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RE | SHAPING POLICIES FOR CREATIVITY

We share, we act, we build

2026

MONITORING FRAMEWORK OF THE 2005 CONVENTION

ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	Ensure the sovereign right of States to adopt and implement policies to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions, based on informed, transparent and participatory processes and systems of governance	Facilitate equitable access, openness and balance in the flow of cultural goods and services as well as the free movement of artists and cultural professionals	Recognize the complementarity of economic and cultural aspects of sustainable development	Respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of expression, information and communication as a pre-requisite for the creation and distribution of diverse cultural expressions
GOALS	SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE FOR CULTURE	ACHIEVE A BALANCED FLOW OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES AND INCREASE THE MOBILITY OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS	INTEGRATE CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS	PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
2030 SDGs	4 QUALITY EDUCATION; 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH; 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS; 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH; 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES; 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH; 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	5 GENDER EQUALITY; 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
EXPECTED RESULTS	National policies and measures support creation, production, distribution and access with regard to diverse cultural activities, goods and services and strengthen informed, transparent and participatory systems of governance for culture	National policies and measures, including preferential treatment, facilitate a balanced flow of cultural goods and services and promote the mobility of artists and cultural professionals around the world	Sustainable development policies and international cooperation programmes integrate culture as a strategic dimension	International and national legislation related to human rights and fundamental freedoms is implemented and promotes gender equality and artistic freedom

AREAS OF MONITORING	***Cultural and creative sectors***	***Media diversity***	***Digital environment***	***Partnering with civil society***	***Mobility of artists and cultural professionals***	***Flow of cultural goods and services***	***Treaties and agreements***	***National sustainable development policies and plans***	***International cooperation for sustainable development***	***Gender equality***	***Artistic freedom***
CORE INDICATORS	Policies and measures support the development of dynamic cultural and creative sectors	Policies and measures support diversity of the media	Policies and measures support digital creativity, enterprises and markets	Measures strengthen the skills and capacities of civil society	Policies and measures support the outward and inward mobility of artists and cultural professionals	Policies and measures support balanced international flows of cultural goods and services	Trade and investment agreements refer to the Convention or implement its objectives	National sustainable development policies and plans include action lines to support diverse cultural expressions	Development cooperation strategies include action lines to support diverse cultural expressions	Policies and measures promote gender equality in the culture and media sectors	Policies and measures promote and protect freedoms of creation and expression and participation in cultural life
	Policy-making is informed and involves multiple public bodies	Policies and measures support diversity of content in the media	Policies and measures facilitate access to diverse cultural expressions in the digital environment	Civil society is involved in the implementation of the Convention at national and global levels	Operational programmes support the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, notably from developing countries	Information systems evaluate international flows of cultural goods and services	Other agreements, declarations, recommendations and resolutions refer to the Convention or implement its objectives	Policies and measures support equity in the distribution of cultural resources and inclusive access to such resources	Development cooperation programmes strengthen creative sectors in developing countries	Monitoring systems evaluate levels of representation, participation and access of women in the culture and media sectors	Policies and measures promote and protect the social and economic rights of artists and cultural professionals

ACTIONS

Strategic decisions of the governing bodies implemented • *Awareness raised* • *Partnerships and networks established, strengthened and fostered* • *Public debates organized*
Information and data collected, analysed and shared • *Policy analysis, benchmarking and monitoring ensured* • *Global reports produced*
Capacities and skills reinforced • *Technical assistance and policy advice provided* • *Projects financed*

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SHORT SUMMARY

Making Creativity Matter

The future of creativity stands at a critical juncture. Today, most countries have established public bodies with mandates and budgets for culture, yet public funding for culture accounts for less than 0.6% of GDP. While the global trade in cultural goods reached US$254 billion in 2023, it is mostly dominated by the Global North. Furthermore, development aid for culture accounts for just 0.15% of total aid.

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the creative landscape. Never has creative content been so abundant, nor the tools so widely accessible. Yet for many, stable employment and fair pay are out of reach.

These technological shifts are widening existing digital divides. In developed countries, 67% of individuals hold essential digital skills as opposed to only 28% in developing contexts. At the same time, the proliferation of AI-generated content, online harassment and censorship generate an increasingly hostile environment for creators, especially women, Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable communities.

Cultural goods trade is valued at US$254 billion in 2023

These challenges urgently call for collaborative global governance. As part of the Convention's critical platform for policy dialogue, *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* contributes to this collective endeavour. It offers updated insights on how countries are navigating these challenges and evidence-based recommendations to inspire policy action.

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'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

Foreword

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Khaled El-Enany
Director-General of UNESCO

The diversity of cultural expressions is not a privilege reserved for the few. It is a condition of human dignity for all.

For nearly a decade, the *Re|Shaping Cultural Policies for Creativity* report has accompanied this ambition. It has become a unique global reference, offering a clear and comparative picture of how States are working to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

Published eighty years after the creation of UNESCO and two decades after the adoption of the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, this fourth edition draws on 133 periodic reports and nearly 4,000 policies and measures implemented between 2021 and 2024 to offer a clear-eyed assessment of the paths taken.

The report reveals a central tension. While all reporting countries have now integrated culture into public policy – with dedicated ministries and expanded legal protections –, inequalities persist, and opportunities remain unevenly distributed. This is especially true for artists in low- and middle-income countries, who still face major barriers to mobility, infrastructure and access to markets, despite a cultural goods sector valued at US$254 billion in global trade. Gender gaps also endure, with nearly half of leadership roles now held by women, yet with strong regional disparities.

Investment remains limited, and funding is under pressure, with only 0.15% of development aid currently directed towards culture. At the same time, digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are transforming how culture is created and shared. They offer new opportunities, but few safeguards: of 148 AI laws adopted globally, only one places culture at its core – raising serious questions about how diversity and human rights are upheld in the digital era.

In response to these challenges, UNESCO is taking concrete action. At the forefront of cultural policy development, the 2005 Convention has inspired ambitious initiatives worldwide. More than 8,100 measures have been identified – ranging from broadcasting quotas to financing schemes, from artist residencies to content export strategies. This momentum is also driven by the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, which has supported 164 projects in 76 countries since 2010, including 71 projects in Africa. It has been further reinforced with MONDIACULT 2022 and 2025, which reaffirmed culture as a global public good, inseparable from human rights and sustainable development.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Government of Sweden and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for their continued support for this report.

Preserving the diversity of cultural expressions is about defending the very idea that every culture has something to say. It is about ensuring that all people, everywhere, have the freedom to create, to participate, and to be represented. That is the promise of the 2005 Convention. That is the commitment we renew with this report.

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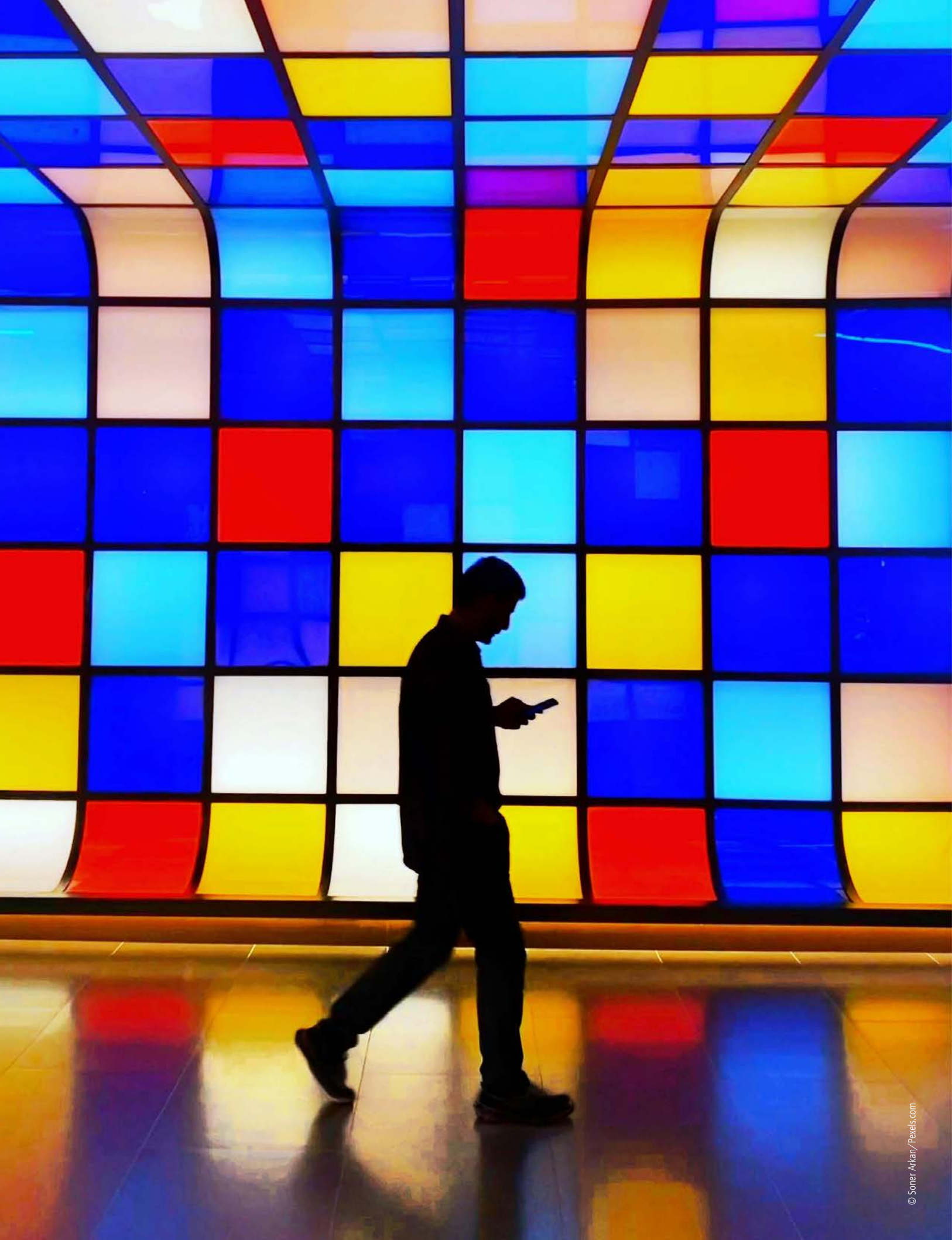

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Introduction

We share, we act, we build

Ernesto Ottone R.
UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture

LOOKING BACK

'Anniversaries are a time for reflection and planning' was the opening line of the inaugural edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report. The timing is especially meaningful for this fourth edition, as it coincides with the 2005 Convention's twentieth anniversary, marking two decades since its adoption by the General Conference on 20 October 2005.

When the *Re|Shaping* report was first published in 2015, it was hailed as 'likely to be a milestone in the advancement of cultural policy research across the world' (UNESCO, 2015), because, until then, no report at the global level had existed to monitor national cultural policies in the field of the diversity of cultural expressions.

UNESCO has been at the forefront of cultural policy development since the 1960s, beginning with its Round-Table Meeting on Cultural Policies in 1967, followed by the publication of the seminal volume *Cultural Policy – a Preliminary Study* (UNESCO, 1969) and a series of reports on national cultural policies prepared by UNESCO Member States through the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, the need for evaluation methods and statistical indicators persisted over the years, particularly as the sector lacked robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

The process of monitoring the Convention's implementation was put in place in 2011, and the first Quadrennial Periodic Reports were submitted in 2012. However, an important barrier to the implementation of the Convention was the lack of baseline data on cultural policies and cultural and creative industries that could inform policy making. In 2014, UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service recommended initiating work towards developing an overall results framework for the Convention, including objectives, indicators and benchmarks (UNESCO, 2014) to capture evolving trends and respond to changing contexts. This recommendation prepared the ground for the birth of the Convention's Monitoring Framework, structured around four goals and 11 areas of monitoring, which have been the backbone of the Convention's knowledge production and sharing for the past decade.

