

Open Letter to the EU Commission and the Member States, demanding support for the Cultural and Creative Sectors, particularly cultural creators, affected by the COVID-19 crisis

The Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) all over Europe are hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Live events and performances had to be cancelled, while most cultural venues were forced to close their doors. Cultural creators are severely affected by the discontinuation of their exhibition and performance opportunities. In sectors characterised by self-employment, freelancing and job flexibility, combined with little or no access to social benefits, the loss of income poses a direct and immediate threat to the existence of authors, performers and all cultural operators, many of which had already been struggling well before the current emergency.

In times of crisis, culture is more important than ever. With millions of citizens confined in their homes, it is music, films, books and online performances that represent a source of solace and hope. They are an essential factor of psychological well-being and play a key role in strengthening the sense of community and inclusivity of our society. Without immediate action, the negative consequences of this crisis will affect much more than our economy. We might not be able to recover from this “culture shock” for many years, losing much of the richness and diversity of the European cultural scene.

It is our responsibility to protect and support the cultural ecosystem and creators all over Europe in order to ensure that they can continue to create culture, during these difficult times and in the future.

We call on the European Commission and the Member States to take immediate action in a coordinated manner and do whatever it takes to mitigate the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the Cultural and Creative Sectors, especially independent creators as well as small and medium-sized enterprises and associations. Proactive, large-scale and integrated measures across all policy areas are necessary to make a strong and sustained impact, both in the short and in the long term.

In the short run, we demand the following immediate and unbureaucratic initiatives:

- Offer financial aid to the Cultural and Creative Sectors and the whole cultural ecosystem, including through the *Corona Response Investment Initiative*, proportionally to the size of the CCS in our economy.
- Ensure access to unemployment and other social benefits for all cultural professionals, with particular attention to freelancers, self-employed and others in atypical forms of work, including creators coming from cultural minorities, and grant them compensation for the discontinuation of income.
- Provide emergency aid to cultural professionals, especially the independent ones, as well as to small and medium-sized cultural companies, for example in the form of tax relief, loans, (micro-)credits, compensation for losses and non-recoverable costs.
- Implement fiscal measures to relieve the pressure on the CCS and stimulate a recovery in the consumption of cultural services.

Once the COVID-19 crisis is over, the EU must:

- Set up an adequately funded stimulus package for cultural creators all over Europe in order to tackle the long-term effects on the CCS. This package should also include legal facilitation for the mobility of artists and their works, e.g. regarding taxation and visa regulations.
- Protect the CCS from future shocks, in particular by reinforcing its social dimension and adapting rules on social security and labour rights, taking into account the diversity of the CCS workforce.
- Increase public funding to arts and culture while also ensuring their access to other sources of finance, for example by reinforcing the availability of *CCS Guarantee Facility*.

The *Multiannual Financial Framework* (MFF) also represents an important instrument to support and revitalise the CCS. We call for a swift adoption of an ambitious MFF, investing more in the arts and culture through the *Cohesion and Values* heading.

Culture is building the resilience of our societies through unprecedented and challenging times. Will we be able to protect the Cultural and Creative Sectors and the creators within from the devastating economic and social impact of this crisis?