

Inter-Agency Platform on Culture for Sustainable Development

●●● Context

As we enter the last Decade of Action for the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – marked by the manifold impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgency of climate change and ever-growing social inequalities – harnessing the multifaceted impact of culture on sustainable development is more important than ever. Although culture has no dedicated stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) within the 2030 Agenda, the increasing recognition of culture’s contribution across the public policy spectrum makes it a powerful enabler in shaping sustainable development pathways. Culture pervades all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and can help fill in implementation gaps. Culture has a clear impact on the achievement of critical SDGs notably *quality education* (SDG 4) through cultural and artistic education in both formal and informal settings as well as technical and vocational education and training in the cultural sector; *decent work and economic growth* (SDG 8) by supporting job creation in the creative economy; *reduced inequalities* (SDG 10) by fostering social inclusion within communities including vulnerable groups; *sustainable cities and communities* (SDG 11) by strengthening the resilience and social fabric of urban areas; or *climate action* (SDG 13) through innovative and community-based adaptation and mitigation solutions.

In 2020, the health crisis has brought unforeseeable repercussions around the world – economies have been suspended and societies left reeling. No sector has been neither immune nor spared. Whilst the crisis has exposed preexisting faultlines and vulnerabilities within the culture sector globally, it has served as a reality check and brought to light the critical contribution of culture to societies’ resilience, wellbeing and prosperity, provoking a wake-up call for world leaders who have widely acknowledged the dividends of the culture sector on the global economy and on their national GDP. This has led notably, in a historic move, to the integration of culture as integral part of the deliberations of the G20 countries in November 2020 to address the urgency of recovery from the health crisis. This worldwide recognition is complemented with increased evidence of culture’s transversal agency in advancing development at the national and local levels as testified by the growing integration of culture in the Voluntary National Reviews undertaken by Member States on the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda. This momentum is further amplified by the prominence given to the development and consumption of cultural contents online and offline in the context of the pandemic, and by the decision of the UN Member States to mark the International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development in 2021.

Whilst the world is experiencing a global health emergency, the United Nations system as a whole is urged to strengthen cooperation within its agencies, echoing the purpose and vision of the UN reform, to tackle the multifaceted and long-term impact of the crisis. UNESCO as the only UN agency with a specialized and global mandate on culture, is committed in amplifying this cooperation dynamic with sister agencies across the UN Family with a view to federate efforts on harnessing culture's contribution for sustainable development and foster the efficiency and coherence of related UN-wide action towards the cultural sector. At the country level, the Organization has strategically strengthened the contribution of culture to UN mechanisms within UN Country Teams, particularly as part of the preparation and monitoring of Common Country Analysis (CCA) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) as well as within the preparation of COVID-19 impact assessment and national recovery plans. An increasing number of interagency programmes and projects are engaged across all cultural domains through a variety of entry points which reflect notably the impact of culture on urban regeneration, education, resilience, or job creation among other areas.

At the global level, interagency cooperation was strengthened and strategized in various domains including sustainable urban development, cultural indicators and data or intellectual property, notably as part of the preparation of the High Level Political Forum or the development, the implementation of activities related to International Years and International Days as well as the elaboration of joint methodologies and guidelines to guide Member States' policies. Building on peer-to-peer exchange and strengthened cooperation, UNESCO calls upon UN sister agencies, relying on their respective domains of expertise and competencies, to bring about concerted efforts in supporting countries in their recovery strategies and plans in the aftermath of the health crisis. By maximizing inter-agency cooperation, UNESCO is engaged in leveraging and amplifying joint action and progress within the UN system on the role of culture for sustainable development, in the context of the global response to the pandemic and of the effective delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

●●● Main objectives

- **Strengthen the relevance, efficiency and cohesiveness of cross-UN interventions and actions in areas relevant to culture,** both regarding the cultural sector itself and the contribution of culture to other policy domains, with a view to better address needs expressed by Member States through the pooling of resources and the sharing of experiences and good practices;
- **Facilitate interagency dialogue and joint mechanisms, reflections and activities** pertaining to monitoring, documenting and analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural and creative sector, as well as the ways to leverage culture's contribution to the socio-economic recovery at national, regional and global levels;
- **Federate efforts in supporting Member States in their respective policies** at the national level to inform and strengthen cultural policies and promote the inclusion of culture in other public policy areas; and
- **Strengthen advocacy efforts on the role of culture for the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals,** in particular in the context of the Decade of Action, with a view to upscale, accelerate and further demonstrate the impact of culture on sustainable development processes and frameworks.

●●● Reflection Themes

To streamline the working process, participating agencies will be invited to contribute based on their specific areas of mandate around three proposed transversal thematic areas, which cut across the different domains of culture while also reflecting core components of culture's contribution to the SDGs.

● *Culture for Reduced Inequalities*

Leaving no one behind is the overarching motto of the 2030 Agenda, in a world marked by increasing disparities regarding notably access to jobs, basic services, education, health, culture or the digital realm. These inequalities are conducive to an increasing fragmentation of the social fabric as well as disparities within and between societies – a situation which was further exacerbated by the current pandemic. Culture can be a driving force towards a more inclusive world, by fostering the creation of jobs – including for the most vulnerable – notably in the creative economy and in cultural tourism, but also by contributing to social inclusion, ensuring cultural rights and other societal benefits linked with decent work. Boosting Technical and Vocational Education and Training in relation to the cultural and creative sectors, including in non-formal education settings, is thus particularly important in fostering youth employment and entrepreneurship in the cultural sector. The most up-to-date figures show that some 29.5 million people are employed in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), and more young people 15-29 are employed in the sector than any other economic activity.

●● *Culture for Climate Action*

The effects of climate change are already being felt around the world, including on cultural heritage. Meanwhile, culture also provides solutions to adapt to this new reality. Living heritage, in the form of local and indigenous knowledge, is a particularly vital source of resilience, through traditional food security strategies or water and land management techniques. While cities account for more than 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions in the world, it is also in cities that are found hubs of creativity and innovation at the forefront of more responsible production and consumption patterns to combat changing climate. Several of the 246 members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network demonstrate how cities can adopt more sustainable practices for individual or collective action, reduce the carbon footprint of the cultural and creative industries or spark debate about climate change through a wide array of creative fields from literature to design and gastronomy. Culture-based approaches can help shift the focus of climate negotiations from competing interests to shared values and the common good. As such, culture can have an impact on diverse policy areas related to urban planning, food security, social inclusion or tourism.

●●● *Culture for Dialogue and Peace*

As the world is faced with the increasing magnitude and complexity of conflicts and protracted crises – further amplified by the current pandemic – culture should be more systematically harnessed for conflict prevention and reconciliation, building on its soft power and fundamental vocation as a federating force. In that perspective, respect for cultural diversity should be understood as an asset for cohesion and stability, rather than being seen as a threat or instrumentalized for divisive purposes. In order to reduce communities' vulnerability to external

shocks and strengthen social cohesion, fostering the appropriation, safeguarding and transmission of culture and heritage values, identities and memory is critical, notably by building on museums and heritage sites as places of knowledge. As a critical condition for cultural diversity to flourish, the protection of cultural rights is equally central to sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies, building on existing achievements, notably as part of the UNESCO Culture Conventions. Looking forward, expanding policy discussions on cultural rights, including individual and collective rights, and strengthening related policy and legislation options, will be an important area of policy discussion and a critical foundation for harnessing the power of culture for peacebuilding and dialogue.