The Monitoring Framework was designed 'to share, not compare' (UNESCO, 2015), and the guiding principles and values underpinning the Convention have shaped its four monitoring goals, which encompass sustainable systems of governance for culture; the balanced flow of cultural goods and services and the mobility of artists and cultural professionals; the integration of culture within sustainable development frameworks; and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The four monitoring goals are rooted in the Convention's scope and its vision for the cultural ecosystem, guiding data collection to identify emerging trends and challenges that inform cultural policies and initiatives worldwide. Their strength lies in the distinct perspectives they bring to the creative sector, allowing for a nuanced understanding of its current state and what it could become with – or without – appropriate action.

Each edition of the *Re|Shaping* report has introduced its own innovation. This fourth edition breaks new ground by presenting a longitudinal analysis over the years, while also tracking progress and setbacks since its last edition in 2022. Drawing on 133 reports representing 3,908 policies and measures collected between 2021 and 2024, this edition benefits from a data volume increase of 87% compared with the first edition and 115% more than the second, providing a more comprehensive and representative perspective of global cultural policies. While this allows us to measure what has improved or stagnated, persistent 'data deserts' highlight critical gaps in global monitoring.

UNESCO's leadership in global cultural governance

As we marked the twentieth anniversary of the 2005 Convention in 2025, a historic milestone was reached: 100% of reporting countries now have established ministries or agencies dedicated to culture. Furthermore, 92% of Parties now have mechanisms facilitating interministerial cooperation, and the proportion of countries with institutions responsible for collecting cultural statistics has risen to 81%. These milestones, driven by UNESCO's sustained advocacy, confirm the significant progress in establishing strong governance frameworks that provide a foundation for evidence-based and participatory policy making.

In this context, UNESCO's convening of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT) has been central to strengthening global cultural governance. As a unique multilateral forum for policy dialogue, MONDIACULT has reaffirmed culture as a global public good, integral to human rights and sustainable development, while also advancing the production of up-to-date cultural data at national and international levels. This leadership has culminated in the systematic integration of culture into the highest United Nations policy fora, including the landmark Pact for the Future (2024). However, this institutional progress has not yet been fully reflected in international trade agreements. Among the 269 trade agreements concluded since 2005, only 3% explicitly reference the 2005 Convention.

Structural imbalances and mobility barriers

While we celebrate institutional gains, the cultural sector remains hindered by deep-seated structural imbalances and vulnerabilities. Despite increases in direct government funding for culture in developing countries, the global average remains below 0.6% of gross domestic product. International funding is critically low: in 2022, only 0.15% of Country Programmable Aid went to culture and recreation, and between 2006 and 2022, the cultural and creative industries received only a small share of Aid for Trade.

These constraints are epitomized by a persistent 'visa wall' that restricts the movement of artists from the Global South. While 96% of developed countries support outward mobility, only 38% facilitate inward mobility from developing nations. In parallel, funding constraints are stifling not only government programmes but also civil society initiatives, with 67% of organizations reporting direct impacts from funding cuts – particularly organizations supporting human rights, democracy, gender equality and inclusive participation.

Finally, the near collapse in foreign direct investment stock in developing countries after 2020 further highlights a growing investment gap. Combined with ongoing resource shortages and limited institutional capacity, this gap continues to limit many countries' ability to fully protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

Rights, equality and protection gaps

Culture is fundamental to social equity, inclusion and cohesion. It underpins human rights and freedoms, and is essential for building just, peaceful and sustainable societies. To this end, countries are urged to strengthen cultural policies and institutions so that culture reaches all communities and addresses structural inequalities.

Within this framework, progress on gender equality, a priority for UNESCO, remains uneven. While women's leadership in national arts and cultural institutions has risen globally from 31% in 2017 to 46% in 2024, wide disparities remain between developing countries (30%) and developed countries (64%). The share of countries with ministries or government bodies addressing gender equality for artists and cultural professionals has declined slightly from 72% to 69%, with the sharpest declines in developing countries.

Furthermore, formal recognition of rights does not always translate into effective protection. Although over 90% of Parties now report legal guarantees for artistic expression, violations are rising – including the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) to intimidate and silence artists by exhausting them financially and psychologically. These legal pressures, alongside a 7 percentage point decline in independent monitoring bodies in certain regions, contribute to self-censorship and a pervasive chilling effect. Continued strategic action is therefore required to advance equality in the sector and ensure that artistic freedom moves from mere legal recognition to enforceable practice.

The digital environment and AI governance

The digital environment, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), is reshaping cultural creation, production, distribution and access. While 85% of Parties now implement digital cultural strategies, a 'regulatory vacuum' persists regarding Generative AI. Only 48% of Parties report measures to develop statistics or studies on access to digital media, and out of 148 bills on AI passed globally, only one identifies culture as its primary subject matter.

At the same time, the economic and professional impacts on creators are increasingly evident. While digital-source revenues now account for 35% of creators' income, an overwhelming 79% of cultural professionals perceive AI as a threat to their livelihoods, citing the unlicensed use of copyrighted data and the potential devaluation of human creativity.

Yet, digital tools and AI offer significant opportunities – to democratize access to cultural experiences, revitalize heritage and foster innovative cultural expressions. Realizing these benefits requires targeted investment in digital and AI literacy for cultural professionals, enabling creators to engage with these technologies ethically while maintaining cultural integrity. Unequal access risks deepening global disparities, highlighting the importance of UNESCO's multilateral, cross-sectoral governance approach. In this regard, the UNESCO 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of AI provides a framework for aligning algorithmic governance with human rights and cultural sovereignty, while protecting cultural diversity from content homogenization.

Bridging the action gap

Trade in cultural goods has nearly doubled since 2005, reaching US$254.28 billion in 2023. Developing countries have recorded an average growth rate of 8.5% for cultural goods and now account for 20% of global trade in cultural services. However, this progress is threatened by an over 95% contraction in the annual growth rate of foreign direct investment stock among developing countries.

At policy level, a disconnect exists between formal recognition of the cultural and creative industries in National Development Plans or National Sustainable Development Plans and concrete engagement. While 93% of Parties involve cultural bodies in national planning, only 25% of reported measures integrating culture into sustainable development frameworks have been evaluated, limiting accountability and opportunities for learning. Furthermore, expectations regarding culture's contribution to environmental outcomes have fallen to 11%.

To address this action gap, UNESCO is spearheading global action through the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action at COPs 28, 29 and 30, mainstreaming culture as an indispensable tool for societal transformation and climate resilience.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE POST-2030 AGENDA

As the twentieth anniversary of the 2005 Convention is marked, we stand at a strategic turning point. The global creative landscape has been fundamentally transformed, and the pace of change will only accelerate. This report invites policy makers and civil society to move beyond symbolic recognition and fully integrate culture as a driver of sustainable development, economic growth, peace and social cohesion, and to embed culture as a global public good within the post-2030 framework.

Protecting the diversity of cultural expressions is a shared responsibility – one that requires reinforcing interministerial cooperation, mobilizing resources for equitable cultural participation and bridging structural barriers to ensure creative voices thrive, for present and future generations. UNESCO reaffirms its unwavering commitment to strengthening the creative ecosystem, harnessing culture for inclusive development and safeguarding the diversity that makes our world resilient.

The Convention, 20 years later: progress made, many challenges still to face

Jordi Baltà Portolés
Principal Editor

This fourth edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report marks 20 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and ten years since the report was first published in 2015. It provides a vantage point from which to examine how the core architecture of cultural governance has matured, how the challenges identified have evolved, and how the global landscape for cultural ecosystems, creativity and diversity has changed.

STRONGER POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE – ALONGSIDE OLD AND NEW CHALLENGES

One of the main aims of the Convention is to enable Parties to adopt policies and measures that protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions, through the establishment of sustainable systems of governance for culture. As this report shows, the building blocks for the design and implementation of policies aligned with the Convention now exist in a large majority of countries – to an extent that has never been seen before within the framework of the Convention.

Several core indicators show that a large majority of Parties have established the necessary policy infrastructures, including decentralization of responsibilities for culture at the local or regional level, policies in areas related to digital aspects, and the legal recognition of artistic freedom. They have also adopted plans and programmes in key areas, including export strategies for cultural goods and services, and national sustainable development plans. While these foundations are solid, the report shows that interministerial collaboration nonetheless exposes coordination challenges within existing institutional frameworks.

It is also encouraging to see that, in several cases, developing countries are taking the lead in policy adoption, and narrowing the gap with developed countries. On average, their public funding for culture has increased, even if the global trend reflects a long-term and continuous decline. Similarly, their efforts to involve civil society organizations in policy making have strengthened, even as participatory monitoring mechanisms face new challenges at the national level.

Alongside these positive developments, the report also sheds light on areas where progress has stalled or emerging challenges demand new policy responses. One recurring issue is the limited engagement of ministries of culture in cross-cutting domains that impact on the diversity of cultural expressions. Today, protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions requires influence over digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategies, international trade negotiations and related agreements, the provision of visas, and social protection systems adapted to the needs of artists and culture professionals. Several chapters in this report show that much remains to be done, particularly in translating interministerial mechanisms into effective and tailored policies across government.

Likewise, whereas the report demonstrates civil society's involvement in policy debates in many countries, it also points to the need for more structured and permanent governance arrangements involving civil society alongside governments, and demonstrating mutual trust. Civil society activities, however, are increasingly hampered by restrictive legislation and reduced civic space – trends that the report highlights as a significant threat to the long-term resilience of cultural ecosystems.

EVOLUTION OF CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THE 2022 REPORT

Since the last *Re|Shaping* report assessment in 2022, the digitization of cultural content has evolved from an emergency pandemic response into a set of permanent structural shifts. In this context, this report presents initiatives aimed at improving working conditions and adapting policy approaches to the digital environment to strengthen skills and enable more sustainable business models.

The structural challenges observed four years ago – including the digital divide, gender inequality and labour precarity – remain largely relevant as AI continues to gain ground. These areas demand reinforced attention in the coming years. In a context of increasing demands on governments' policy priorities, effective policy making will depend on more robust dialogue and collaboration between governments and civil society, as well as the allocation of adequate resources.

THE PERVASIVE IMPACTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence is a cross-cutting force in this report, reflecting how cultural practices are being deeply transformed. Algorithms now determine how diverse cultural content is distributed, accessed and discovered, with significant implications for public debate. Addressing these challenges – and the potential opportunities they create – calls for integrated policy responses that encompass technological, economic, social, educational and ethical considerations.

This requires sustained interministerial collaboration, as well as partnerships among public, private and civil society stakeholders, to safeguard human creativity and the diversity of cultural expressions in an increasingly AI-driven landscape.

Given the pervasive nature of AI-related challenges, responsive policies and measures should also operate at multiple levels. This report explores a technical roadmap that includes updated regulatory frameworks, capacity-building initiatives and the development of ethical guidelines. These actions, supported by international agreements, are essential to ensure that Parties can effectively implement policies that protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory.

SHIFTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE GLOBAL SCENE

At the heart of the 2005 Convention is the aim to balance global cultural relations and ensure sustainable cultural ecosystems representative of cultural diversity. Data presented in this report, particularly in Chapter 6 on the flow of cultural goods and services, show that trade in cultural goods has become more balanced over the years, due to the stronger position of upper-middle-income developing countries. Several chapters also point to a significant increase in South-South cultural cooperation connecting developing countries.

Meanwhile, lower-middle-income countries and Least Developed Countries remain under-represented in the trade of cultural goods and services. This continues to be a significant weakness and a cause for concern. So too is the limited attention devoted to culture in international development cooperation – a gap that calls for more integrated strategic planning and market-access support to ensure the participation of Least Developed Countries in the global creative economy.

