact on the creative sector and the short and medium term consequences for artists and cultural professionals in all domains of the creative economy, in particular the performing arts and cinema. The crisis risks the mass impoverishment of cultural professions and, more generally, a weakening of the diversity of cultural expressions. Afghanistan, Mali and Myanmar, for their part, outlined the risks of increased looting and illicit trafficking in cultural property, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlighted concerns about the possible resurgence of poaching in natural sites.



This interruption impacts all the actors on whom the vitality and the richness of Tunisian cultural life depends.

H. EXC. MS CHIRAZ LAÂTIRI
MINISTER OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TUNISIA



Countries also stressed the social consequences of the interruption of cultural practices and expressions. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Zambia alluded to the profound impact of the cancellation of national and local cultural events – such as festivals, ritual and traditional practices – on communities, as these events are essential for social cohesion and dialogue. The closure of sites and museums impedes the educational function of cultural institutions and spaces, as well as their role in supporting cultural and artistic education, despite efforts to increase access to culture through online tools. Some countries also mentioned the direct impact of the pandemic on the sector: the deaths of artists and cultural actors represents a loss of knowledge and creativity, as mentioned in particular by Cameroon, especially given that the elderly, who are more vulnerable to the consequences of the virus, are often essential to the transmission of culture.

Countries underlined the vulnerability of the cultural sector, which is often the first to be affected by confinement measures and the one for which the economic repercussions are likely to be the most long lasting, due to the risk of social distancing measures becoming entrenched in public spaces. The crisis reveals the fragility of the cultural ecosystem, which is largely made up of individual workers and small and medium-sized enterprises. Many countries, such as Panama, pointed to the pre-eminence of the informal sector in the creative economy, which is particularly exposed to economic and social crises. Mauritania, for its part, underlined the risks facing the handicraft sector, which is particularly vulnerable, despite the fact that it constitutes a key part of the economic lifeblood of communities.





Strengthening social security for cultural professionals, as well as ensuring the right to access to culture, are our two fundamental priorities.

H. EXC. MR ARAYIK HARUTYUNYAN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, CULTURE AND SPORT
ARMENIA

In general, the crisis shows the institutional fragility of the sector, as, even in countries where it is most regulated, artists and cultural professionals can often fall outside social safety nets. Faced with the scale and complexity of the crisis, many states stressed the inadequacy of existing support mechanisms for the sector and the need for large-scale action.

Inequalities revealed and amplified

The impact of the crisis is uneven both within and between societies. While the direct health impact of the pandemic is still relatively limited in certain countries, the economic shock wave is being felt far and wide due to confinement measures. Most countries in the South feared that the contraction of the national economy would be accentuated by a parallel loss of international aid. Some of them underlined the particular fragility of the sector in terms of infrastructure and social protections - in particular with regard to the extent of informal work - and the insufficiency of budgetary resources for aid measures dedicated to culture.





Certain categories of the population are more directly exposed to the consequences of the crisis, either in economic or social terms. The impact of the confinement on youth was highlighted by Zimbabwe. Women – who make up a large segment of the cultural sector – are particularly affected, as Sweden pointed out, and certain countries, including Colombia, are setting up specific campaigns targeting women. Indigenous populations are also strongly impacted by the interruption of cultural practices, which directly structure economic and social life, and some countries highlighted the risks to cultural rights. Inequalities are also territorial, as cities and urban spaces are much more affected by the consequences of the pandemic.

The crisis has also revealed inequalities in the digital realm. While online cultural consumption has increased massively in most countries, many countries pointed to the persistence of the digital divide. Globally, 46% of the population does not have access to the Internet. In this respect, the crisis reveals and accentuates inequalities, both in cultural production and consumption, especially in Africa. In some countries, the infrastructure remains insufficient to support the digitization of culture, in particular museum collections and literary heritage, which remains very uneven.



COVID-19 has destroyed the livelihoods of the majority of the artistic community and professionals in the creative economy.

