



# 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

Data from the World Health Organization shows that COVID-19 now has a firm grip on every continent, with governments putting in place widespread confinement or mobility restrictions on an unprecedented scale. 128 countries have now entirely closed down their cultural institutions. In these circumstances, billions of people are turning to culture as a source of comfort, well-being and connection.

This situation is particularly affecting artists and the ways in which they work. Cancelled concerts, postponed festivals, delayed album launches, suspended film production and closed cinemas - all of which are having a devastating impact on the livelihoods of artists, many of whom are independent workers or who work in small and medium-sized enterprises, which are particularly vulnerable to financial shocks. Even countries with a social security system that covers artists and cultural professionals report that they are likely to face difficulties mitigating the impact - the culture sector risks being among the first to be impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and not necessarily prioritised in terms of urgent response measures. Long term, this could push many artists out of their jobs - the fact that Cirque du Soleil (the French performing arts company) laid off 95% of its workforce in March gives an indication of how deep this crisis could be for the cultural sector.



“ IF WE DON'T ADDRESS THE DIFFICULTIES FACING CULTURE AND THE ARTS NOW, THEY WILL BE SUFFERING FOR GENERATIONS.  
 JEAN-MICHEL JARRE, UNESCO GOODWILL AMBASSADOR (RESILIART DEBATE, 15 APRIL)



Yet, artists will be essential for "building back better" after this crisis. There has also been a huge surge in access to cultural content online - from virtual visits to museums and galleries, streaming of films and even community choirs via social media - showing its fundamental role as a source of resilience for communities. Major crises throughout history have often given rise to a renaissance of culture and an explosion of new forms of creativity, so vital for human progress. Furthermore, the creative and cultural industries (CCI) contribute US\$2,250bn to the global economy (3% of GDP) and account for 29.5 million jobs worldwide. The economic fall-out of not addressing the cultural sector - and all auxiliary services, particularly in the tourism sector - could also be disastrous. This is why UNESCO has launched the ResiliArt movement, begun on 15 April with an online debate with artists (see Useful Links below for more).



## ASSESSING THE IMPACT

Many UNESCO Member States have already embarked on Impact Assessments on the consequences of COVID-19 that take into account the cultural sector, often with UNESCO Field Offices providing support. In addition, many non-governmental organizations are gathering data, often through surveys, to build a more complete picture of the situation at many different levels and across different parts of the world.

Whilst some of the impact of COVID-19 for some aspects of the cultural sector can be quantified (number of institutions or sites closed, loss of revenue for cultural and creative industries etc), other facets of culture are harder to gauge. Confinement measures due to the pandemic have interrupted living heritage practices and expressions - from Norwuz celebrations in parts of Central Asia and the Middle East, to Buddhist Vesak celebrations in South-east Asia, Christian Holy Week festivities in several countries, carnivals in Latin America and the Caribbean, and countless other festivals and community performances around the world. Living heritage - so vital for communities - must be taken into account when assessing the full extent of the disruption caused by COVID-19. In response, UNESCO has launched an online survey, open to the Member States, partner organizations, living heritage practitioners and communities, and the public, to get a clearer idea of the scale of the impact and to identify good practices that draw on living heritage as a source of resilience. The many experiences collected through the survey will soon be made available on the UNESCO website. (See Useful Links).



# EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL RESPONSES TO COVID-19

Several governments have already announced measures to address the social and economic implications of the pandemic. Some of these measures are financial, for the whole economy or - increasingly - packages particularly targeting the cultural sector. There are also several innovative initiatives to ensure continued access to culture in these times of confinement.

## HERITAGE

In **Lebanon**, the Ministry of Culture has made virtual tours of its World Heritage sites and museums available

**Malaysia** has initiated income tax relief worth MYR 1,000, (US\$231) per person to reduce entrance fees and hotel rates at tourist attractions to stimulate domestic tourism

## EMERGENCY FUNDS

**Canada** established a CAD500 million (US\$354.9) COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sport Organizations.

## TOURISM

## SAFETY NET FOR ARTISTS

In **Kenya**, the government created a fund of KES200 million (US\$1.9m) per month to give artists a minimum wage

## ARTS EDUCATION

**Chile** is providing teaching materials to create short stories through the "Santiago in 100 words" initiative

## REBOOTING CULTURAL LIFE

**Italy** started a system of vouchers for reimbursement or replacement of cinema, museum, theatre and concert tickets already sold



# WORLD MUSEUMS

CURRENT FIGURES

# 95%

of countries around the world have closed or partially closed their museums to the public.

- International Council of Museums  
(announced during an OECD webinar, 10 April)



## INNOVATIVE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

“AT THIS TIME, THE ARTS BECOME OUR EMOTIONAL SANITY  
DEEYAH KHAN GOODWILL AMBASSADOR (RESILIART DEBATE, 15 APRIL)

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted an unprecedented acceleration in the digitisation of culture access to culture online, often without much prior preparation. To ensure continued access to culture during the pandemic, countless museums, galleries and libraries have metaphorically opened their doors with virtual visits and expanded access to e-books. Opera houses, theatres and concert halls have live streamed performances and individual artists have serenaded their fans from their living rooms via social media. Many UNESCO Member States have also spearheaded a number of digital initiatives, including creating platforms to bring together the numerous and diverse resources made available by cultural institutions in their countries.

Whilst these initiatives support access to culture in the short-term, participants in the ResiliArt debate highlighted that this also sends the wrong message that cultural content should be free in the longer term. This extraordinary situation has highlighted society's need for artists and the fragility of their livelihoods. Artists and creative professional must be fairly remunerated for their work, as per UNESCO's guidelines for the diversity of cultural expression in the digital environment, (see "Useful Links" below).

