

# 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

Numbering at least 370-500 million, indigenous peoples represent the greater part of the world's cultural diversity, and speak the major share of the world's almost 7000 languages – more than 4000. Numbering approximately 5% of the world's population, indigenous people are guardians of some 20% of the world's territory, playing a vital role in the protection of biodiversity and natural cultural heritage, as well as the management of natural resources and the fight against climate change. The protection of indigenous peoples is not only a human rights issue but also one of preserving cultural diversity and ancestral wisdom.

According to the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, there are already nearly 7,000 cases of infection in the Amazon Basin, and there have already been 639 official deaths among 93 indigenous nationalities. Cases have been reported in all Amazon countries, from Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil to Guyana, French Guiana, Peru, Ecuador and Suriname. In the Canadian town of La Loche, more than 200 indigenous people in the community have contracted the virus so far and two elderly care home residents died, according to local officials. Meanwhile, concerned for their community, elders of the Bontoc group in northern Philippines have imposed since early March a traditional lockdown called a tengao.



Photo by Trevor Cole

International Decade of  
Indigenous Languages

**2022-2032**

Besides being knowledge repositories on the environment, history, territory, production of specific artefacts and medicines, these elders provide political and spiritual guidance, being fundamental in the struggle for territorial recognition. They remind their peoples of who they are in a fast-changing world,

Bruna Rocha, a lecturer in archaeology at the Federal University of Western Pará, Brazil.

Indigenous peoples are also bearers of intangible cultural heritage and some groups supplement their income through the sale of crafts and traditional produce. The Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean has expressed its concern about the great vulnerability of indigenous peoples, since they are at risk of physical or cultural disappearance. It estimates that in Latin America, some 462 peoples currently have fewer than 3,000 inhabitants and around 200 of them are in voluntary isolation, all in a situation of extreme poverty. Furthermore, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs has expressed its concerns about the economic implications, for example, citing The United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda, which reports on how the lockdown is crippling their livelihood. More worryingly still, the disappearance of elders puts in peril inter-generational transmission of culture and traditional knowledge.

According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, José Francisco Cali Tzay, the traditional lifestyles of indigenous peoples' can create greater risks of spreading infection when they involve large gatherings to mark events like harvests, or living in multi-generational housing with elderly family members. Indigenous people also suffer from a relatively high degree of socio-economic marginalization that makes them more vulnerable. In his statement on 18 May, the Special Rapporteur also expressed concern for indigenous communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that in many countries, states of emergency are exacerbating the marginalisation of indigenous communities. He called for urgent special measures to be put in place to ensure availability and access to culturally-appropriate medical services.

He further implored that the rights to development, self-determination and lands, territories and resources be guaranteed, in order for indigenous peoples to manage the crisis and advance sustained development and environmental protection. In some countries, he stated, consultations with indigenous peoples – as well as environmental impact assessments – are being abruptly suspended in order to force through megaprojects relating to agribusiness, mining, dams and infrastructure. The situation of indigenous peoples highlights the issue of cultural discrimination of many groups around the world, particularly in terms of accessing adequate health care during this pandemic.

**“ The pandemic is teaching us that we need to change: we need to value the collective over the individual and build inclusive societies that respect and protect everyone. It is not only about protecting our health.**

José Francisco Cali Tzay, Special Rapporteur for the rights of indigenous people - a Maya Kaqchikel from Guatemala (18 May, 2020)



Naramuri in the desert, Mexico



# RESPONSE: INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY



#Culture2030  
Goal Campaign

Whilst the health consequences of the pandemic are now particularly affecting some countries of the Americas and a few countries in Africa, the disruptive effect on the cultural sector had sometimes been felt well before cases of infection are detected. Despite the impact being felt at different times and in different ways in various countries around the world, it is beginning to become clear that there will be a profound impact on the cultural sector in the long term.

