



CULTURE & COVID-19

Impact & Response Tracker

THIS REGULAR UPDATE

is produced by UNESCO as a snapshot on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the culture sector worldwide and on the responses initiated at the national, local and regional level. This tracker is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of measures but instead draws on a variety of sources to provide a broad overview of the evolving situation worldwide.

IMPACT

Biological diversity is intimately linked to cultural diversity, as humans have always adapted to the particular environment they found themselves in, leading to the flourishing of societies, cultures and languages that have developed throughout human history. In the coming week, World Environment Day and World Oceans Day will be celebrated against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has further highlighted the strong linkages between humans and nature. At the same time, the health crisis and lockdown of countries is projected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8% this year, according to the International Energy Agency. UNESCO is also currently revising and updating its Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage properties.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has disrupted work at the international level to protect biodiversity and tackle climate change. This month, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an advisory body to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, was due to hold its World Conservation Congress in Marseilles (**France**), now postponed until 2021. Likewise, the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference, scheduled to take place this month in Lisbon (**Portugal**), has also been postponed. Meanwhile, the final year of the U.N.'s Decade on Biodiversity was set to culminate in October in Kunming, (**China**), with the Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of the Parties. Finally, the COP 26 Conference - a major follow-up to the Paris Agreement on climate change is now scheduled to take place in Glasgow (**United Kingdom**) in November 2021, a year late.



Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park, Philippines

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

5 June

WORLD OCEANS DAY

8 June

#ShareOurHeritage

Further exacerbating the problem, many of the 213 natural World Heritage sites that carry out essential conservation work and rely on ticket sales have seen their budgets decimated. This includes some 50 marine sites, mainly coral reef systems that play a vital role in combatting climate change, as well as the Galapagos Islands of **Ecuador**, made famous by Charles Darwin's writings on evolution. At a recent online meeting of marine site managers organized by UNESCO, the outlook was bleak. At Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, **Philippines**, for example, tourism revenues make up over half of the conservation budget needed to protect the large, remote areas from illegal fisheries, whilst coral scientists at **Seychelles'** Aldabra Atoll – among the most renowned in the world – now face an uncertain future as monitoring and surveillance programme funds will dry up by the end of summer if nearby tourism hotspots fail to attract paying visitors. Underwater archaeology, a domain where seasonal fieldwork is the norm, has also been affected. Underwater cultural heritage, such as shipwrecks and the vestiges of ancient coastal cities and civilizations, which is protected under the UNESCO Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention (2001), can provide vital clues to how people lived in the past, inspire research and help build resilience for the future. Unfortunately, only 7.4% of our ocean is protected.

“I can't be any blunter...if COVID-19 gets into our communities, we are gone.

Pat Turner, Chief Executive, National Aboriginal Community Council Health Organisation, Australia



Treehugger: an indigenous Paiter Surui boy, Brazil

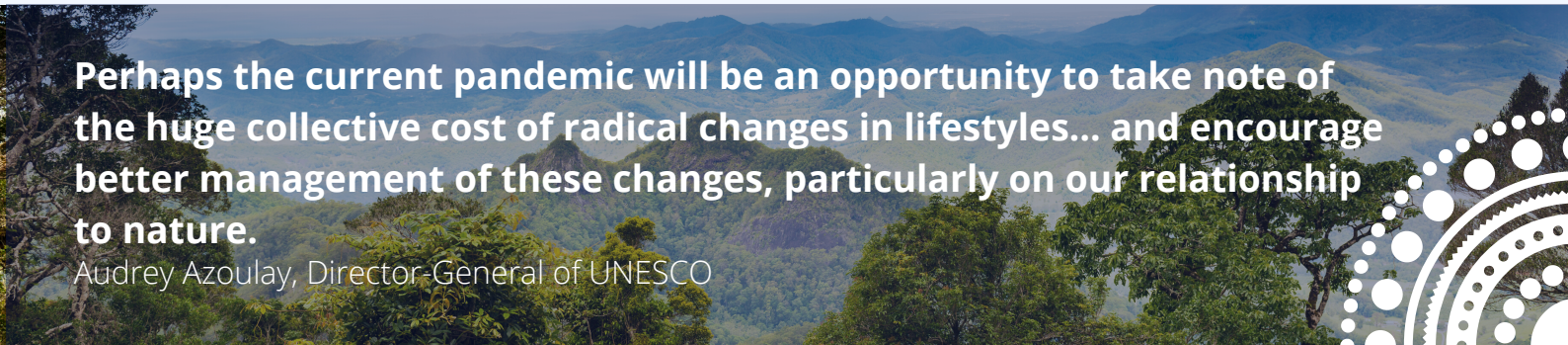
According to the National Geographic, some 80% of the world's global biodiversity is protected under the stewardship of indigenous peoples, who make up but 5% of the global population. At a time when species are being lost at about a thousand times the natural rate of extinction (according to the Society for Biological Conservation), the world's 370 million to 500 million indigenous people in over 90 countries, speaking some 4,000 different languages, play a critical role in conserving biodiversity. They hold vital ancestral knowledge and expertise on how to adapt, mitigate, and reduce climate and disaster risks.