H. EXC. MR NATHI MTHETHWA
MINISTER OF SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE, SOUTH AFRICA





A crisis compounded by the cessation of cultural tourism

Many countries emphasized the dependence of their national economy on cultural tourism, which for some accounts for a major proportion of the national economy, notably in Saint Lucia and Ethiopia. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Bolivia highlighted the domino effect produced by the closure of sites and mobility restrictions. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) reports a drop of 67 million in international arrivals and losses estimated at 80 billion US dollars for the first quarter of 2020. The impact on national resources and employment is massive, especially in small island states such as the Maldives and Mauritius, which benefit greatly from tourism linked to the natural environment. The cessation of tourism weakens the conservation of cultural and natural sites - whose funding depends in part on entry fees - and radically affects employment and living conditions of surrounding communities. It has hit museums with full force, weakening their economic model and endangering employment. Ultimately, it affects the entire ecosystem of cultural production, consumption and distribution, for which the tourist sector constitutes an essential outlet, as Antigua and Barbuda and Costa Rica pointed out.



The COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed our economy, which is deeply dependent on tourism and closely linked to the cultural sector. The devastating impact on the cultural sector has been immediate.

H. EXC. MS SYLVIE DURÁN SALVATIERRA
MINISTER OF CULTURE AND YOUTH, COSTA RICA



CONSTRUCTING THE RESPONSE: CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES OF MEMBER STATES

A proactive response, anchored in public policies

Countries have initiated a wide range of policies and measures to deal with the crisis in the cultural sector. They have unanimously reiterated the importance of a massive, rapid and proactive response from the state in support of the cultural sector, in view of the magnitude of the economic and social repercussions. The crisis has brought the role of the state back to the fore, which has been called upon to support the cultural sector and, more broadly, to guarantee the well-being and unity of societies that have been shaken to their core. Countries also stressed the need for a coherent and concerted approach involving all public policy players, as part of the national response to the crisis.

More than ever, cultural policies must fit into the global spectrum of public policies. Countries also recalled the importance of a participatory approach to identify needs and build the response. Some of them, including Iceland, have thus initiated extensive consultation processes with players in the online sector to configure the response, while others, notably Finland, emphasize the need for a focused, flexible approach, adapted to the demands of cultural players as well as to the specificities of the national and local ecosystem, to optimize its capacity to create, produce and distribute.





To mitigate the impact of the crisis, the government has provided direct funding to help the culture and creative industries, which represents one of the priority areas of the national recovery plan.

H. EXC. MR TUOMO PUUMALA
VICE-MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE, FINLAND

A range of support measures for the cultural sector

Most countries have taken measures to close cultural sites and cancel cultural events. World Heritage properties and museums serve as a barometer in this regard: as of 18 May 2020, 86% of countries have closed or partially closed their World Heritage sites and 90% of museums (ICOM) were closed. In some regions – notably Africa and Latin America – these measures were implemented from the earliest stages of the pandemic, when the health effects were still relatively limited.

A majority of Ministries of Culture and cultural institutions have also required staff to telecommute, resulting in a temporary disruption in cultural management and cooperation with UNESCO in some countries. To facilitate the resumption or continuity of remote operations, certain Ministries of Culture, notably in Egypt, have organized digital trainings for their staff.



Investments planned in 2020 for the renovation of cultural properties and heritage sites were delayed to 2021 and corresponding funds were redistributed.

H. EXC. MS ASJA DRACA MUNTEAN
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND MEDIA, SERBIA



We have launched several digital initiatives in various sectors [...] to foster cultural creativity in these exceptional circumstances and to provide platforms for artists in all fields.

HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE BADR BIN FARHAN AL-SAUD
MINISTER OF CULTURE
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Countries committed to ensuring access to culture online. Many countries, including Saudi Arabia, supported the establishment of online culture access platforms for confined populations. Often managed by the Ministry of Culture, these platforms make it possible to bring together existing digital resources (virtual museums, digital libraries). India, for its part, places particular emphasis on digital tools intended to strengthen cultural and artistic education. This rapid growth is driving technological advances, including the emergence of new forms of mobile applications to expand or facilitate access to culture.