Furthermore, as in previous editions, this report confirms the very limited application of the principle of preferential treatment enshrined in Article 16 of the Convention. Beyond practical barriers to mobility, developed countries often lack structured mechanisms to facilitate access for cultural goods, services and professionals from the Global South. Addressing this requires a technical roadmap centred on systemic monitoring, interministerial coordination and international cooperation, in order to move beyond ad hoc measures towards binding commitments.

In the global scene, this period has been marked by aggravated armed conflicts, the climate crisis and attacks on the multilateral order. Support for the diversity of cultural expressions therefore faces a complex and paradoxical reality. While awareness of human rights, gender equality and artistic freedom is growing, many societies are experiencing a backlash against equity and diversity, alongside rising digital threats against diverse voices. These trends directly shape the environment in which policies for diversity are being developed and implemented, underscoring the need for stronger recognition of culture as a global public good in international agendas. This need becomes particularly evident in areas such as the shifting discoverability of diverse content in the media, the emergence of new factors prompting artists to cross international borders and the feasibility of adopting trade agreements that recognize the intrinsic value of diversity.

In response to this changing landscape, and to the challenges that affect the diversity of cultural expressions at the global level, this report advocates for stronger inter-agency collaboration, connecting UNESCO with international and regional partners to strengthen the multilateral framework of the Convention. Furthermore, a stronger recognition of culture within global agendas – reaffirming its status as a global public good, as stated in the UNESCO *Global Report on Cultural Policies* (2025) – is essential to provide the necessary strategic backing to support diversity in both domestic and global policy.

THE NEED TO CONTINUE IMPROVING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The *Re|Shaping* report series serves to analyse trends and facilitate the exchange of information and policy approaches among Parties, researchers and practitioners. To this end, successive editions have called for improving cultural information systems – which are essential not only for this report, but also for identifying needs on the ground and for evaluating the effectiveness of policies and measures.

While this report presents numerous innovative approaches and good practices, it also identifies persistent 'data deserts' that require more sophisticated monitoring and knowledge tools. There is a clear need to improve data availability and to evaluate policies more frequently to ensure they remain responsive to current challenges.

In light of the high proportion of positive responses to existing indicators, many authors have included in their chapters recommendations to revise the Monitoring Framework of the 2005 Convention, introducing more complex indicators that allow for a more nuanced understanding of cultural governance and that align with the strategic discussions held at the Conference of Parties to the Convention in June 2025.

Taken together, the findings in this report underscore the evolving nature of the implementation of the Convention and the necessity of regularly reassessing its tools, priorities and objectives in response to global transformations. Over the past 20 years, the 2005 Convention has significantly strengthened the global policy infrastructure around diversity by clarifying the interconnected nature of the policies needed to support the diversity of cultural expressions at both national and global level. Yet, as political, technological and social shifts continue to reshape the creative landscape, new and more sophisticated responses are required to ensure that creative voices thrive. While ten years of systematic policy monitoring marks a substantial milestone, within the broader context of UNESCO's 80-year history, this ambitious undertaking has only just begun.

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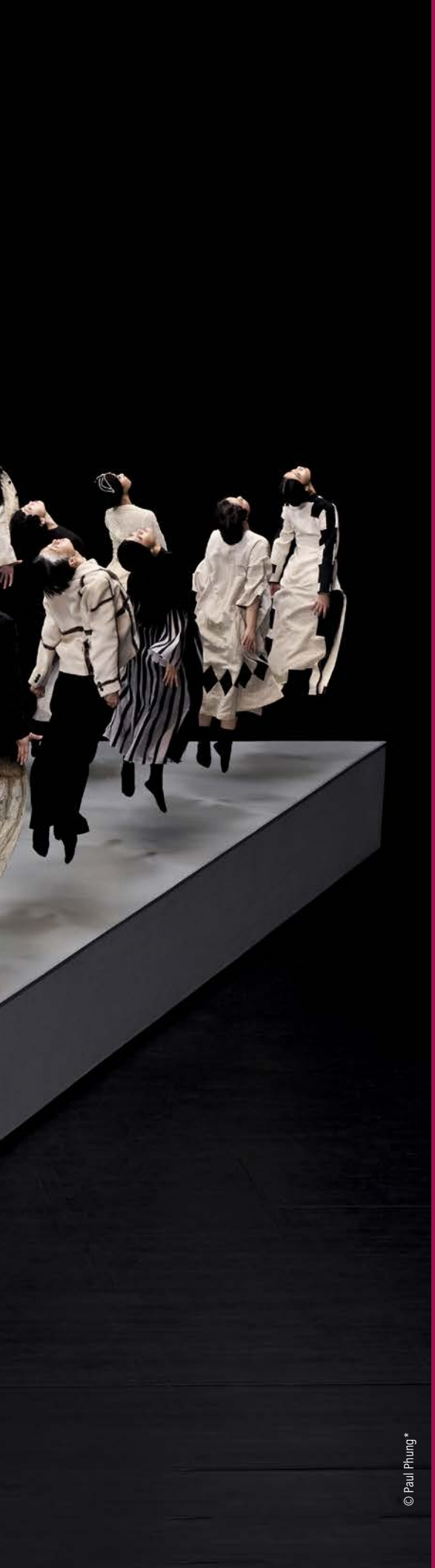


Goal 1

SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE FOR CULTURE

© Jessica Christina. Headpiece artwork by Mulyana,
attire created by Douche, featuring artist from Inspyro Moves*

Chapter 1

Building on strong foundations

Andy C. Pratt

KEY FINDINGS

- Cultural governance has strengthened significantly. By 2024, all Parties reported having a ministry or agency with responsibility and funding for culture, signalling growing acknowledgement of the need for robust institutional frameworks to support the cultural and creative sector.
- Decentralization trends are reinforcing this progress. Responsibilities for promoting the cultural and creative sectors expanded from 79% to 90% of Parties, and 92% now report having regulatory frameworks that foster interministerial cooperation. These developments indicate a broad commitment to strengthening cultural governance at multiple levels.
- Education and economic ministries are the main partners in interministerial cooperation. Education agencies now account for 28.1% of partnerships (up from 19%), and trade, economy, business and finance ministries account for 25%, reflecting a focus on leveraging the economic contributions of the cultural and creative sector. Still, a major gap remains between policy recognition and implementation in the area of innovation: although 77% of reporting countries acknowledge 'creativity and innovation' in their national sustainable development plans, only 3% of interministerial cooperation measures involve innovation-focused agencies. This disparity indicates challenges in aligning the sector's creative potential with policy frameworks that tend to prioritize technological innovation.
- Developing countries are narrowing the public funding gap, but the global average remains below 0.6% of GDP, reflecting a continuous decline in direct funding for culture globally. Developing countries have increased government spending on culture since 2018, while spending in developed countries has generally flatlined or declined since 2014. Despite this convergence, developed countries still allocate more than twice the share of their GDP to the cultural and creative sector compared to developing countries.
- Indirect public expenditures – such as tax deductions – are becoming a major policy tool for supporting the cultural and creative sector, particularly in the audio-visual sector. While direct public expenditures produce cultural goods with distinct social and cultural value, tax incentives work by reducing financial barriers for private sector investment. Yet, the impact of fiscal incentives policies is rarely examined beyond a narrow economic perspective, raising critical questions about their purpose, effectiveness and influence on the diversity of cultural expressions.
- Comprehensive and reliable data are essential for effective cultural policy making, as they enable assessment of policy results and foster evidence-based governance. The share of Parties with institutions for collecting cultural statistics has risen from 62% to 81%, and those with statistical offices or research bodies evaluating cultural policies has increased from 46% to 61%. However, their development lags behind most other areas of public policy (such as health, education and transport), and Parties frequently report challenges such as limited statistical reporting, expertise and resources for interministerial coordination.
- Cultural policy is increasingly oriented towards employment. Today 85% of Parties report job creation measures, up from 68% in the last reporting cycle. The most frequently reported measures, each cited by 29% of Parties, are integrating cultural employment into broader cultural policy strategies or national development plans and improving access to finance.
- Concerns are growing about formalizing cultural and creative sector activities within broader economy and governance frameworks. This reflects the persistent precarity of work in the sector – characterized by high levels of non-standard employment – including self-employment, part-time, secondary and intermittent work – and limited access to social benefits such as pensions, childcare and sick leave.
- Labour market data indicate that self-employment in the cultural and creative sectors can be significantly higher than economy-wide averages. While these arrangements offer flexibility, Parties note that they also create structural vulnerabilities that underscore the need for stronger formalization measures.
- Intellectual Property and copyright are critical to building resilient cultural and creative industries, yet many regions still show low respect for copyright and lack effective collective management organizations (CMOs) to collect and redistribute earnings from creative work. Coverage beyond the music sector remains particularly weak: while CMOs for music operate in just over two-thirds of Parties, only 23-24% of developing countries have CMOs covering audio-visual, literary, visual arts, photography or graphic design fields.
- Education and training in the cultural and creative sector are shifting rapidly in response to technological change and evolving labour market needs. While 83% of Parties still offer university-level programmes, as in the last reporting cycle, coverage has declined across several domains – including media arts, music, performing arts and visual arts, each domain scoring between 71% and 78%. Publishing is now the least supported at 60% in tertiary and 63% in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, followed by cultural management at 65%. This indicates a continuing education gap. In contrast, TVET programmes have expanded sharply, from 76% to 93%, addressing shortages in technical and craft skills. Cinema, audio-visual arts and design show strong growth across both tertiary and TVET offerings, reversing previous trends. Digital literacy programmes for creation and experimentation have also surged, from 49% to 63%, reflecting rapid adaptation to technological change.
- Capacity building, funding, and artist development programmes remain among the most popular measures, reported by 31.7% of Parties. Developing countries (85%) implement capacity-building initiatives more often than developed countries (79%) to help artists monetize their work, reflecting the need for more solid institutional frameworks for training and capacity building.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Robust institutional frameworks for cultural governance are crucial for:

- **Funding for culture**
- **Accessible public cultural services**
- **Effective cultural policies**
- **Interministerial cooperation**
- **Monitoring and collecting cultural statistics**

PROGRESS

100% of reporting countries indicate having a **ministry/agency** with competence and funding for culture

92% of countries have regulatory frameworks supporting **interministerial cooperation**

62% → 81%
The share of countries with institutions collecting **cultural statistics** is rising

Increased measures addressing **technical workforce and skills gaps**, with cultural TVET programmes in **93%** of countries

CHALLENGES

Less than 0.6% of **GDP** is dedicated to **direct funding for culture** globally

Cultural statistics development lags behind other areas of public policy (health, education, transport)

Precarity of work in the **creative sector** remains **persistent**

Intellectual Property and copyright frameworks remain weak, with **collective management organizations** limited in developing countries

University-level programmes have declined, especially in publishing and cultural management

EMERGING TRENDS

Indirect public expenditures are increasingly used as policy tools; however, their impact on cultural expressions **needs to be assessed**

Ministries of education and economy are emerging as main partners for **interministerial cooperation**

Cultural policy is increasingly oriented towards **employment**, with **85%** of countries reporting **job creation** measures

49% → 63%
More countries report **digital creation and experimentation literacy** programmes, reflecting adaptation to technological change

INTRODUCTION

As the cultural and creative sectors navigate an increasingly complex landscape, this opening chapter of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report examines the foundational elements sustaining creative ecosystems – governance structures, public funding, training opportunities and policy priorities observed over the course of the four years from 2021 to 2024. Framed by Goal 1 of the Monitoring Framework of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention), the chapter examines two key indicators: the extent to which policies and measures support the development of dynamic cultural and creative sectors, and the degree to which policy making is informed and involves multiple public bodies.