Unfortunately, in nearly all countries, indigenous people fall into the most "vulnerable" health category. In a recent policy paper, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs drew attention to the death of a 15-year old boy due to COVID-19 among the Yanonami in the Amazon rainforest and raised concerns about further encroachment on indigenous lands, for instance, by illegal loggers and miners that could result in significant deaths due to the easily compromised immune systems of indigenous peoples. It highlighted the importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for policy action on COVID-19 in defending the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly to healthcare.



Despite the issues facing the environment and the oceans, some positive outcomes have arisen from the lockdown. Increased use of virtual platforms has expanded access to knowledge about natural World Heritage sites and mixed World Heritage sites, such as Macchu Pichu, **Peru**, Blue and John Crow Mountains, **Jamaica**, and the Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes, **Republic of Korea**, via virtual tours. Another 360-degree video from **New Zealand** shows the HMNZS Canterbury, a frigate warship sunk to provide an artificial reef. These platforms have served to raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage for preserving both natural World Heritage sites and underwater archaeological sites. Marijo Gauthier Bérubé, an underwater archaeologist from the Institute of Research in Maritime History and Underwater Archaeology in Québec, reported an increase in interest in underwater heritage from the local community during the lockdown

With an unprecedented halt of visits to heritage sites worldwide, some local government agencies have also taken steps to boost potential visitors' interest in the unique experiences they have to offer. These include the underwater heritage routes of the "Sicilia Archaeologica", smartphone app created in **Italy** by the Cultural Heritage department, and an online platform developed by Heritage **Malta** that provides virtual tours with site curators of underwater wrecks. Sustainable tourism in these places and the revenue that it generates for local communities rely on a conservation of the environment and ocean.



Perhaps the current pandemic will be an opportunity to take note of the huge collective cost of radical changes in lifestyles... and encourage better management of these changes, particularly on our relationship to nature.

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

In iSimangaliso Wetland Park, **South Africa**, sustainable tourism has generated over 10,000 jobs since the inscription of the site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in the late 1990s and helping to lift the whole region out of poverty. In recent weeks, we have seen a major shift at some marine World Heritage sites, with some staff working on conservation and supporting local communities with food and basic services. Adapting to the halt in tourism, initiatives include a dive tour operator in **Australia** has committed to working with marine scientists to help restore the country's imperilled reef and ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods in the long term, as well as help tackle climate change. According to the World Economic Forum, such work to restore coastal ecosystems, such as coral reefs and mangroves, represents a massive return on investment that such ecosystems deliver to so-called "blue tourism". It estimates that ocean tourism, before COVID-19, was directly valued at US\$390 billion globally and comprises a significant portion of the GDP of many nations, and recommends that recovery funds be used hire people to carry out such work.



RESPONSE – CULTURE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Another consequence of the pandemic has been on global supply chains. In some parts of the world, this means that local food - from the sea and the land - as well as local, traditional recipes are more important than ever. Local food chains can provide food for communities when sustainably managed. According to a survey carried out by UNESCO on the impact of the pandemic on intangible cultural heritage, there has been a resurgence in interest in traditional farming, as well as local ingredients and recipes. For example, among the younger generations in **Lebanon**, there has been a return to healthier and organic agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the gathering of wild plants that can be consumed, cooked or used for healing purposes.

In **Colombia** the elders of the Misak indigenous community are teaching traditional agricultural techniques to young generations so they can survive with their own local products, enhancing local resilience to address future crisis. The survey also found changes in food consumption in Hong Kong, **China**, with increased sales in local (organic) farm products. Many citizens are revisiting their traditional culture, exploring home cooking skills by making their own rice wine, as well as traditional knowledge and skills to produce and preserve food.

EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

TRADITIONAL KNOW-HOW FOR HEALTH

In **Austria**, the Färbermuseum, which plays an important role in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage element "Indigo hand block printing in the Mühlviertel region" has started to produce artisanal masks

INVESTING IN ARTISTIC EDUCATION

Kyrgyzstan is prioritising Technical and Vocational Education and Training for students of higher and special educational institutions in the field of culture and art during the pandemic

CONSERVING NATURAL HERITAGE

Bermuda aims to document over 100 historic shipwrecks and distinct natural habitats in its surrounding waters to enhance conservation efforts and open the sites to tourism

In **Madagascar**, the Ministry of Culture has distributed aid as bags of rice to artists

SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS

In **Algeria**, the National Office of Copyright and Related Rights has announced exceptional grants for artists



SPOTLIGHT – REGIONAL RESPONSES

Countries around the world are mobilising at the national level to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Action at the regional level is also a vital lever for measuring the impact of the crisis on culture, pooling knowledge on new economic models and leveraging finance.