To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, [...] we have given priority to the production of audio-visual educational materials, in direct collaboration with our cultural practitioners, so that knowledge of our living heritage remains at the heart of the experience of populations during this crisis.

H. EXC. MR PATRICK JASON FABER
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORTS AND CULTURE
BELIZE





This digital transition also encourages the creation of new cultural content. Public orders and assistance programs for creation in the digital domain are increasing in number to feed these broader platforms, as evoked in particular by Poland.

Member States highlighted the importance of financial support for the sector. Although emergency financial aid concerns the economy as a whole, several ministers spoke of the advocacy efforts undertaken at the national level to ensure that the cultural sector fully benefits from these comprehensive measures. Many countries have announced large-scale emergency aid systems specifically targeting culture, including through global cultural funds, such as in Tunisia. Other countries like the Republic of Korea prefer sectoral subsidy mechanisms, paid through specialized cultural institutions intended for specific sectors such as music, books or visual arts. Addressing organizations or individuals, this aid sometimes results in ad hoc arrangements for grants, loans, tax exemptions or even reduced charges, as evoked in particular by Malta.



The Government of Kazakhstan has preserved its existing budgetary commitments regarding staff and previously approved activities for all publicly-funded entities of culture and sports.

H. EXC. MS AKTOTY RAIMKULOVA
MINISTER OF CULTURE AND SPORT,
KAZAKHSTAN



Other countries are building on existing financial mechanisms, by easing or broadening the criteria, in order to support economic viability and employment. These mechanisms are implemented at the national level (Ministries of Culture or specialized cultural institutions), regional (provinces, regions, etc.) or local (municipalities, cultural networks or associations, etc.), in some cases with co-financing mechanisms. Several countries, including North Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria and Djibouti provide for the temporary payment of minimum wages to artists, while others rely on existing arrangements. In general, these mechanisms favor flexibility with regard to the profile of the players in the cultural ecosystem.

Countries have maintained, or even increased, their aid for creation, production and distribution, with a view to supporting the sector but also supporting awareness of health risks. They mentioned in particular the provision of materials and equipment intended for the cultural sector, the increase in public orders for artists and contests on social networks. Artists are also encouraged to continue their activity at home, especially in Venezuela, or are invited to draw inspiration from museum collections that have been made inaccessible to the public to build a new form of cultural mediation.



We must support the formalisation of the cultural sector, reinforce value chains for the cultural and creative industries and guide the digital transformation and citizens' access to these digital technologies.

H. EXC. MS. CARMEN INÉS VÁSQUEZ CAMACHO
MINISTER OF CULTURE,
COLOMBIA





To support the recovery and resilience of cultural sector, financial support is being provided to cultural entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises. [...] Following the closure of cultural institutions, budgets have been reprogrammed and reallocated to conservation and maintenance activities.

H. EXC. MS AMINA MOHAMED
MINISTER OF SPORTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE,
KENYA

Online platforms for the distribution of cultural production have been opened with the support of public authorities, sometimes in partnership with the private sector, as in Portugal. Finally, some countries stressed the need to give priority to supporting areas of culture that are more difficult to translate online. In general, countries have sought to maintain cultural budgets or even increase them.

The cultural sector has directly mobilized in response to the health crisis. Artists are involved in raising awareness, particularly in South Africa and Haiti, thus strengthening their role as unifiers. Cultural enterprises have been called upon to produce paramedical equipment, particularly in Palestine. Cultural places or artisan workshops have also been made available to host medical activities, as in Cuba.





We have launched a study to quantify the economic impact [...] on selected cultural domains, so as to adapt compensatory measures.