Since the last edition of the report in 2022, the world has undergone profound shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic initially elevated the visibility of culture as a vital part of public life and well-being. Yet, this recognition has been challenged by a cascade of global crises – armed conflicts, rising political polarization, rapid technological development and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). These overlapping pressures have strained public budgets and shifted policy priorities, often to the detriment of culture. This chapter attempts to correlate recent data with possible factors that have influenced recent trends in the governance of the cultural and creative sector.

The 20th anniversary of the 2005 Convention in 2025 offered a valuable long-term perspective. Over the past two decades, the Convention has helped shape a more holistic and integrated approach to cultural policy. By embedding culture within broader development agendas and promoting the complementarity of economic and cultural goals, it has encouraged Parties to the Convention to view culture not as a luxury, but as a driver of sustainable development, social cohesion and innovation. And there is clear evidence of progress, along with a growing recognition of the need for robust institutional frameworks to support the cultural and creative sector.

However, the short and long term, as well as the regional and global perspectives presented in this chapter, underscore that challenges persist. For example, the global average of direct funding for culture continues to decline, even though the gap between developed and developing countries appears to be narrowing for the first time in a decade. As cultural policy increasingly intersects with economic and educational agendas, new opportunities – and tensions – are emerging. Governments are exploring ways to harness the creative economy for job creation and innovation, while grappling with persistent challenges unique to the sector. At the same time, a global shift in education priorities raises pressing questions about the future of artistic talent and the role of creativity in a tech-driven world. This chapter explores these evolving dynamics and their implications for the cultural and creative sector.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR INFORMED POLICY MAKING

Institutional architecture and ministerial mandates

When Parties to the 2005 Convention first reported in 2020 on the existence of a ministry or agency with ministerial status responsible for cultural and creative sectors, the proportion of Parties with such institutions was already exceptionally high across regions, with only the Asia and the Pacific region reporting a marginally lower rate (93%). Today, all reporting countries (100%) have established ministries or agencies with competence and budgets for culture.

Box 1.1 • Azerbaijan: establishment of the Department of Creative Industries and Digital Development at the Ministry of Culture

Established in September 2021, the Department of Creative Industries and Digital Development aims to enhance the role of cultural and creative industries in national development and policy making. Key activities include strengthening the legal and policy framework for cultural and creative industries, supporting their digital transformation – particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – and leading inclusive policy dialogue with various stakeholders. Additionally, the department operates the Creative Azerbaijan web portal (www.creative.az) to promote awareness, local production and export of creative goods and services, as well as to foster a supportive ecosystem for cultural and creative industries in Azerbaijan, particularly in the digital environment.

In the same year, the Azerbaijan Creative Industries Federation was also established to coordinate the development of creative industries, manage international and local projects, and coordinate government agencies and business partners with individuals, companies and public organizations operating in the field. The Federation is mandated to carry out awareness-raising activities; support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in Azerbaijan; promote the production, promotion and export of creative products and services; support public entities in the field of creative industries; and develop initiatives within this framework.

Source: Azerbaijan QPR, 2022

While there has not been a significant change in the proportion of Parties reporting ministries or agencies with competence and budgets for culture, several Parties have reported changes in ministerial or governmental structures, including new ministries or departments being established. Where this has been reported, cultural and creative industries are placed alongside broader agendas. For example, Saint Lucia has created a combined ministry responsible for all areas of culture and creative industries, as well as information, media and broadcasting. The newly created Ministry of Tourism, Investment, Creative Industries, Culture and Information identifies the Cultural Development Foundation as its main implementing agency. Similarly, Azerbaijan has created new structures tasked with advancing both cultural and digital development (Box 1.1). Among the countries that took part in the UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators pilot phase, seven out of ten (Burkina Faso, Colombia, Costa Rica, Morocco, Philippines, Portugal and Viet Nam) reported that tourism and sports/recreation were also included within the remit of their ministries responsible for culture. Not only do the cultural and creative sectors have global recognition within the policy-making arena, but these developments also indicate a trend towards the alignment of culture and other national development strategies (a topic explored in more detail in Chapter 8).

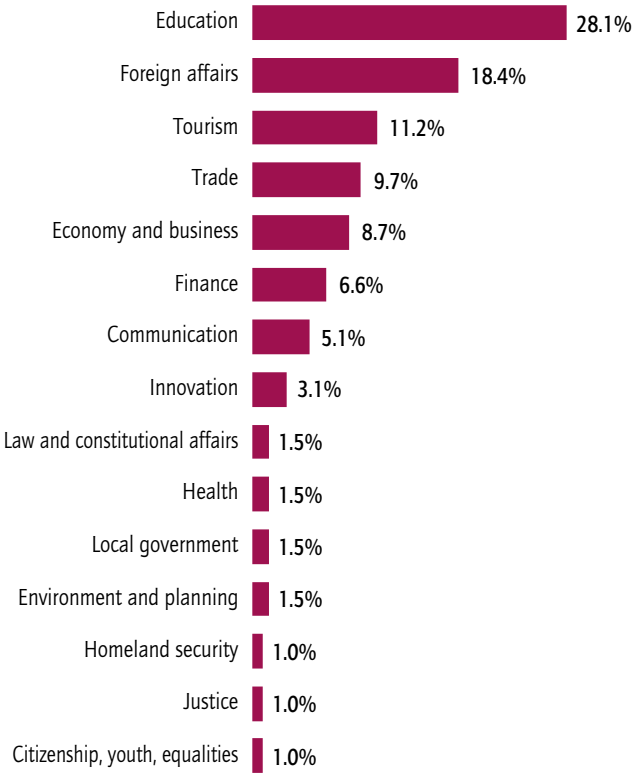
Interministerial collaboration and decentralization

A high percentage (92% globally) of countries report having regulatory frameworks that support the cultural and creative sector through interministerial cooperation, providing ongoing evidence of transversal cultural policy making. This level has remained largely stable since the last reporting period, although the share of developing countries reporting such frameworks declined slightly (from 92% in 2017-2020 to 89%). Regionally, the Latin American and Caribbean region is somewhat of an outlier, with a noticeably lower proportion of countries engaged in interministerial cooperation of this sort (76%), which has also decreased slightly from 81% in 2017-2020.

Closer analysis reveals that transversal collaboration extends across a wide range of separate policy domains (15). Of these, the most frequent partners for measures developed through interministerial cooperation were ministries and agencies in charge of education; these represented 28.1% of collaborative frameworks and measures (Figure 1.1). This represents a notable increase from the share recorded in the previous edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, when education was represented in 19% of the policies and measures designed through interministerial cooperation. Reported measures of this kind include collaboration on curriculum development and programmes to address skills gaps in the cultural workforce.

Figure 1.1

Distribution of policies and measures designed through interministerial cooperation, by remit of partnering ministries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Examples include the 'Egyptian Craftspeople' initiative, as well as scholarships for cultural professionals as seen in Indonesia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In Lithuania, the 'Cultural Passport' initiative, launched in 2018, provides each student with a set allowance for cultural education activities (11 euros for the 2024 school year). The project 'Sustainable Interaction of Culture and Education' further enhanced this initiative between 2022 and 2024, contributing to improving students' cultural competencies, with notable gains in critical thinking and creativity. It also laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation between cultural and education sectors, ensuring that cultural education becomes an integral part of student education and positioning cultural institutions as trusted providers of high-quality content in both formal and informal education settings.

The important relationship between culture and education is also reinforced through the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education, which was unanimously adopted by UNESCO Member States in February 2024 at the World Conference on Culture and Arts Education in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The Framework promotes the effective integration of culture and arts education in both culture and education policies, alongside greater cooperation across public policy areas.

Figure 1.1 also shows a clear focus on leveraging the economic dimensions and contributions of cultural and creative sectors: 25% of measures developed through interministerial cooperation involved agencies with a remit for trade, economy and business, or finance. These include measures such as tax incentives to stimulate economic activity in the cultural and creative sector and public-private partnership initiatives (Box 1.2). In Finland, a cross-sector growth agreement for the audio-visual sector was launched by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture in early 2022, while Business Finland and the Finnish Film Foundation were delegated to develop the initiative. A public-private working group was formed with representatives from the sector, with the aim to boost internationalization and sustained development within Finland's audio-visual industry. With the sector already showing upward momentum, further work continues, and the successful model has since been extended to other creative industries starting in 2023.

After education, the most frequently reported agency involved in interministerial cooperation was foreign affairs (18.4%). This is not a surprising finding; rather, it reflects a continuing trend that underscores the important role of the 2005 Convention as an international cooperation platform in the cultural and creative sector. It is worth noting that while the proportion of policies and measures developed through interministerial collaboration with foreign affairs agencies might suggest a decline from the 31% reported during the 2017-2020 period, this is solely due to the increase in the sample size, as the number of interministerial measures have doubled in the most recent reporting cycle from 120 to 240 between 2021 and 2024.

For example, since 2021, Andorra's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs have jointly implemented a 'Cultural Diplomacy' programme aimed at positioning the country as both a cultural producer and host. This targeted co-ministerial initiative has led to increased financial and governmental support for artistic residency programmes such as 'FABER' and 'ArtCamp'. For example, within the framework of 'ArtCamp', the Department of Multilateral Affairs and Cooperation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced a grant scheme for artists which supports projects that integrate art and themes of social justice and sustainable development.

International cooperation that supports the diversity of cultural expressions and sustainable development is a core principle of national cultural institutes around the world, as well as international regional organizations such as the European Union (EU). In fact, the EU's Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 includes strengthening the cultural dimension of the EU's external relations as one of its four priorities. In this context, the Cultural Relations Platform is an EU-funded initiative supporting international cultural relations and cooperation between European and global cultural and creative sectors. It was launched in 2016 for a four-year period and later extended through 2025. The Platform's mission is to strengthen the EU's ability to engage meaningfully with different audiences and stakeholders in partner countries, through enhanced cultural relations and cooperation with the cultural and creative sectors. The Cultural Relations Platform provides policy support for EU institutions; promotes and facilitates sustainable cultural exchanges, people-to-people activities and co-creation processes between European and non-European actors active in the cultural and creative sector; and builds global communities.

Box 1.2 • Colombia: developing tax incentives in support of cultural and creative industries

Colombia has implemented several tax incentives to stimulate the growth of its cultural and creative industries. The Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Knowledge, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance's Directorate of National Taxes and Customs, introduced a tax exemption for eligible companies. At the time of reporting, 1,482 companies benefited from these tax breaks. Although this programme ran only from 2020 to 2022, Colombia continues to implement tax incentives in support of the cultural and creative sectors. These are now managed through the Colombian Crea Talent Corporation (CoCrea), established in 2019, which offers a 165% income tax deduction (meaning for every 100 Colombian pesos spent, up to 165 Colombian pesos can be deducted from the company's taxable income) for private individuals and entities investing in or donating to approved cultural projects through open and public calls. As of 2024, CoCrea has issued 338 investment or donation certificates, representing contributions of 220.8 billion Colombian pesos for projects valued at more than 471 billion Colombian pesos. In addition, CoCrea has financed 221 projects related to arts, culture and heritage across 26 of Colombia's 32 departments. Colombia's Superior Council of Fiscal Policy, which sets the maximum annual amount of investments or donations eligible for the tax incentive managed by CoCrea, has approved a larger fiscal quota year after year, signalling positive outcomes.

Source: Colombia QPR, 2024

The small number of measures developed through interministerial cooperation that were designed with agencies focused on innovation (just 3%) seems to raise questions about another finding, which shows that as many as 77% of reporting countries stated in their Quadrennial Periodic Reports that 'creativity and innovation' are recognized in their national sustainable development plans. The gulf between these two responses may point to a discrepancy in how innovation is understood – particularly in a sector inherently driven by imagination and continuous creativity versus in other areas of public policy where 'innovation' is typically associated with technological advancement.

While interministerial collaboration is concerned with the transversal governance of cultural policy, the practice and delivery of the cultural and creative sectors' activities is also context based. Hence, it requires Parties to also have decentralized responsibilities for policies and measures that promote the cultural and creative sector at subnational, municipal and local levels.