To address the specific challenges faced by countries in each region concerning the scale or nature of impact, regional efforts are taking shape and gaining momentum. A number of these regional initiatives are presented below.

“ Fortunately we’ve managed to keep COVID-19 out of this country, and we don’t want to drop that guard ... We do have to lift our borders, we cannot live this way. We’re used to a particular way of life.

Dr Josephine Aumea Herman,
Cook Islands’ Secretary of Health



PACIFIC



Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)
Council of Regional
Organisations of the Pacific
(CROP)
South Pacific Tourism
Organization (SPTO)

Pacific island countries account for two thirds of all countries that remain free of COVID-19, with their geographical remoteness and small populations playing a key role. Pacific culture is so intrinsically entwined with the islands’ way of life and the pandemic would have a devastating impact. To protect themselves and this way of life, countries of the Pacific, with support of the Pacific Islands Forum, were swift to take measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), which groups eight regional organisations, also pledged its full support to Pacific Island Countries and Territories in humanitarian and socio-economic affairs. The South Pacific Tourism Organization continues to share information on the impacts and responses from tourism sectors throughout the region. Travel and tourism – a principal economic driver – have come to a halt, and countries like Fiji and Vanuatu could see their GDP fall by almost 50%. Unemployment figures are likely to be high as well, as close to 40% of the latter’s workforce is dependent on tourism, as estimated by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University.



SPOTLIGHT – REGIONAL RESPONSES

The ASEAN Summit, due to take place at the end of April, has been postponed until the end of June and regional leaders have foreseen holding a joint session dedicated to education and culture in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The first issue of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural community's magazine that came out in May could be seen as an effort to promote further cultural integration of the region, the first article being entitled "A Shared Identity, becoming ASEAN". In a recent brief assessing the economic impact of the pandemic, the Asian Development Bank projected that the global economy could suffer between \$5.8 trillion and \$8.8 trillion in losses with about 30% of the overall decline in global output being attributed to Asia. It quoted figures indicating the tourism would be badly affected: with a drop in tourism figures of 70.9% in North East Asia and 49.5% in Southeast Asia. The briefing states "for many destinations, encouraging domestic tourism should be a priority".



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
Asian Development Bank (ADB)

AFRICA



On 27 May, the African Union Department of Social Affairs organised a Virtual Forum of the African Union Ministers Responsible for Arts, Culture, and Heritage on their Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the resulting communiqué, the Ministers recognised "the crucial and essential role that the arts, culture and heritage sector can play in assisting Member States in curbing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economic and cultural landscape of the continent as enshrined in major continental policy instruments including the AU Agenda 2063, the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, the AU Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries, the AU Model Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Heritage and the global instruments such as the UN Agenda 2030." On the 25 May, The African Union Commission (AUC) and the All Africa Music Awards (AFRIMA) organized an online concert to advocate for contributions to the Africa COVID-19 Response Fund. The powerful role of African artists through their music and art in curbing the pandemic as well as in advocating for contributions to assist the Africa CDC operations cannot be overemphasized.

African Union (AU)
African Union
Commission (AUC)
All Africa Music
Awards (AFRIMA)



“ If there was ever a time that we need culture and creativity to address our challenges, it is now.
Dr. Douglas Slater Assistant Secretary General in charge of Human and Social Development at the CARICOM Secretariat



On 20 May, CARICOM held the 'First Regional Dialogue on Culture in a COVID-19 Environment', at which the Assistant Secretary General in charge of Human and Social Development told regional culture stakeholders from government and the artistic community that their input and ideas were crucial to post COVID-19 resilience. He encouraged the representatives of the creative industries to prepare to demonstrate the importance of culture as a vital element of society, noting that there was a critical role for creatives to play in the rebuilding of a resilient Caribbean community. Participants also discussed the use of online platforms for performance, festivals and events and recommended that CARIFESTA XV scheduled for 2021 in Antigua and Barbuda, serve as catalyst for a new approach to presenting festivals in a mixed on and off-line format and to jump start the festival economy. Several countries and regional agencies, notably the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and Caribbean Export, indicated that stimulus packages were available or in development to assist artists and cultural workers who are facing economic challenges during this period. CDB has allocated USD 50,000 for the music sub-sector and USD 50,000 for the festivals and carnivals sub-sector for Emergency Relief Grants.