H. EXC. MR LUBOMÍR ZAORALEK
MINISTRE DE LA CULTURE,
CZECH REPUBLIC

Many countries have undertaken impact studies to measure and define the economic and social repercussions of the health crisis on the cultural sector, as in Togo. These studies are based on online surveys or telephone surveys, like those mentioned by Paraguay. These impact assessment processes are supported more widely by regional or subregional organizations, building on existing statistical systems.

Adaptation to the socio-cultural context is a central concern. Faced with the digital divide, many countries favor national radio and television for the transmission of cultural content, notably in Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan and Montenegro, as well as the use of vernacular languages, as in the Seychelles.



Through the Ministry of Culture portal, all theatres, museums, philharmonic companies and libraries have opened virtual access to culture.

H. EXC. MR SERGEI OBRYVALIN
FIRST MINISTER OF CULTURE,
RUSSIAN FEDERATION





Specific policies have been deployed by certain countries, including Peru, to raise awareness among indigenous peoples, and specific measures have implemented for them, in an effort to mitigate the effects of the crisis, particularly in Australia.

Countries are drawing up longer-term measures in anticipation of the end of the crisis. A reflection is underway on the reopening of institutions, risk assessments and the implementation of health protocols, especially in museums and cultural spaces. Some countries, notably Malaysia, are anticipating budgetary choices after the crisis. Emergency response plans are in place, in particular in the Cook Islands. Voucher systems are envisaged to encourage cultural consumption. Countries are also initiating in-depth discussions to strengthen the resilience of the cultural sector. They have focused on improving their systems for collecting and analyzing cultural data, such as in Hungary and Barbados; strengthening capacity and the professionalization of the sector, as in Belize and Mozambique; strengthening copyright in Côte d'Ivoire and supporting the transition from the informal sector to the formal economy in Jamaica.



The government set up a social fund to support the cultural sector and will ensure that national cultural budgets be maintained.

H. EXC. MS KIRSTY COVENTRY
MINISTER OF YOUTH, SPORTS, ARTS AND RECREATION,
ZIMBABWE



PREPARING THE FUTURE OF THE SECTOR: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Supporting the digital transition

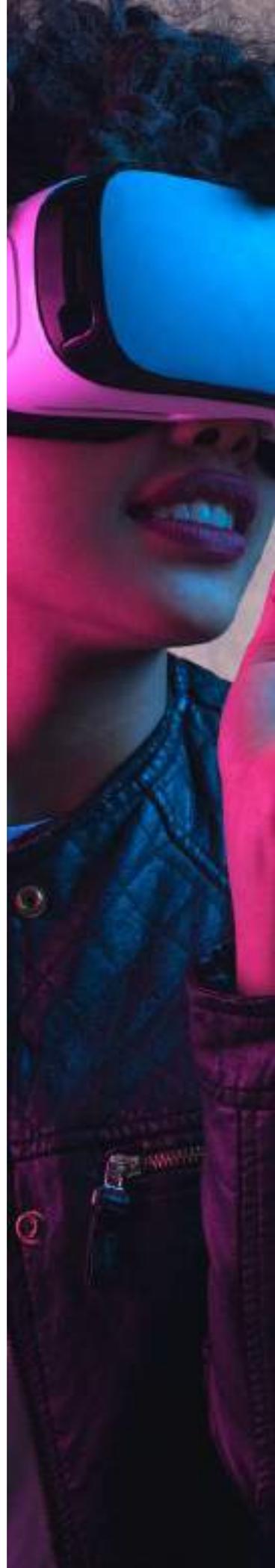
The crisis has prompted an unprecedented acceleration of the digital transformation of the cultural sector in most countries. The massive rise of online culture access platforms to meet the needs of confined populations is set to profoundly transform cultural production and consumption. This offers, as Bangladesh recalled, considerable potential in economic and social terms, which is still largely under-exploited. It is driving technological advances and the development of new economic models, as pointed out by China.

This digital transition opens up prospects for broadening access to culture and cultural experience, but also educational opportunities, as many countries pointed out. Estonia, Greece and Albania particularly insisted on the transformation of the practices of documentation and mediation of tangible and intangible heritage offered by digitization. Some countries are talking about expanding distribution through digital platforms. This acceleration of the digitalization of culture, however, poses the risk of deepening of social inequalities, as Chile pointed out.