Civil society groups envisage that the post-pandemic world can open new horizons to use culture to “build back better”. A coalition of several international and regional civil society organizations, the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign officially launched its call for action at the end of May, advocating for the role of culture in the longer term response to the crisis:



“

Now more than ever, we need to recognise, incorporate, and support cultural concerns in our response to the crisis and planning for the recovery. ...Overall, responses to this pandemic should aim to be inclusive and look at a broader framework of inequality and challenges to sustainable development, including climate change and disaster risk reduction. ...

But we too often fail to realise that culture is both a source of inspiration and a means of realising our thoughts and ideas, that culture makes it possible to mend the social fabric, to forge new forms of solidarity, to create new spaces in which to draw the energy needed to meet together the intense challenges facing us...

We have an opportunity to build back better, designing policies that allow culture to fulfil its role. Doing so will provide a more comprehensive frame to understand our world and make for stronger, more innovative, more tolerant and more resilient communities tomorrow.”

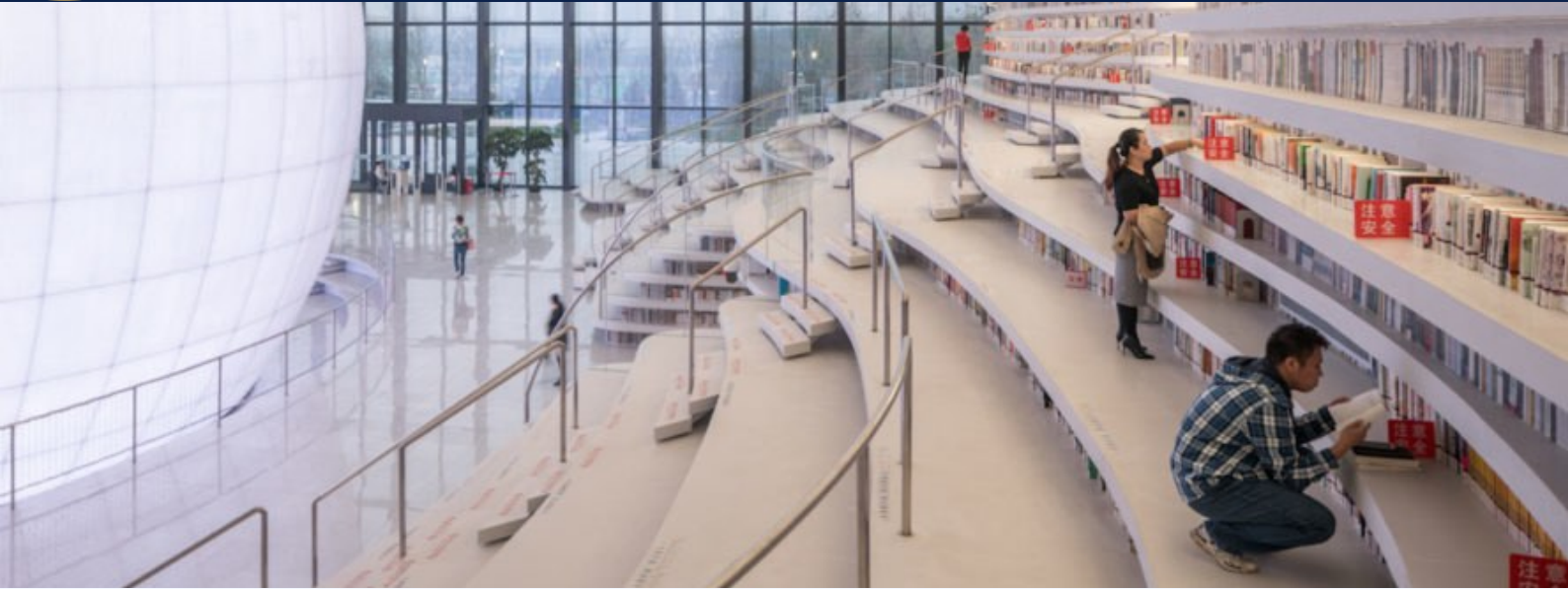
**The Culture 2030 Campaign is a coalition of several international or regional Civil Society Organizations:**

IFACCA, IFCCD, Agenda 21 for culture (UCLG), Culture Action Europe, Arterial Network, International Music Council, ICOMOS, IFLA and the Latinoamerican Network of Arts for Social Transformation.