Quadrennial Periodic Report data indicate extensive and growing decentralization of responsibilities for policies and measures promoting the cultural and creative sector, having risen from 79% in the previous reporting period to 90%. This trend is also identical across developed and developing countries. Examples of new policies in this area include Indonesia's decentralization of cultural responsibilities for policy development (Box 1.3). In Lithuania, ten Regional Culture Councils were established (one for each county in the country) with the aim to bring the decision-making process closer to local communities and create a coordinated network of expertise and knowledge. Since the beginning of the regional model in 2019, there has been increased trust in the Lithuanian Council for Culture as the main funding institution in the country for cultural projects, and the distribution of the funds has been increasingly democratized.

However, financial pressures can prevent devolved administrations from fulfilling their decentralized responsibilities. For instance, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), funding for culture by local governments has declined sharply over the past decade. This has been driven by an equally dramatic decline in the overall budget allocations given to local governments by the central government, which has led some local governments to withdraw entirely from supporting cultural provision (Ashton et al., 2024).

Box 1.3 • Indonesia: decentralizing responsibilities for policy development

Over the past four years, Indonesia has introduced a series of policies aimed at decentralizing cultural governance by shifting responsibilities to provincial and city or regency governments. These measures support bottom-up cultural planning, requiring each regional government to draft regional cultural white papers with community involvement and to regularly monitor their implementation. The Special Allocated Funds for Culture, managed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, now focus solely on programmatic – not physical – infrastructure support for museums and cultural parks, and their implementation is facilitated by a dedicated information system.

Overall, government affairs in the field of culture are classified as mandatory for the central government, provincial governments, and city or regency governments. In contrast, matters related to the creative economy are considered optional, with only the central government bearing mandatory responsibilities. Provincial governments and city or regency governments engage in this area according to the potential of their respective regions. These efforts contribute to national goals of reforming cultural institutions and strengthening the government's role as a cultural facilitator.

Source: Indonesia QPR, 2024

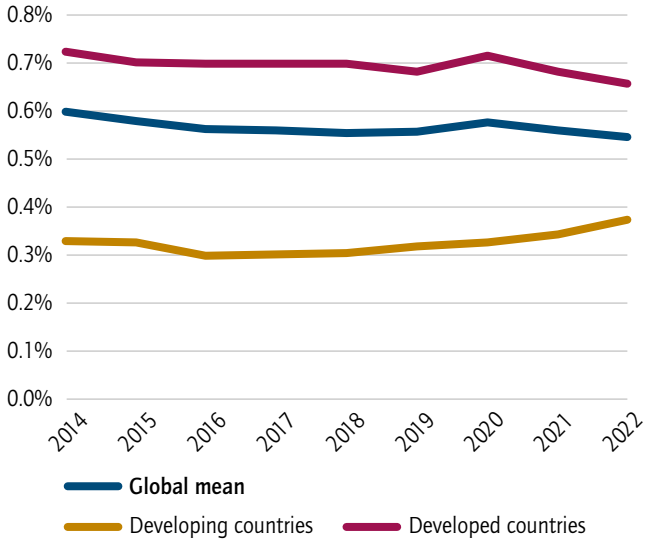
Direct funding for culture

Measuring the total value of public funding for culture is challenging due to a number of factors. For instance, the existence of transversal policy making that takes in other national government departments and agencies, coupled with the existence of public support at lower tiers of government, means that obtaining data that capture the full extent of public spending on culture is a complicated and difficult process. Adding international comparability further complicates the picture.

Data derived from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports on the state of public spending on culture, coupled with secondary data, highlight recent global trends. The longitudinal analysis in Figure 1.2 shows that, on average, more than twice the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) is spent on the cultural and creative sector in developed countries compared to developing countries.

Figure 1.2

Mean government expenditure on 08.2 Cultural Services and 08.3 Broadcasting and Publishing Services (Classification of the Functions of Government) as a percentage of gross domestic product, by developing and developed countries (2014-2022)



Source: IMF (2025) / BOP Consulting (2025)

However, there is evidence that this gap is narrowing. In developed countries, the long-term trend since 2014 has been for expenditure to flatline or decline. The only interruption to this was a short-lived uplift in 2020, as developed countries sought to protect their cultural sectors through the worst period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, in developing countries the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) data show government expenditure on culture as a percentage of GDP increasing since 2018. The Quadrennial Periodic Report data also provide examples of this, such as Botswana, which reported a budget allocation increase of nearly 59% for culture and the arts in 2024, in recognition of the 'high potential' of the sector. The Chema Chema Fund was established with US$14.7 million aimed at transforming the informal sector and creating more employment opportunities.

Encouraging private sector investment: the rise of indirect expenditures

As noted in the previous section, measuring the total value of public funding for culture is complicated due to several factors. A final element of this complication is that both the COFOG data and data reported via the Quadrennial Periodic Reports include only direct government expenditure.

Another element of government expenditure is termed 'indirect expenditure' and relates to monies that governments forego by offering favourable tax deductions for a range of economic activities. These tax deductions are offered by governments to incentivize the spending of private actors, whether firms or individuals.

Tax incentives have become a key policy tool in the audio-visual sector for many countries. Initially targeted at film production, these incentives have since expanded to cover related activities such as high-end television, visual effects, animation and often also computer games. Tax incentives – in the form of rebates, tax credits or shelters that return a share of qualifying production spending and are typically designed to encourage inward investment – work at different tiers of government. While some are national in scope, many more are decentralized and apply only at province, state, region or city level. Data that track these automatic incentives suggest that by November 2024, there were 120 such incentives in operation around the world (Olsberg SPI, 2024). While these incentives are particularly frequent in Europe and North America, they are an increasing feature of audio-visual policy globally. Recent examples include Ecuador, where the Law for Digital and Audiovisual Transformation (2023) established a comprehensive legal framework aimed at modernizing the country through digital innovation and support for the audio-visual sector; Mongolia, where film production is supported by the recent Regulation on Incentives for Foreign and Mongolian Producers (2022), Regulation on Non-Repayable Financing from the Film Promotion Fund (2022) and the Law on Promotion of Cinematography (2021); and Saudi Arabia, where in 2022 the Saudi Film Commission launched the 'Film Saudi' cash-rebate programme as a strategic initiative to position Saudi Arabia as a global hub for film production (Saudi Film Commission, 2024).

The amount of money that these indirect expenditures account for can be substantial. For instance, the United Kingdom is particularly active at a national level in its tax-relief policies for the cultural and creative sector, having begun them in 2007 and extended them repeatedly, expanding them beyond the audio-visual industries to include tax relief for new museum exhibitions and theatre productions. Between 2009/2010 and 2022/2023, the total value of tax credits in the United Kingdom grew by 649%. In 2017 to 2018, this indirect expenditure surpassed the national culture ministry's core funding of cultural organizations for the first time and has remained far above it ever since (Ashton et al., 2024).

While an increasingly important element of public policy and support for the cultural and creative sector globally, this form of public expenditure raises important questions as to the purpose and impact of public funding.

Tax incentives place governments in a market-facilitating role in which the main aim of the incentive is to reduce financial barriers and risk for the private sector to invest, while maximizing positive externalities (benefits to the overall economy rather than the producer). In contrast, direct public expenditures are focused on producing public cultural goods – such as films, screen content and animations – that carry distinctive cultural and social value and that the market would not produce on its own, or would produce in insufficient quantities. Although many countries apply a 'cultural test' to tax incentives, seeking to channel them into projects that have public cultural good characteristics (and that would be aligned with the 2005 Convention), the effect of fiscal incentive policies is rarely researched from this standpoint, as it is more regularly assessed through a narrower economic lens (for example, Econometría Consultores, 2022).

The rise of significant indirect public expenditures in culture is in large part a policy response to the transformations of the sector over the last 20 years that have already been discussed – specifically the increasing complexity, technological sophistication, and production and distribution costs, as well as the globalized supply chains, of many cultural and creative industries.

However, the use of fiscal incentives in supporting the cultural and creative sector should not be at the cost of ignoring the possible impact of these policies on the diversity of cultural expressions. Relatedly, it is also important to flag that production tax incentives are not the only way that governments can provide financial support to the cultural and creative industries. Estonia is an example where the government is using a hypothecated tax – a tax whose revenues are set aside exclusively for a specific purpose. In this case, those funds support the Cultural Endowment, the main institution responsible for distributing public funds for cultural purposes, alongside the Ministry of Culture. The Cultural Endowment receives a percentage of levies on tax, gambling and alcohol to fund cultural projects, associations and buildings.

Developing the evidence base

It should go without saying that reliable data, evidence and robust information systems are essential to effective public policy making. The use of statistics, measurement and assessment supports accountability and transparency in the use of public funds, enables appraisal of the results and effectiveness of policy actions, and is central to policy improvement. However, the development and sophistication of the data and evidence used in cultural policy making typically lags behind most other areas of public policy (health, education, welfare, transport, etc.). In part, this is driven by the fact that the cultural and creative sector represents a much smaller proportion of public spending than most other public policy areas, and this often drives political priorities. But there are also other complicating factors. Collecting cultural statistics, and particularly those associated with an expanded notion of the cultural and creative sector as an important element of contemporary economies, has been a relatively new undertaking for all countries. Cultural statistics often require considerable technical expertise to extract and repurpose from existing official sources, and they often rely on goodwill and mutual understanding across different offices of government – factors that can be challenging even in developed countries. The demand for cultural and creative data can seem expensive and hard to justify within government budgets, particularly by Parties with limited resources, and especially those that cannot already demonstrate the potential impact of the creative economy.

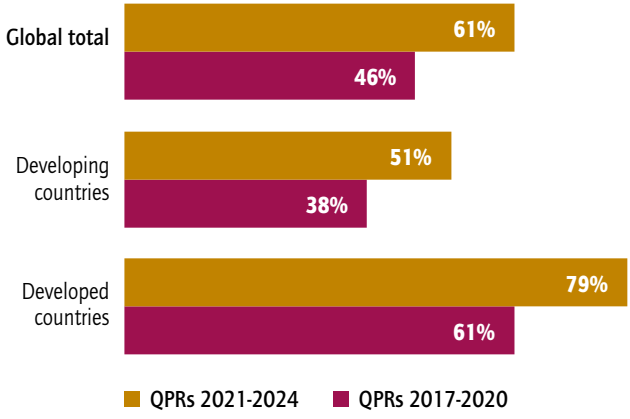
Therefore, many Parties have been on a journey of constructing cultural statistics from a minimal starting point. In the periodic reports, Parties often refer to the coordination challenges of collecting and analysing cultural statistics as it requires active interministerial coordination. Further issues noted in the reports include the lack of, or low level of, basic statistical reporting more generally (for example, Cameroon, Guatemala, Mongolia, Samoa and Timor-Leste) and the unavailability of resources to improve the situation (for example, Central African Republic, Mali and Mauritius).

Nevertheless, there has been considerable progress in Parties establishing institutions and responsibilities for collecting and maintaining cultural statistics; this share now represents 81% of countries globally, up from 62% in the previous 2017-2020 reporting period. Côte d'Ivoire provides a specific example, with the Ministry of Culture and Francophonie having launched a computerized system for collecting and managing cultural statistics. This initiative aims to address existing gaps – such as outdated data collection methods, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient infrastructure – and to continue the production of Cultural Statistics Yearbooks. These yearbooks – produced in 2018, 2020 and 2023 – support better analysis of culture's economic impact, employment trends and the growth of cultural enterprises. As a result of this process, Côte d'Ivoire has participated in regional workshops to share good practices in cultural policy and statistical evaluation systems, providing technical assistance to Benin and Togo. This work builds on a 2017 study on the socio-economic impact of culture on development in Côte d'Ivoire, which led to an increase in the Ministry's budget for culture. This shows considerable acknowledgement of the intrinsic importance of the cultural and creative sector, as well as positive commitment from the government to address the problem through the allocation of resources, even in those countries with fewer resources.