Cultural participation in virtual spaces and communities has increased fivefold.

H. EXC. DR. MOHAMMAD REZA BAHMANI
DEPUTY MINISTER OF CULTURE AND CYBERSPACE AFFAIRS
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN





We need to build a holistic approach to the digital cultural economy.

H. EXC. MS NOURA AL KAABI
MINISTER OF CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

It calls for an in-depth reflection on how to adapt content and approaches to audiences and better reflect cultural diversity, but also to strengthen capacities and infrastructure in order to allow for greater access, including in the most vulnerable countries. A large share of countries, including Kenya, Mexico and Lithuania, have made the digital transition one of the cornerstones of their cultural policy, which also opens up opportunities for closer synergies with other sectors - especially education and health. The United Arab Emirates, for their part, called for the creation of a global vision, fueled by international reflection, in order to support this digital transition, taking into account the specificity of different cultural fields.

The digital transformation calls us to reflect on the status of the artist, notably on copyright protection and the social rights of artists and cultural professionals, whose fragility has been laid bare by the crisis. Serbia, Botswana, Cyprus and Andorra recognized this as a priority. The enthusiasm for broadened access to culture and the spontaneous generosity of artists in the response to the crisis should not eclipse the importance of fair remuneration for creative work. Likewise, several participants, such as Quebec (Canada), recalled the importance of regulating major cultural platforms, which have reaped considerable economic benefits from the crisis and confinement, while the creators whose works are being shared on such platforms are being severely impacted.



Rethinking economic models and funding for culture

This crisis will encourage a relocation and a diversification of the economic fabric generally speaking, which will also have repercussions on the cultural sector. Faced with the interruption of international tourist flows, States are encouraging local, domestic tourism, notably in the Philippines. Other countries like Palau, are encouraging economic diversification, notably in support of the green economy in order to meet the essential needs of the population, while at the same time exploring new economic models that are more rooted in the local communities.

The crisis may also potentially cause deep transformations in how culture is funded and may lead to a reconfiguration of the roles of public authorities. In order to strengthen the resilience of the sector in future crises, funding methods must adapt to a relatively fragmented sector that is largely comprised of individual workers or small enterprises. This could be done by giving priority to flexible financing mechanisms and envisioning new collaborations with the private sector and civil society. In this way, the State could exert greater leverage within the private sector, notably regarding the regulation of cultural platforms. Similarly, sectors such as tourism that had been relatively independent with regard to public funding, will now need State support to face the full scale of the crisis.



Before the crisis, Sri Lanka's cultural tourism sector was self-sufficient. In the immediate future, it will need government support from the national budget.

H. EXC. HON. PRIME MINISTER MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA
MINISTER OF BUDDHASASANA, CULTURAL
AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, SRI LANKA





We try to be active actors in the development of transversal public policies, while prioritizing efforts to guarantee the human right to culture.

H. EXC. MR CARLOS AGUILAR NAVARRO
MINISTER OF CULTURE,
PANAMA

Reaffirming a cross-cutting approach for culture

The response to the crisis has strengthened global and cross-cutting approaches, as highlighted by Panama, and opens opportunities for collaboration between the cultural sector and other areas of public policy – social, environmental, economic, innovation and urban development. In this way, the groundwork is being laid for a closer inclusion of culture in sustainable development. The response to the crisis calls more broadly for reinvesting in a global and strategic approach to the sector. Likewise, a more cross-cutting approach for funding culture could be achieved by linking culture to other areas of public policy, with a view to increasing public funding effectiveness as well engaging a more proactive approach in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.



We are looking into different industries outside of tourism to help sustain our local economy, such as promoting local businesses in tree planting, and cleaning our rock islands.

