

Brussels, 26th March 2020

Authors' Organisations Joint Statement on COVID-19 Crisis

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravages our societies, including the cultural and creative sectors, authors' organizations stand in solidarity with all those affected by the virus and we support measures taken to contain it.

Our members – writers of all kinds, composers, songwriters, directors and cinematographers – have seen their industries come to a standstill and their livelihoods vanish in a matter of days. We urge decision-makers to include specific measures to help self-employed and freelance authors as they devise emergency measures in support of the Cultural and Creative industries heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

As governments and public agencies are starting to announce much-needed support measures for businesses at risk, we urge decision-makers to avoid creating a worrying inequality between the employed and self-employed workers and freelance community.

Authors are not businesses nor employees and already face precarious working conditions and unstable income. They work, whichever sector they are in, from contract to contract, and those contracts are now being suspended or cancelled. We also believe that few working professional artists / authors have any resources – savings, investments, pensions – that they can rely on in difficult times.

As such, several essential issues need to be considered in devising specific support to help mitigate the impact of the ongoing crisis on the creative community:

- Loss of work (postponed/cancelled ongoing work, or work that was due to start).
- Limited ability to work due to illness, self-isolation or caring responsibilities (children, vulnerable persons).
- Limited ability to work due to specificities of the craft (e.g. access to required equipment, crew, ability to travel).
- Financial impact of work loss e.g. uncertainty on ongoing contracts' payments, reduced rates, compensation for contract termination, insurance.
- Managing living costs (rent, utilities, mortgage, loans, etc).
- Freelance authors' access to unemployment schemes or welfare benefits aimed at people without any income who do not have rights to unemployment benefits.
- Securing future work, including alternative employment in or outside the sector.

As a result, **emergency measures should include:**

- Immediate access to full sick pay including isolation periods for freelance workers,
- Possibility for authors to be covered by public health insurance during the crisis and the aftermath,
- Adjustment of unemployment schemes where available to ensure continued access,
- Immediate access to guaranteed basic income such as welfare benefits aimed at people without any income who do not have rights to unemployment benefits,
- Options for replacement income for the crisis period,
- Deferment/support for living costs (e.g. rent, mortgage, loans),
- Tax relief.

We call on the European institutions and all public authorities across Europe to ensure that such measures aimed at supporting freelancers, including authors, are encouraged and financially supported, with temporary amendments or exceptions of existing rules where necessary. We also encourage the EU to swiftly assess the devastating impact of this crisis on authors and provide recommendations to overcome their specific challenges.

As the current situation will also severely impact authors' royalties payments, we welcome the announcements of emergency social funds from collective management organisations (CMOs) and encourage the use of non-distributable funds, private copying levies or cultural deductions to support authors during this unprecedented crisis.

While use of our work diminishes in public spaces it increases dramatically online. Arts and entertainment, the result of our work as creators, turns out to have a hugely important role in helping society to manage in times of crisis.

In this context, sustained royalties' payment will play a key stabilizing role for European authors' income: it has never been more necessary for authors to share in the economic success of their works and therefore to implement the principle of appropriate and proportionate remuneration a mandatory rule preventing the widespread malpractice of buy-out contracts in Europe.

Last but not least, we encourage all EU institutions to ensure that emergency funds provided by the EU are available to authors and to finally agree on a future EU budget (Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027) that can match Europe's cultural needs and ambitions.

As we stand in solidarity with those directly affected by the virus and on the frontlines, this unprecedented global crisis puts us all, individually and collectively, to the test. With fit-for-purpose support from EU and national authorities, we want to believe in the ability of our sectors to recover from this unprecedented crisis. As authors, our desire to create vibrant and diverse works for audiences across Europe and beyond will certainly drive us to find the necessary means to do so.

The European Composer and Songwriter Alliance (ECSA) represents over 30,000 professional composers and songwriters in 27 European countries. With over 60-member organizations across Europe, the Alliance speaks for the interests of music creators of art & classical music (contemporary), film & audiovisual music, as well as popular music. composeralliance.org/

The European Writers' Council (EWC) is the federation of 41 European national organisations of professional writers and literary translators in all genres in 31 countries. EWC's members represent more than 150,000 authors in the book sector. europeanwriterscouncil.eu/

The Federation of European Film Directors (FERA), founded in 1980, represents film and TV directors at European level, with 47 directors' associations as members from 35 countries. We speak for more than 20,000 European screen directors, representing their cultural, creative and economic interests. www.filmdirectors.eu/

The Federation of Screenwriters Europe (FSE) is a network of national and regional associations, guilds and unions of writers for the screen in Europe, created in June 2001. It comprises 25 organisations from 19 countries, representing more than 7,000 screenwriters in Europe. federationscreenwriters.eu/

IMAGO is a global umbrella Federation for cinematographers supporting our members and their art through affiliation, participation and advocacy. www.imago.org/