Furthermore, making digital content available online also poses other questions concerning, for example, inclusion, as digital content is not necessarily adapted to different audiences. Such questions must be addressed in the longer term to ensure that culture in the digital space becomes more inclusive, more diverse and fairer for its producers. At the same time, the crisis has also put the spotlight on the global digital divide and the need to implement policies to bridge the gap.

### ACCESS TO CULTURE

In the **Republic of Korea**, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has launched a comprehensive guide to health and cultural life during confinement, which brings together resources related to the arts, education and sports, including links to virtual reality museum tours, and online access to old and rare books. To maintain access to intangible cultural heritage, in **China** during March, Wuhan (a UNESCO Creative City) live-streamed the cherry blossom from various scenic spots, in collaboration with media outlets, which attracted millions of viewers. As part of its wide-ranging cultural strategy, #culturadigital, **Colombia's** Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with Señal Colombia television, has launched a series on dance in its different regions that also explores the creative process.

## STIMULATING IDEAS

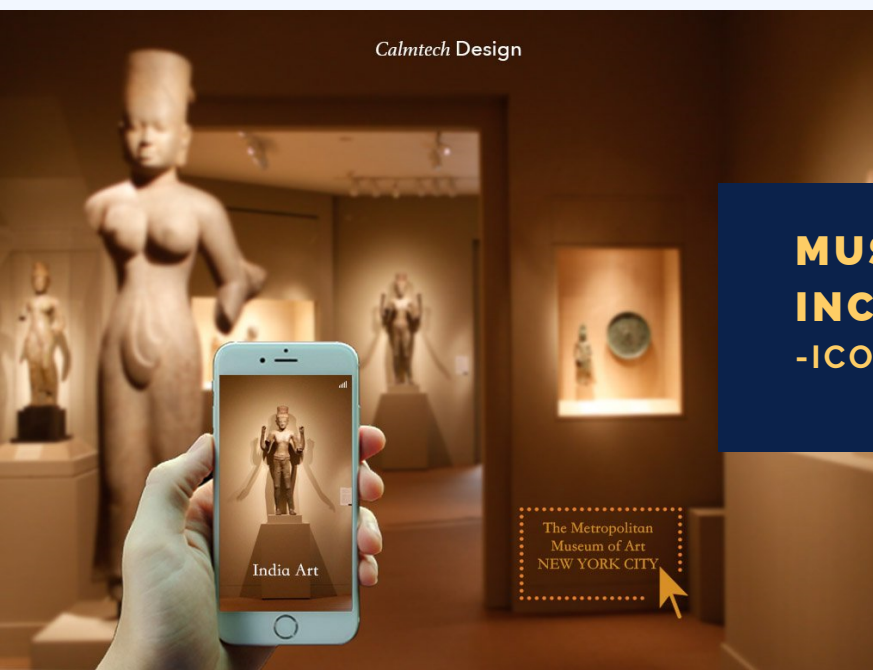
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In the **United Arab Emirates**, the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority and the Art Dubai Group have launched an "Idea-thon" - an online hub calling for ideas on how to stimulate the creative industries. It identifies six specific challenges to be addressed by crowd-sourcing innovative ideas. Culture **Ireland**, is awarding artists EUR1000 (US\$1091) through a new fund-matching grant scheme in collaboration with Facebook to enable artists to present their work on live platforms. Similarly, the government of **Mexico** is supporting a competition launched by the Veracruz Institute called "Stay home, we'll see each other soon" for students and professionals in graphic design, illustration and visual arts to produce works underscoring the importance of community solidarity.

## IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA

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Yet, in many parts of the world, digital solutions are still not an option. An estimated 36 billion people remain totally offline, particularly in developing countries. In some countries, digital penetration is only around 35%, meaning that two in three people do not get have access to online content. For example, countries in East Africa report that their museums have very little online presence. Traditional media, such as local radio, television and the print press, must therefore be a vital part of the response. In **Guatemala**, for example, Radio Faro Cultural and community radios, are providing special cultural programmes for the population, as well as information on the pandemic. Furthermore, telephone surveys replace online surveys to gather data about culture.



**MUSEUM WEBSITE USAGE HAS  
INCREASED BY**

**200%**

-ICOM



## FIND OUT MORE...

UNESCO works with many other cultural organizations on various aspects of culture. Many have made public statements or calls for action. We will feature in this section a few each week. Click on the logos for more information from these partners.

# ICOMOS

conseil international des monuments et des sites

“ THIS PANDEMIC IS HAVING DRAMATIC CONSEQUENCES ON ECONOMIES AND LIVELIHOODS, INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND TRAVEL, THE WAY WE LIVE AND WORK, SOMETIMES ALREADY FRAGILE CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND SITES, BUT ALSO THE STRONGER ONES, THE PEOPLE THEY EMPLOY AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT ARE LINKED TO THEM – AND BY DEFINITION THEREFORE ALSO OUR SHARED CULTURAL HERITAGE.

ICOMOS



## culture 21

Agenda 21 for culture

“ WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD BACK BETTER, DESIGNING POLICIES THAT ALLOW CULTURE TO FULFIL ITS ROLE AS THE FOURTH PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. 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.

UCLG COMMITTEE AND PARTNERS

### USEFUL LINKS

- [ResiliArt Movement page, including playback of the debate with artists](#)
- [UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist \(1980\)](#)
- [UNESCO Guidelines on the Implementation of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in the Digital Environment \(2017\)](#)
- [UNESCO survey for the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)
- [UNESCO Interactive map of initiatives in the cultural sector from around the World](#)
- [UNESCO map of World Heritage site closures](#)

This update is published by UNESCO

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