H. EXC. MS BAKLAI TEMENGIL
MINISTER OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS
PALAU



REINVESTING AND RENEWING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Strengthening multilateral action

The response to the crisis calls for multilateral, coordinated and global action on a large scale, to re-establish trust and build shared responsibility. The ministers unanimously underlined the importance of international cooperation to build the future of the cultural sector and to ensure that it is rooted in public policy. With over 130 ministers present, the level of participation in this online meeting of ministers of culture testifies to this ambition. Faced with the scale of the crisis – which reveals both the vulnerability and the interdependence among countries – States must pool their efforts and construct a global discourse inspired by shared cultural values, as highlighted by Jordan.

A new form of global solidarity must emerge in order to build a shared response. In this sense, Spain reiterated the principles of solidarity and fraternity that must guide the action of the international community in supporting the cultural sector. Particular solidarity must be extended to countries of the South, an issue raised by several countries, including Sudan, which called for the creation of a support fund.



The initiatives to be taken must go beyond the borders of a single country and be driven by solidarity and mutual support.

H. EXC. MR DARIO FRANCESCHINI
MINISTER OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ACTIVITIES,
AND TOURISM, ITALY





Beyond national measures, several countries, notably Germany, reiterated their commitment to maintaining and even strengthening the level of their international cultural cooperation.

Regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organisations and development banks have an essential role to play in amplifying States' efforts. As highlighted during the meeting of regional intergovernmental organisations "Mobilizing Partners to Address the Impact of COVID-19 on Culture", organised by UNESCO on 17 April 2020, regional organisations can gather and disseminate data on the impact of the crisis and its response, in order to identify trends and guide States' policies. They can strengthen the leverage of investments provided by States in mobilizing financial and operational tools to support priority areas in the cultural sector that are prone to generating spill-over effects across the economic fabric. They can also contribute to global advocacy efforts in promoting the role of culture in the response to the crisis.

To support this dynamic, several States proposed large scale international cooperation initiatives aimed at encouraging intercultural exchanges, including the establishment of an international cultural marathon, which would involve the cultural leaders of each country, offered by the Russian Federation, or the creation of a cultural archive of humanity to document the socio-cultural transformation underway around the world, suggested by Indonesia. Mexico, which will host the Mondiacult conference on cultural policies in 2022, recalled the importance of pursuing global dialogue on cultural policies for sustainable development.



Highlighting UNESCO's role

States, including Slovakia and Lebanon, highlighted the essential role of UNESCO in providing a platform for exchange and in gathering and disseminating information on the economic and social impact of the crisis and its response. UNESCO has the capacity to mobilize States and the civil society, as reflected by the ResiliArt campaign, welcomed notably by Croatia or Comoros. The Organization was also called upon to provide guidance in its areas of expertise – notably the preservation and the mediation of heritage in a context of confinement, as raised by Japan, and the adaptation of cultural policies to the new digital context mentioned by Argentina – in order to guide Member States' response to the crisis, and more broadly to ensure leadership in supporting countries as they integrate culture in the framework of development policies, as highlighted by Niger.

The crisis also provides the opportunity to strengthen or reactivate UNESCO's normative tools, notably the Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist, which was raised by Belgium, or the Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, as highlighted by France. Some countries also highlighted the need to strengthen the collaboration between the Organization and its partner institutions, notably the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) on the question of copyright or with Interpol in the fight against illicit trafficking.



UNESCO should provide recommendations and call for wider access to emergency funds for artists and cultural organizations from developing countries.

H. EXC. MR TA QUANG DONG
DEPUTY MINISTER OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM, VIET NAM





IMAGINING THE WORLD AFTER: CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The COVID-19 crisis represents a systematic rupture, and is compelling States to rebuild their public policies. By revealing the vulnerability and interdependence among societies and economies on an unprecedented scale, this crisis requires a profound paradigm shift in order to confront the deep sources of contemporary divides – notably the resurgence of conflicts, the climate crisis and the deepening of inequalities. As highlighted by the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, “We can go back to the world as it was before or deal decisively with those issues that make us all unnecessarily vulnerable.” In this way, the public policy response to the crisis must serve not only to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the health crisis in the short and medium terms; it must also deliberately rethink public action in building more just societies, more inclusive economies and in facing the climate emergency that is jeopardizing the stability of societies. The unparalleled scale of public investment that has been committed in response to the crisis, must leverage our efforts in forging a new world.