The advances in collecting cultural statistics are increasingly being matched by stronger institutional capacities within national statistical offices and cultural ministries to evaluate and analyse them. The proportion of Parties globally with statistical offices or research bodies that evaluate cultural policies is 61%, up from 46% in the previous 2017-2020 reporting period (Figure 1.3). While it should be recognized that establishing an office or responsibility is merely the first step on the journey of providing full reporting on cultural statistics, it does bode well for the longer-term construction and maintenance of an evidence base for cultural policy making.

Figure 1.3

Proportion of Parties with statistical offices or research bodies evaluating cultural policies, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

At the global level, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (adopted in 1986 and updated in 2009 and 2025) provides internationally recognized standards for cultural statistics and comparable data. The latest 2025 revision identifies 14 domains[1] within the cultural and creative ecosystem, delineating them as the 'statistical universe for measuring culture'. It standardizes terminology and concepts for a wide range of statistical operations, including censuses, surveys, administrative data, big data and qualitative methodologies, enabling a deeper understanding of the sector's complexity while reflecting national cultural contexts.

1. The 14 domains are categorized into two main groups: cultural domains and transversal domains, which together recognize the pivotal role of public, private and non-profit agents in fostering the development and sustainability of cultural practices. The seven cultural domains are 1) cultural and natural heritage, 2) performing arts, 3) visual arts and crafts, 4) books and press, 5) audio-visual, 6) design and 7) music. The seven transversal domains are 8) cultural knowledge, 9) festivals, 10) interactive media, and 11) cultural governance and management, classified as cultural transversal domains; 12) cultural education and 13) cultural tourism, categorized as partial cultural domains; and 14) a support domain for multipurpose devices and equipment essential for cultural production and dissemination.

This update also presents a timely opportunity to revise the Monitoring Framework of the 2005 Convention, a process initiated in 2025 at the request of its governing bodies.

DEVELOPMENT OF DYNAMIC CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS

Job creation and entrepreneurship support

Reporting on measures related to job creation and support for entrepreneurship is a key component of monitoring the implementation of the 2005 Convention, offering insight into the steps taken to foster a dynamic and adaptable cultural and creative sector.

Within the 2021-2024 Quadrennial Periodic Reports, there is an increasing focus on cultural policy on supporting employment: the proportion of Parties that report measures focused on job creation in the cultural and creative sector is now 85%, up from 68% in the previous 2017-2020 reporting cycle. This is likely in recognition of the significant share of total employment now represented by the cultural and creative sector in many countries. Using the responses from the periodic reports, supplemented with Eurostat data from additional countries, a combined dataset of 61 countries (39 developed, 22 developing) shows that the mean share of total employment accounted for by the cultural and creative sector was 3.6%.

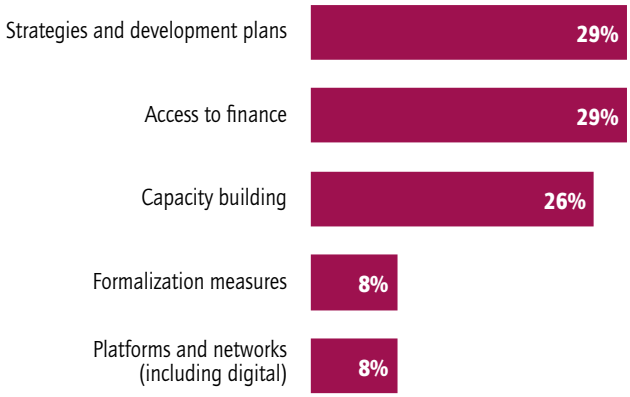
As the 2021-2024 reporting cycle overlaps with the COVID-19 pandemic, delays in statistical data collection and reporting at national levels mean the full impact of the pandemic on the cultural workforce is likely not yet reflected in the available data. While the immediate impacts of pandemic-related restrictions on social gatherings are known to have been acute for many in the cultural and creative sector workforce, longer term impacts may be apparent in future periodic reporting cycles.

The job creation measures most frequently reported by Parties encompassed cultural employment as part of a broader cultural policy strategy or national development plan, followed by access to finance, both at 29% (Figure 1.4). Access to finance measures included publicly provided financial assistance to cultural and creative sector businesses (for example, debt finance and loan guarantees, such as the European Investment Fund's Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility), as well as grants designed to improve entrepreneurship and support business growth. For instance, Chile established a co-financing fund in 2023 to strengthen micro and small creative enterprises, with the goal of improving their skills, innovation and business performance. The outputs of each project are either an early-stage scale-up, a prototype or an innovative business model.

Croatia also reported an initiative that supports the development of creative business models across the cultural and creative industries through an annual project call. The programme, entitled 'Entrepreneurship in Cultural and Creative Industries', is implemented by the Ministry of Culture and Media and represents a revitalized version of a scheme originally launched over a decade ago in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship. This updated programme aims to strengthen the capacity and competitiveness of the cultural and creative industries, boost their visibility, and foster new networking opportunities.

Figure 1.4

Most frequently reported types of job creation measures



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Measures reported by Parties for dedicated support to the creative sector sometimes overlap with support provided through more generic small and medium-sized enterprise and innovation policies. For instance, Tunisia reports a series of initiatives aimed at creating a dynamic environment for startups; it has been in operation since 2016, and was most recently reiterated in the national Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-2025. The Strategy includes 'Startup Invest', a financing framework that includes a startup guarantee fund and an incubator of management companies, among other elements. Creative startups can be supported through this programme, as can those in other sectors.

In Ecuador, the Organic Law of Culture establishes a framework for supporting artistic creation and cultural industries within the National Development Plan (2017-2021), emphasizing the significance of culture in economic development, job creation and the overall contribution of GDP, reinforcing the status of arts and culture as a priority sector in the economy. Key measures include tax deductibility (companies can deduct up to 150% of cultural investments from their income tax, effecting a return of US$1.50 for every dollar sponsored in the cultural sector); zero value-added tax (VAT) on artistic services (since 2019, artistic and cultural services have been exempt from VAT, with specific guidelines for qualifying shows and venues); and foreign-trade tax exemptions (which apply to imported goods used for artistic purposes by registered cultural entities, aimed at bolstering the cultural economy).

Viet Nam showcased the outcomes of various policies and mechanisms introduced under the Decision No. 844/QĐ-TTg (2016-2021), including the establishment of several startup ecosystem platforms, the creation of organizations supporting startup companies, the integration of business startups into educational programmes, and capacity building for ecosystem actors. These efforts paved the way for the adoption of Decision No. 188/QĐ-TTg, which aims to foster a more supportive environment for innovative startups.

These examples ably demonstrate that part of the answer to how to develop policy for dynamic cultural and creative sectors is to ensure that they are included within mainstream economic development and innovation funding. Once again, this underlines the importance of interministerial collaboration and transversal policy making. Collaboration with different departments and offices of government helps to crowd in resources to the cultural and creative sector, as well as bringing with it different expertise and capacity.

Lastly, as reported in several of the periodic reports, an important concern across many countries is the formalization of cultural and creative sector activities to bring them within the remit of the formal economy and governance. Such measures often include professionalization, accreditation or certification for cultural practitioners. In Bolivia, for example, a specific government agency has been created for this purpose: the Vice Ministry of Micro, Small Businesses and Handicrafts. It facilitates access to credit, public procurement, technical assistance and market opportunities, with a particular emphasis on community and cooperative enterprises, in sectors like textiles and leather, with the ultimate aim of integrating the micro, small, and artisanal workforce and enterprises into national economic strategies.

Box 1.4 • Clustering and creative hubs

A substantial body of international policy and research evidence indicates that geographical clusters and creative districts of cultural assets and actors – their grouping together within a given geographic area, or even within the same building – are associated with multiple benefits (Gill et al., 2019; Pratt, 2021). These include enhanced skills formation and the development of specialized local labour markets (UNESCO and UNDP, 2013), knowledge sharing and greater innovation (Jang et al., 2017) as well as stronger firm performance (Tao et al., 2019).

While clustering in the cultural and creative industries can happen organically over time, many successful clusters and cultural districts have additionally benefited from supportive, sustained and coordinated policy actions (BOP Consulting and KRIHS, 2019).

The 2021-2024 Quadrennial Periodic Reports provide examples of policy interventions of this kind. For example, Parties have reported initiatives applying the concept of clustering across an expanding range of sectors. In Viet Nam, creative hubs constitute a pillar of the country's strategy to foster creativity and innovation, shaping a dynamic ecosystem that bridges creative, educational and business communities. In Qatar, Media City was established to serve as a hub for innovation in the media and digital communication sectors. In Kenya, the Talanta Hela Digital Hub, launched in 2023, aims to 'identify, recruit, nurture, and monetize' talent in the sports and creative sectors. In South Africa, the DSAC (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture) Publishing Hub was created to support the growth of local publishing and literature, resulting in 2024 in the writing and publication of 21 new books and the translation of four titles into braille.

Clustering can also have benefits for audiences, and cultural consumption and participation. Examples of policy supporting clustering of cultural infrastructure from the 2021-2024 Quadrennial Periodic Reports include the construction of a library and archive complex in Ethiopia, and Tunisia's Cité de la Culture, a nine-hectare site bringing together cultural assets in music, opera, ballet, choreography, theatre, performing arts and literature.

Source: Ethiopia QPR, 2024; Kenya QPR, 2024; Qatar QPR, 2024; South Africa QPR, 2024; Tunisia QPR, 2024; Viet Nam QPR, 2024; Gill et al., 2019; Pratt, 2021; UNESCO and UNDP, 2013; Jang et al., 2017; Tao et al., 2019; BOP Consulting and KRIHS, 2019

Self-employment and micro-enterprises: flexibility and precarity

Designing business support for cultural enterprises can be difficult, particularly as most businesses in the cultural sector are either micro-enterprises – with a handful of workers – or freelance self-employed professionals. In the EU, where the most recent data is available, almost one-third (31.7%) of cultural workers were self-employed in 2024, compared to an average of 13.6% in the whole economy (Eurostat, 2025). Micro-enterprises have fewer resources to dedicate to both social support and business support. Self-employment has many positive aspects such as flexibility, but it also has downsides in terms of social and economic sustainability. Furthermore, it leaves industries and workers vulnerable to 'coordination' issues where labour markets and business transactions do not operate fluidly. Self-employment can cut off workers from the social support mechanisms provided in workplaces, leaving them reliant upon social networks to navigate the labour market and limiting their access to financial resources.

An area of concern for cultural and creative sector policy makers has been the precarity of work in the sector, in part due to high levels of non-standard forms of work (self-employment, part-time, secondary and intermittent employment). Countries such as France have intervened historically via policies that mitigate the problems of intermittent work patterns and payment for cultural sector workers. However, there is a wider concern with the relative lack of social benefits (compared to other sectors of the economy), such as pensions, childcare and sick pay that cultural workers can access (an issue explored in more detail in Chapter 10). These issues came to wider attention during the COVID-19 pandemic when business and job-continuity was compromised for all, but it also highlighted the intrinsic challenges that intermittent work in the cultural and creative sector manifests. This wider issue of lack of social support services for cultural workers was mentioned in reports by Austria, Côte d'Ivoire, Estonia, Jordan, Madagascar, Peru and Slovenia.

Not only does this fact affect current workers but it also dissuades new entrants, the cultural and creative sector workforce of the future. The idea of a basic income for artists has been the subject of an experimental initiative in Ireland (Box 1.5) and underpins thinking about a more sustainable pattern of cultural work. The Irish example offers an interesting test case for a 'Basic Income for the Arts' model. It emerged not only in response to the COVID-19 crisis but also from the deeper reflections contained in *A Life Worth Living: The Report of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce* (Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce, 2020), which examined the challenges of supporting and sustaining artistic careers.