Photo: Human tower of Spain. (Xinhua)



# SPOTLIGHT ON... BOOKS AND THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY



Tianjin Binhai Library, China (MVRDV)

The book publishing industry has taken a hit around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Estimated in 2017 to be worth 122 billion euros (USD 139 bn), books are also a key domain in the cultural sector. Books provide an opening on to the imaginative world of others and enrich us with their creativity, shaping our perception of the world. Furthermore, translations of books promote a greater understanding of the values, actions, accumulated wisdom, traditions and thoughts of the people from other parts of the world, contributing to intercultural dialogue. Books are also one of the main tools for education, including in adult education targeting the 773 million illiterate adults around the world.

Singapore has seen its book sales fall by 65% this year due to the pandemic whilst the Argentinian National Scientific and Technical Research Council showed that 71% of the publishers confirmed that sales fell by more than 60% in April. The German Publishers and Booksellers Association estimates that it lost half a billion euros in four weeks in the country. Meanwhile, more than half of the UK's small publishers fear they could be out of business by the autumn as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, according to research by The Bookseller, which also estimates that, prior to the pandemic, global ebook sales accounted for 19% of total book sales by revenue, and 36% of the number of books sold. Book fairs have been cancelled around the world, from Colombia to Bahrein. Meanwhile, in Tanzania, the National Swahili Council that offers translation services, the certification of books and other training such as book editing, has seen its activities reduced as there is a lack of demand.

Governments and national libraries, as well as publishing civil society organizations, have responded to the impact of the pandemic. Whilst the entire sector – especially authors themselves – needs support from the public authorities, literary professionals and organizations have also been working to ensure that literature can be a source of solidarity and inclusion. Through online platforms, there have been initiatives to expand access and spur innovation.

## SUPPORT FOR PUBLISHING AND AUTHORS

1

**Haiti** has created new exchange mechanisms between the Department of Books and writers, encouraging them to produce literary works during the confinement. One of the priorities of the Minister of Culture of **Paraguay** is to strengthen the publishing and library sector, prioritizing the acquisition of national editions and the provision to the country's public libraries, in order to keep the publishing sector active in the face of the suspension of book fairs and the closing of bookstores. In **Norway**, the Minister of Culture announced NOK 100 million (USD 10,6 million) to ensure that writers can continue their artistic work, whilst the **United Arab Emirates** has set up a AED 1million (USD 272,257) fund for the book industry. In **Turkey**, the publishing sector is on the list of "sectors affected by force majeure" and the appropriate measures are under consideration. In **Egypt**, the Minister of Culture has pledged to make a donation to the Egyptian Publishers Association. In **Brazil** the National Union of Book Publishers (SNEL) regularly updates on COVID-19 related action of government, particularly on the Emergency Employment and Income maintenance programme.



“ We will continue to convince policy makers of the importance of copyright as an enabler of creativity and innovation, while at the same time fighting for our freedom to publish whatever we think appropriate. Hugo Setzer, President, International Publishers Association

Book-Of-Life-Butterflies, Kristen Moeller

## LITERATURE FOR SOLIDARITY, MEMORY AND HOPE

2

In **Serbia**, the University Library of Belgrade and NGO Adligat Society / Lazić Library have digitalised relevant content about epidemics, the treatment of infectious diseases and medicine in general, from the late 19th century until today. The **Korean** Publishers' Association collected 14,000 books donated by 102 publishers through the COVID-19 book donation campaign, which were distributed to patients in quarantine. In addition to providing financial support for the purchase of books by local authors, **Mauritius** is also funding the production of collections of short stories by local authors on their COVID-19 experience in e-book format. In a similar move, the Ministry of Culture of **Jordan**, in cooperation with the Crown Prince's Foundation, have launched the "Daily Writings in the Times of Corona" award, to present stories detailing daily life during the current pandemic. In **Italy** a performing arts event Racconti per Ricominciare (Stories to Start Over) will take place in royal building and heritage sites around the town of Naples with presentations of monologues written by contemporary authors.