We have to collectively imagine the world of tomorrow. More than ever, this world will need culture.

H. EXC. MR FRANCK RIESTER
MINISTER OF CULTURE, FRANCE



The need to rebuild public policies concerns cultural policies first and foremost. Culture must inspire and feed this paradigm shift. In a context in which societies and the international community appear particularly fragmented, UNESCO Member States reaffirmed the driving and transforming role of culture in public policies. The risk of deepening economic and social inequalities due to the health crisis and the erosion of fundamental rights, demands a renewed commitment to cultural diversity as a fundamental human right and as an essential component in a more just and sustainable world.

Indeed, the crisis forcefully highlights the central role of culture in society. Confinement, as Turkey recalled, has revealed the importance of culture for the well-being of societies and for living together in peace. Brunei Darussalam highlighted how confinement has brought to light the values of mutual support and solidarity, and Algeria evoked how it has lifted up the importance of intercultural dialogue. The educational role of culture has also been particularly essential during confinement, not only in the form of arts education, mentioned by Armenia, and in the mobilization of keepers of tradition but also in knowledge development through the appreciation of other cultures. Generally speaking, the importance of culture as an agent of social transformation is more broadly recognized, as Thailand indicated.



Promoting intercultural dialogue in the face of this new global reality will be a crucial challenge.

H. EXC. MR ABULFAS GARAYEV
MINISTER OF CULTURE
AZERBAIJAN





Culture can and must bring us together, stimulate international engagement and restore hope and confidence to enable us to face this crisis.

H. EXC. MR ZHANG XU
VICE-MINISTER OF CULTURE AND TOURISM, CHINA

The crisis also brings to light the economic significance of culture, which was highlighted by several countries including Dominica and Ghana. Paradoxically, it is when the sector is risking collapse that its importance in job creation seems most recognized, notably concerning the multiple roles of culture in the economic fabric – both formal and informal – through related services and industries. Valuing this economic leverage effect is essential to successfully engaging financial partners, notably funding institutions, whose role will be of utmost importance in the medium-term response. The creative economy is also a source for advocacy in favor of new, more resilient and inclusive economic models, encouraging both openness to international exchanges and grounding in local development, a fundamental asset in the anticipated developments of the global economy.



In Chinese, the term crisis* refers to opportunity.

H. EXC. MS N'DIAYE RAMATOULAYE DIALLO
MINISTER OF CULTURE, MALI

*The term 危机, designating the concept of crisis in the Chinese language, brings together two characters evoking danger and opportunity.



The crisis can be an opportunity to explore new avenues for connection at the international level.

H. EXC. MR NATALIO D. WHEATLEY
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AFFAIRS, FISHERIES
AND AGRICULTURE, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Imagining the future of culture also means rethinking ways to make it more resilient. The cultural sector, whose vulnerability has been revealed, must undergo a deep transformation in order to be more resilient in the face of future crises. In light of the disastrous impact of the prolonged closures of museums and cultural institutions, directives must be produced to guide countries in adopting preventive adaptive measures to mitigate the impact of future pandemics. The system of economic and social protection for artists and culture professionals must be rethought and consolidated so that culture can continue playing its role in the flourishing and adaptation of societies. The cultural sector is in need of reform, as are other areas of public policy, so that they become more inclusive, notably for women, youth and vulnerable communities. The processes that have already begun in this sense must be deepened. In-depth reflection must also take place as we rethink certain components of cultural policies – in particular cultural tourism and the creative economy – so that they are firmly rooted in the perspective of a more sustainable world.



We have the challenge to transform this health crisis into an opportunity for the sector for which we are responsible. Strengthening our institutions to offer a public cultural policy, to guarantee cultural services to citizens and to the cultural sector [...] is our priority.