This issue has become even more pressing given the widespread concerns about AI companies using the copyrighted works of artists without compensation (an issue explored in more detail in Chapter 3).

Such initiatives in Ireland and elsewhere that look to address some of the current structural labour market challenges of the cultural and creative sector represent a significant shift within cultural policy – from a dominant concern regarding cultural forms and audience experiences, to one that recognizes the interdependencies of the whole cultural ecosystem, and the situatedness of cultural workers in communities and families. Clearly, if the cultural sector is to be sustainable, independent cultural workers should be able to pursue careers that offer fair and equal opportunities and allow them to secure a dignified livelihood.

Box 1.5 • Ireland: basic income for the arts

Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme, launched in 2022, provides 2,000 artists and creative workers with a weekly income of 325 euros for three years. Emerging from the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce report during the COVID-19 crisis, *A Life Worth Living: The Report of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce*, the scheme aims to give artists stability to focus on their practice, test the viability of self-employment, and reduce reliance on social protection support. Developed through sector-wide consultation and international research, it represents a pioneering effort to address precarity in the arts while informing future government policy.

In October 2025, the Irish Government announced that the scheme would become permanent, with between 2,000 and 2,200 beneficiaries to be selected in 2026. The decision took into account the positive assessment made of the pilot project, in terms of artists' ability to devote more time to their creative practice, improved economic situation, and reduced levels of anxiety or depression. Furthermore, a cost-benefit analysis showed that society received 1.39 euros in return for every 1 euro of public money invested in the scheme.

Source: Ireland QPR, 2024; Dagg, 2025

Copyright: securing a business model for creators

Intellectual Property[2] offers a clear illustration of how formalization supports more resilient business models in the creative sector. Intellectual Property rights, especially copyright, are important to creators in two ways. First, they identify a work as an original creation belonging to a creator, giving them the right to prevent derogatory changes to the work ('moral rights'). Second, copyright is an economic right that entitles the creator to exclusively profit from their creations.

In both senses, this requires legal recognition concerning the protection of Intellectual Property and copyright, and a method and institution to collect and redistribute earnings. Central to the second action is the role of collective management organizations (CMOs). These organizations are typically non-profit entities that act as intermediaries for authors, artists and other rights holders, licensing their rights to users (for example, broadcasters) and collecting royalties the copyright owners are due from the transaction. Without their existence, it is much harder for individual artists and creators to benefit financially from the Intellectual Property that they create through their work.

As Table 1.1 shows, there is a lack of effective and functioning CMOs in many regions and countries. There is also particularly poor coverage of such organizations outside the realm of music, and even music's reach is on average just over two-thirds of Parties in 2025.

Ineffective – or inefficient – CMOs, or a lack of public respect for copyright, make it difficult to operate a creative enterprise that is based on Intellectual Property and copyright. Building trust and understanding of Intellectual Property and copyright systems takes time, and operating CMOs across all domains can be expensive. However, with digitization this cost is falling. For example, the Mexican National Institute of Copyright (Indautor) launched in 2022 the online platform INDARELÍN, which stands for *Indautor en línea* (Indautor online), to simplify and modernize the process of registering literary and artistic works. Artists and creators can complete the registration process entirely online, uploading a copy of the work and receiving an official registration certificate digitally. This online service is supported by ongoing efforts to promote and raise awareness of copyright.

2. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, 'Intellectual Property (IP) refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce. IP is protected in law by, for example, patents, copyright and trademarks, which enable people to earn recognition or financial benefit from what they invent or create. By striking the right balance between the interests of innovators and the wider public interest, the IP system aims to foster an environment in which creativity and innovation can flourish' (https://www.wipo.int/en/web/about-ip).

Table 1.1

Percentage of Parties with collective management organizations and reproduction rights organizations across cultural domains, by region and by developing and developed countries

	Any domain	AGP*	Audio-visual	Dramatic	Literary	Musical
Developing and developed countries						
Developing countries	65%	23%	24%	40%	23%	62%
Developed countries	82%	68%	62%	40%	74%	78%
Global total	**71%**	**38%**	**36%**	**40%**	**40%**	**68%**
Region						
Western European and North American States	96%	75%	67%	50%	92%	96%
Eastern European States	96%	46%	58%	46%	63%	96%
Latin American and Caribbean States	72%	34%	22%	31%	34%	69%
Asian and Pacific States	50%	31%	19%	0%	38%	44%
African States	61%	29%	32%	34%	46%	56%
Arab States	36%	0%	14%	21%	29%	29%
Global total	**71%**	**38%**	**36%**	**40%**	**40%**	**68%**

*AGP stands for *arts graphiques* et *plastiques* and covers visual arts, photography and graphic design
Source: CISAC (2025) / BIEM (2025) / IFRRO (2025) / BOP Consulting (2025)

The use of the web led to a significant increase in online registration of works, surpassing other registration methods. Between 2019 and 2023, over 212,700 works were registered. Additionally, outreach activities helped strengthen advocacy and the protection of copyright and related rights. However, once again, policies and monitoring need to focus on these detailed subdomains if comprehensive progress is to be made visible.

Box 1.6 illustrates an initiative to promote and support Intellectual Property and copyright holders based on creating knowledge of, and respect for, copyright protection. Again, this highlights how capacity building in cultural fields can be complex and must be tailored to a particular art form, place and history. The challenge is not simply legislative support, nor even institution building to facilitate a financial redistribution model. It also involves changing the everyday practice of consumers. For successful creative work and businesses, all these three components must be deployed and made to work together.

Box 1.6 • Cabo Verde and Rwanda: the Copyright Label project

The Copyright Friendly Label project, launched in 2019 by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers in Cabo Verde as a pilot country on the African continent, aimed to promote copyright compliance as an economic and cultural asset. Implemented through the local collective management organization *Sociedade Cabo-verdiana de Música* (Cape Verdean Music Society), the initiative began in Santa Maria on the island of Sal, which became the world's first city to receive the Copyright Friendly Seal. Managed by a steering committee involving national and local authorities, the label rewards cities and users who pay royalties, helping them position themselves as trusted partners to creators. The programme gained traction across Cabo Verde and saw its broader success when the 2024 African Cup of Nations incorporated copyright licensing for stadium and fan zone music through the Ivorian collective management organization BURIDA. The initiative's reach extended to Rwanda, where the Kigali Triennial and Rwanda Arts Initiative were also recognized, solidifying the label's role in supporting creative industries and responsible cultural tourism across Africa.

Source: CISAC, 2024

Education and vocational training: from STEM to STEAM

Educational and vocational training are key factors and reliable predictors of the vitality of the cultural and creative sector in any given territory. In the last decade, there has been a global shift in higher and further education towards 'STEM' subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths), as opposed to arts, humanities and social sciences. For example, between 2015 and 2018, the uptake of humanities subjects at bachelor, master's and doctoral levels declined in 24 of the 36 OECD countries (Goldstein, 2021). While policy makers justify this focus on STEM by pointing to technological change and its economic potential, this emphasis risks sidelining the value of cultural education, which also contributes significantly to social, cultural and economic development. Arts and culture rely heavily on humanities graduates, and without cultural education, both production and engagement with the arts decline. Worryingly, there has been a global decline of 10.67% in the share of arts and humanities graduates across the OECD countries over the decade from 2013 to 2023, even as the share of STEM graduates increased by 4.12% (OECD, 2024b).

However, the relationship between arts and science-based education is not an either/or choice: they are increasingly seen as complementary. This recognition has been referred to as the STEAM or STE(A)M education approach (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths). For example, Cyprus has integrated a STEAM-based curriculum into educational workshops, aiming to foster both social and technological skills among Cypriot youth. At Youth Makerspace Larnaka, this curriculum played a key role in allowing youth participants to develop and launch technology-driven business projects.

At one level, this shift in thinking is associated with the transversal culturalization of all forms of economic and industrial production – where design and aesthetics, as well as cultural difference and identity, have become as important, if not more, than simply price signals. On another level, it is being driven by the increasing technological sophistication and complexity of the cultural and creative industries themselves. Computer games have, for some time, been the cultural industry subsector that generates the greatest revenues, and making computer games requires STEAM: an integration of storytelling and artwork with coding skills and mindsets. This is even more pronounced in the emerging area of immersive audio-visual products and experiences that use creative artificial and virtual reality, as well as virtual production technologies and large-scale LED technologies. Such technologies are used increasingly in major live event and theatrical productions as the centrepiece of new cultural experiences.

Seeking to capitalize on the momentum of this rapidly expanding creative sector, several Parties to the 2005 Convention have integrated gaming into their national cultural and digital strategies. The growth of this field, rooted in both technology and art, however, requires training, capacity building, and the strengthening of professional networks. In Uruguay, the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining established the Video Games Roundtable to formalize collaboration among national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Education, the Film and Audiovisual Agency of Uruguay, and the Technological Laboratory of Uruguay – demonstrating a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to developing the creative economy. In Chile, the Centre for the Technological Revolution in Creative Industries, supported by the Production Development Corporation, was established to strengthen technological infrastructure and drive innovation. With funding secured until 2030, the Centre has already trained more than 100 cultural professionals in the use of Unreal Engine, a 3D creation and video game design software.

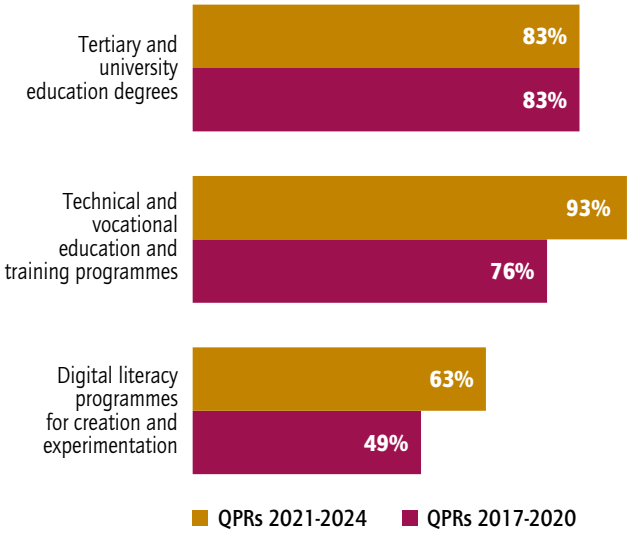
The applicability of gaming-related skills extends well beyond the entertainment industry: in Germany, for example, the Film and Media Foundation of North Rhine-Westphalia launched a 'gamification' programme in 2023 to explore the educational and social uses of video game tools, supporting the development of projects in urban planning, environmental awareness and civic engagement. These varied initiatives illustrate how gaming has become a catalyst for innovation, skill development and transversal collaboration.

Recognizing the complementarity between STEM and the arts has created a renewed respect for cultural education in the increasingly digitized world. Indeed, a recent modification to the Programme for International Student Assessment test has sought to include measures of creativity (OECD, 2024a). Likewise, organizations such as the World Economic Forum have highlighted how creative skills (however defined) are critical in the current and future workplace (WEF, 2019). All these trends suggest that cultural and arts education is not just a 'nice to have' skill, but rather a socio-economically vital one.

Looking more closely at education and training in the cultural and creative sector, there has been a significant shift since the previous periodic reporting period in 2017-2020. While the proportion of Parties offering tertiary and university education degrees in cultural and creative sectors is unchanged at 83%, the proportion of Parties reporting existing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes in cultural and creative sector-relevant fields has risen from 76% to 93% (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5

Proportion of Parties with education and training programmes, by type



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

In the sector, TVET is often used to meet labour market shortages in the technical and production workforce (encompassing roles related to lighting, sound, video and image production) as well as in the teaching of crafts and trades. For example, China's Culture and Entertainment Industry Association has collaborated with government agencies and universities to set up a vocational skills training and accreditation system to improve on-the-job skills and develop career pathways for practitioners in music and performing arts entertainment, gaming, e-sports, and location-based experiences.