## INNOVATING TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO LITERATURE

3

With the cancellation of many book fairs several organizers switched to digital format, such as **Nigeria's** Ake Festival. The online literary festival Afrolit San Frontières, founded by author and publisher Zukiswa Wanner, was held online three times since the beginning of the year, promoting African literature across the continent and in the diaspora. In **Mongolia**, the Ulan Bator Book Festival was held early June in both online and offline formats. During African Heritage Month, the National Library of **Colombia** presented online anthologies of poems from female writers of African descent. The first cultural magazine Afkar Magazine in **Jordan** - which covers literature, criticism and publishing creative works of poetry, short stories and theatre - will be made available online by the Ministry of Culture. In **Saudi Arabia**, the Ministry of Culture launched a Reading Marathon initiative open to age groups, with a dedicated website to share quotes, in order to encourage reading during confinement.

“Safeguarding publishers and promoting the local knowledge industry is the need of the hour as the pandemic has proven beyond doubt the efficacy of the book as the most sustainable tool for spreading awareness, promoting values of peace and coexistence, and encouraging cultural dialogue.

Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi, founder and president of the Emirates Publishers Association, EPA



Arabic Books in Amsterdam, Micmode

## LITERATURE FOR EDUCATION AND INNOVATION

4

The **Jamaican** National Library is helping secondary-school students to prepare their School-Based Assessments via its online resource. Educational Publishers have allowed books to be uploaded to the **Kenya** Institute of Curriculum Development cloud platform, free of charge during the lockdown period. In celebration of the International Day of Archives, the National Direction of Libraries and Archives in **El Salvador** invited citizens to reflect on the importance of those resources with regard to the history of the country. In **Georgia**, publishers have united with private-sector e-book platforms to provide free access to all Georgian e-books, including for education. Finally, in the **Dominican Republic**, the virtual Book and Culture Show 2020, organised by the Minister of Culture, carried the theme “Literature and Startups: looking to the future.”



FIND OUT MORE...

## ADVOCACY MATERIALS

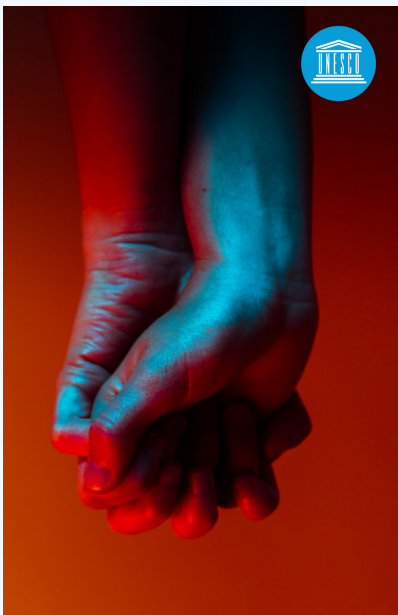


Click on the image to see UNESCO's platform of living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic



Click on the image to see the Compendium of measures for the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

## EVENTS



### Upcoming ResiliArt editions

**Senegal** (21 June, 9, 27 July, 13, 31 August) | **Global:** Global Foundation for the Performing Arts (22 June) | **Iberoamerica:** UNESCO (18 June, 16 July) | **Cameroon** (18 June) | **Saudi Arabia** (18 June) | **Global:** UNESCO with Mémoire de l'avenir (19 June) | **Central Africa** (covering 10 countries) (19 June) | **Union internationale de la marionette** (22, 29 June, 6, 13, 20, 27 July) | **Europe/Canada** (22 June) | **Canada** (23 June) | **Kazakhstan** (24 June) | **Pakistan** (24 June) | **Kenya** (25 June) | **Mexico** (25 June) | **UNESCO/UN75** (26 June) | **China** (7 July) | **Canada** (July 7) | **Pakistan** (8 July) | **Senegal** (9 July) | **Russia** (13 July) | **Senegal** (27 July, 13, 31 August)

For more information click [here](#)

## USEFUL LINKS

- [UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples \(18 May\)](#)
- [UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Culture #2030 Goal Statement](#)