Caribbean Community
(CARICOM)
Caribbean Development
Bank (CDB)



The European Commission, to complement and support Member States' actions, has taken a set of measures to tackle the consequences of the pandemic on the cultural and creative sectors. Some are aid measures, such as the Temporary Framework that enables Member States to use the full flexibility foreseen under state aid rules, particularly granting compensation to companies struggling due to the pandemic, as well as granting financial support directly to consumers,

European Commission (EC)



for example for cancelled services or tickets that are not reimbursed by the operators concerned. The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative provides Member States with immediate liquidity, including for the culture sector, whilst the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) will provide up to €100 billion of financial assistance to Member States to help workers keep their incomes and help businesses stay afloat across the EU.

The European Commission has also launched two platforms to help share challenges and solutions at the EU level in relation to the COVID-19 impact on the cultural and creative sectors: one to allow culture ministries to exchange good practices, the second one, Creatives Unite, to help people in the cultural and creative sectors share information and solutions more easily. In addition, the European Commission has adapted the Creative Europe programme to the new realities, including new measures as regards digital technologies, artists mobility, an acceleration in a scheme for the translation of European books and further support to the Europa Cinemas network (which is likely to take the form of a €5 million supplementary allocation of funds in the form of "vouchers" for cinemas most severely affected by the lockdown).

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The presence of women is necessary not only for the needs of society, but also for its prosperity and to achieve the better society we want.

Dr Salim M AlMalik, Director-General of ICESCO



ARAB STATES



On 11 May, during the 21st Conference of the Arab Ministers of Culture convened by ALECSO, Ministers observed that that the pandemic has halted ongoing efforts to preserve Arab culture, including cultural sites, and that cultural life had been heavily affected. The meeting announced several recommendations, including the digitisation of cultural content and initiatives to support artists and cultural institutions affected by the pandemic. ICESCO has launched the "ICESCO Digital Home" platform which provides technological, educational, social, cultural, and awareness content for all age groups and created three awards for students, as part of its Remote Culture initiative. In early May, the two Director Generals of ALECSO and ICESCO participated in the Online Meeting on "The role of women in the realization of the new cultural roadmap of the Arab region after the COVID-19 crisis" that stressed the important role of women in the cultural ecosystem of the Arab region.

Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)
Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO)



The Ibero-American organizations, SEGIB, OEI, OISS, OIJ and COMJIB, issued a recent joint statement, which expressed deep concerns about the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. It drew attention to "the negative effects of this pandemic on the cultural sector" and called upon all national, regional and international institutions to promote active policies to support the cultural sector so that it can face the crisis and recover as quickly as possible. In addition, in March, the Ibero-American cooperation programme, Ibermuseums, of SEGIB made available to the public a list of Ibero-American museums that can be visited virtually, whilst the OEI made cultural resources available for the Ibero-American community on a dedicated platform.

There are also a number sub-regional initiatives, such as the launch on 21 May of a digital platform in response to COVID-19 amongst the eight members of the Central American Integration System (SICA), with the idea of promoting regional integration amongst the countries of Central America, in the framework of the cooperation between the SICA and the UNESCO Office in San José. Meanwhile, MERCOSUR countries began a joint impact assessment exercise (see Tracker Issue 7 for details).



**Secretary General of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB),
Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, science and culture (OEI),
Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS),
International Youth Organization for Ibero-America (OIJ)
Conference of Ministers of Justice of Ibero-American Countries (COMJIB)
Central American Integration System (SICA)
Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)**

“ We are promoting, together with other multilateral mechanisms, the conduct of a regional study to measure the effects of COVID-19, which will contribute to decision-making and the proper design of policies to mitigate the effects caused in the sector.

Joint Ibero-American Declaration



Fernando Botero, siji.life

For more information on regional approaches to cultural policies see our [latest publication](#)



FIND OUT MORE...

LATEST VIDEOS



World Environment Day

Since 2004, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and the Central African Republic have benefited from the activities of the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative (CAWHFI), led by UNESCO and partners, which aims to strengthen the management of protected areas, including natural World Heritage sites. A new video explains progress made:

[EN](#) [FR](#)

FEATURED EVENT



Upcoming ResiliArt editions

Colombia/Ecuador (3 June)

Colombia (4 June)

Canada (8 June)

Iberoamerica: Ibermuseums and UNESCO (18 June, 16 July)

Cameroon (18 June)

Comoros (21 June)

For more information click [here](#)

USEFUL LINKS

- [UN Knowledge Review of link between biological diversity and human health](#)
- [UNESCO World Heritage Centre Marine Programme](#)
- [UN DESA Policy paper on indigenous peoples](#)
- [UNESCO's work on indigenous peoples](#)
- [Underwater Cultural Heritage professionals' experiences during pandemic](#)
- [UNESCO virtual tours of World Heritage sites](#)
- [UNESCO list of virtual underwater museums](#)
- [UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Heritage](#)
- [Asian Development Bank recent projections](#)
- [African Union Ministerial Communiqué](#)
- [Joint statement by Iberoamerican organizations](#)
- [Full list of European Union measures](#)
- [Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific statement](#)

This update is published by UNESCO

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