H. EXC. MR RUBÉN DARÍO CAPDEVILA
MINISTER OF CULTURE, PARAGUAY





Drawing on its expertise and mandate, UNESCO must provide leadership to support the recovery of the production capacities of cultural actors and place culture at the heart of our development policies.

H. EXC. MR ASSOUMANA MALAM ISSA
MINISTER OF CULTURAL RENAISSANCE, ARTS AND SOCIAL
MODERNISATION, NIGER

The digital transition must be the subject of global reflection and international regulation. While providing fundamental opportunities for the cultural sector, this transition also poses the risk of deepening inequalities, both within and among societies, and standardizing production and cultural dissemination, contributing to a loss of the diversity of cultural expressions. An in-depth analysis must be conducted on the questions of copyright and the protection of cultural data across all domains, in particular in the framework of large digital platforms. Cultural policies must therefore be at the heart of rebuilding public policies, with the goal of creating a more sustainable world, echoing the commitment made by all Member States in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



We hope that this meeting will result in a global declaration on behalf of the Ministers of Culture of all countries, calling for protecting culture and the arts during a pandemic, strengthening solidarity between people and bringing about a new cultural system, reaffirming the role of fundamental human values.

H. EXC. MR BASSIM TWAISSI
MINISTER OF CULTURE, JORDAN



CONCLUSION

The online meeting of ministers of culture sent a strong message regarding the mobilization of States in support of the recovery of the cultural sector, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their massive participation, the ministers reaffirmed the importance of large-scale efforts to support the cultural sector and mitigate the repercussions of the health crisis in the short and medium-term. They also broadly affirmed that culture must be an integral part of the global public policy response.

Through this call to action from Member States in support of the cultural sector, they reaffirmed the importance of culture as a force for the adaptation and transformation of societies. Faced with the growing risk of fragmentation around the world, culture must be a unifying force. In order to resist the temptation to turn inward, culture must foster dialogue, solidarity and exchange, in order to lay the groundwork for resilience to future crises. More than ever, culture must find its rightful place in the arena of public policies, both as an essential sector and a source of renewal and innovation to forge a more sustainable world.

Through the support measures they have already undertaken, countries have demonstrated the primary responsibility of States to invest in culture as a source of economic development and employment, and to guarantee the conditions for its development. By investing greatly in the recovery of the cultural sector, they also underscore the critical role it plays in the national economy as a source of employment and more resilient and inclusive economic models, promoting openness to international exchange, while anchoring this exchange in local development.





Through their presence, the ministers also demonstrated their commitment to international cooperation within UNESCO. Confronted with the magnitude and the multiple ramifications of the crisis, they committed to investing in multilateral cooperation and international solidarity, which are essential in building a sustainable response. The ministers encouraged partners and financial institutions to amplify States' efforts by investing more significantly in the cultural sector. As the crisis reveals both the vulnerability and the interdependence of societies and economies, global, concerted action is required to ensure the recovery of the cultural sector and its future resilience.

By sharing their perspectives, countries also outlined priority areas for the future of the cultural sector. The sector must undergo a fundamental transformation in order to be more resilient in the face of crises and to better protect artists and culture professionals. In-depth reflection must also take place in the area of cultural tourism and its inclusion in a more sustainable approach to development. Lastly, the digital transition must be the subject of broader reflection and regulation to guarantee access to culture for all and the protection of the diversity of cultural expressions.

To support this joint effort, UNESCO is committed to working with its Member States. A monitoring exercise has been launched to document the impact of the crisis on the cultural sector and the measures undertaken in response, whose results are reflected in a weekly bulletin. Several campaigns have been undertaken to mobilise the cultural sector. In the medium and long term, UNESCO will continue to provide support in the areas of reflection, methodology and public policy, in order to guide the structuring and adaptation of the cultural sector and to facilitate its regulation, where appropriate, so that cultural policies are better anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