Almost two-thirds of Parties to the 2005 Convention reported 'digital literacy programmes for creation and experimentation' (63%), a significant 14 percentage point increase from the previous reporting cycle. This growth reflects the cultural and creative sector's adaptability to technological change accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and showing no signs of slowing. While this rise is to be welcomed, greater coverage of digital education programmes will be increasingly needed over the next reporting period if Parties wish to meet the creative labour force needs generated by digitalization, and particularly the rapid development of Generative AI (Chapter 3 explores in greater details the needs for skills development in the digital environment).

The recent Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment made two interconnected recommendations in this sense: it recommended that Parties implement national digital-culture capacity plans to enhance digital literacy and AI skills among cultural actors (Recommendation 7) and that Parties update their arts education curricula and methodologies to incorporate comprehensive training on AI technologies for both students and educators, with a particular focus on arts schools and higher education institutions specializing in the arts (Recommendation 8) (UNESCO, 2025). Additionally, a key objective of the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education is to support countries to benefit from the opportunities opened up by technology and promote reflection, creativity, initiatives, and ethical and responsible use in this domain (UNESCO, 2024).

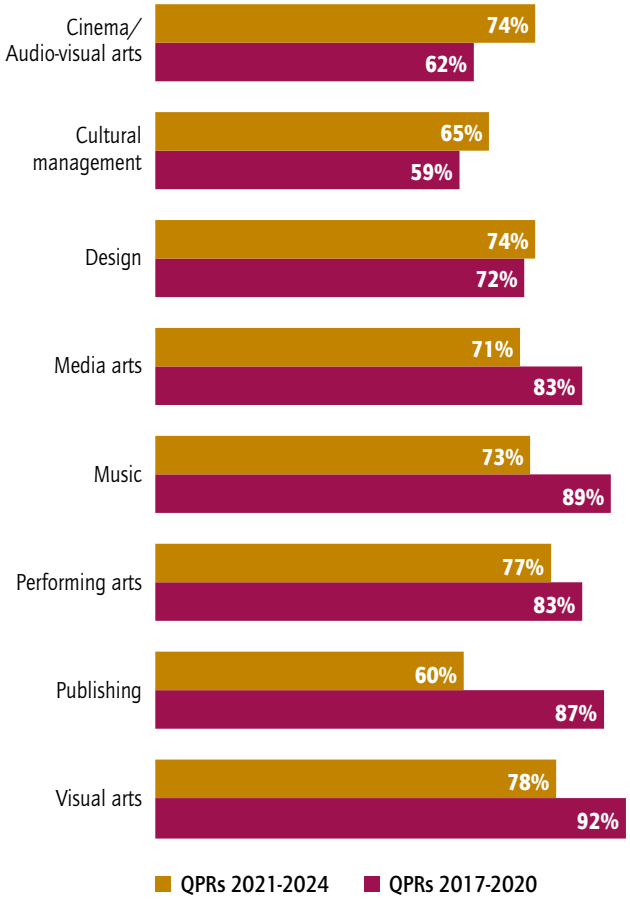
While education and training programmes in the cultural and creative sector remain available across most Parties, significant disparities exist between cultural domains and types of programmes (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). In recent years, most cultural and creative domains monitored through the Convention's periodic reporting mechanism have experienced a notable decline in the university-level educational offerings: media arts dropped from 83% to 71%, music from 89% to 73%, performing arts from 83% to 77%, and visual arts from 92% to 78%. The publishing sector – once well supported through formal university programmes and TVET – has experienced a steep decline, dropping from 87% to 60% in tertiary education and from 74% to 63% in TVET, making it the least supported in terms of both tertiary education and TVET. This decrease is likely due to budget cuts or shifting priorities that have disadvantaged what could be considered traditional creative sectors. Although the exact reason remains unclear, the drop warrants attention and continued monitoring.

Although training in cultural management has shown modest growth – rising to 65% for both academic and TVET offerings from 59% and 62% respectively during the 2017-2020 monitoring period – it remains the second least supported field after publishing. This indicates that an important training gap persists. This field requires specialized expertise to effectively manage and govern the cultural and creative sector, yet only limited training opportunities exist.

In contrast, cinema and audio-visual arts stands out as a domain that has seen significant growth, reversing previous trends. Once among the domains with the lowest university-level offering (62%) – despite being the most frequently targeted by policies and measures in periodic reports – the field now benefits from 74% coverage in tertiary education and 78% in TVET.

Figure 1.6

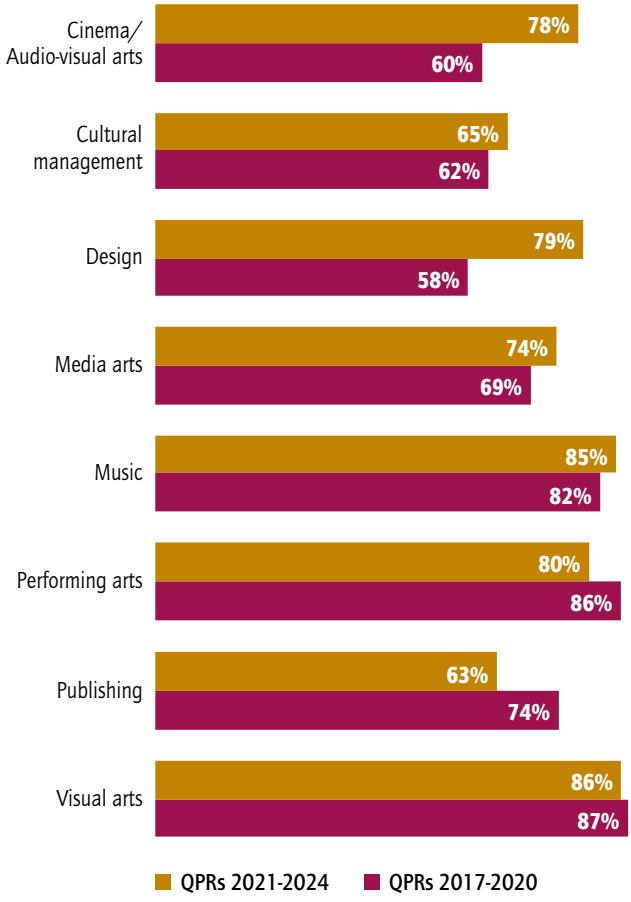
Proportion of Parties reporting tertiary and university education degrees, by cultural domain



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Figure 1.7

Proportion of Parties reporting technical and vocational education and training programmes, by cultural domain



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Several converging factors may have contributed to this progress: the sector's strategic importance reflected in policy attention, rapid technological advancements driving demand for audio-visual content, and increased scrutiny following the #MeToo movement, which highlighted systemic issues within the industry. Together, these developments appear to have prompted educational institutions to expand their offerings in this field.

Design is another domain that stands out, with TVET programme offerings rising significantly – from 58% to 79%. While the number of Parties offering university-level programmes has remained relatively stable, more countries have expanded their TVET options to include design. This shift may reflect the growing importance of visual content, particularly in digital and online environments.

From gaps to growth: capacity building

The ability of artists and creators to understand how to make a living from their work – such as understanding how to price their time or work, how to deploy their skills in other sectors, how the Intellectual Property and copyright systems function, and what they need to do in order to protect and exploit their Intellectual Property – is another important dimension in ensuring a dynamic creative and cultural ecosystem. Reports in relation to the 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist show that globally, 82% of the UNESCO Member States reported having put in place capacity-building initiatives that support artists to monetize their work (Figure 1.8). The proportion of developing countries reporting these measures (85%) is greater than that of developed countries (79%). This could be reflective of the additional training required where supporting infrastructure (that is, CMOs) is weaker.

Figure 1.8

Proportion of UNESCO Member States with policies, measures or programmes that provide artists capacity building, training or other support to monetize their artistic work, by developing and developed countries

Source: UNESCO (1980 Recommendation)

However, 'capacity building' encompasses a much broader range of activity than copyright and monetization training, covering technical, digital, management and entrepreneurship skills across all areas of the cultural and creative sector. While closely related to education and vocational training, it typically focuses on professionals working in, or adjacent to, the cultural and creative sector, as opposed to potential new entrants. In the context of this chapter, capacity building is also characterized by its punctual nature and strong focus on strategic skills for institutional development, and policy design and implementation.

For example, data from the periodic reports show that Türkiye's cultural management capacity-building programme targets those working in local government, including those in cultural tourism, youth, sports or urban planning roles, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of devolved management of cultural projects and services. In Brazil, the National Arts Foundation runs a capacity-building programme for artists and technicians in the performing arts to strengthen and enhance the sector's production capabilities, while in Canada, the 'AcceleratiON' programme offers mentorship and capacity-building support targeted at Black and Indigenous-owned music businesses, to address structural inequalities in the sector.

While these are just a few examples, capacity building represents a significant proportion of the policy making approaches used by the Parties to support and develop the cultural and creative sectors. Across almost 1,000 measures reported through the Quadrennial Periodic Reports under the monitoring area 'cultural and creative sectors', over 30% are related to funding, capacity building or development programmes for artists (Figure 1.9). This is reflective of the centrality of human capital to value generation in the cultural and creative sector: countries recognize that investing in the sector means investing in its people.

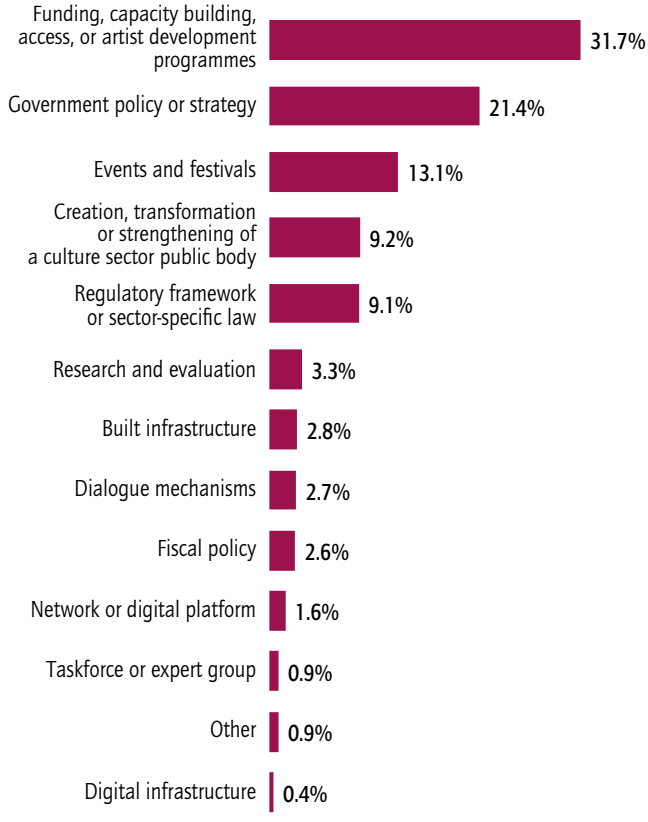
Box 1.7 • Ethiopia: digital capacity-building workshop

The Ethiopian Women Visual Artist Association, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, hosted a one-day intensive workshop aimed at empowering 50 professional Ethiopian women visual artists. The workshop focused on equipping participants with essential skills and knowledge to navigate the evolving digital art landscape while promoting gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors. Key themes included the exploration of new art mediums and digitization, strategies for strengthening the digital presence of women artists, and insights into the digital art market, including the use of non-fungible tokens (NFTs). This initiative marked a significant step towards increasing visibility, opportunity and support for Ethiopian women artists in the global digital art space.

Source: Ethiopia QPR, 2024

Figure 1.9

Most frequently reported types of policy-making tools



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

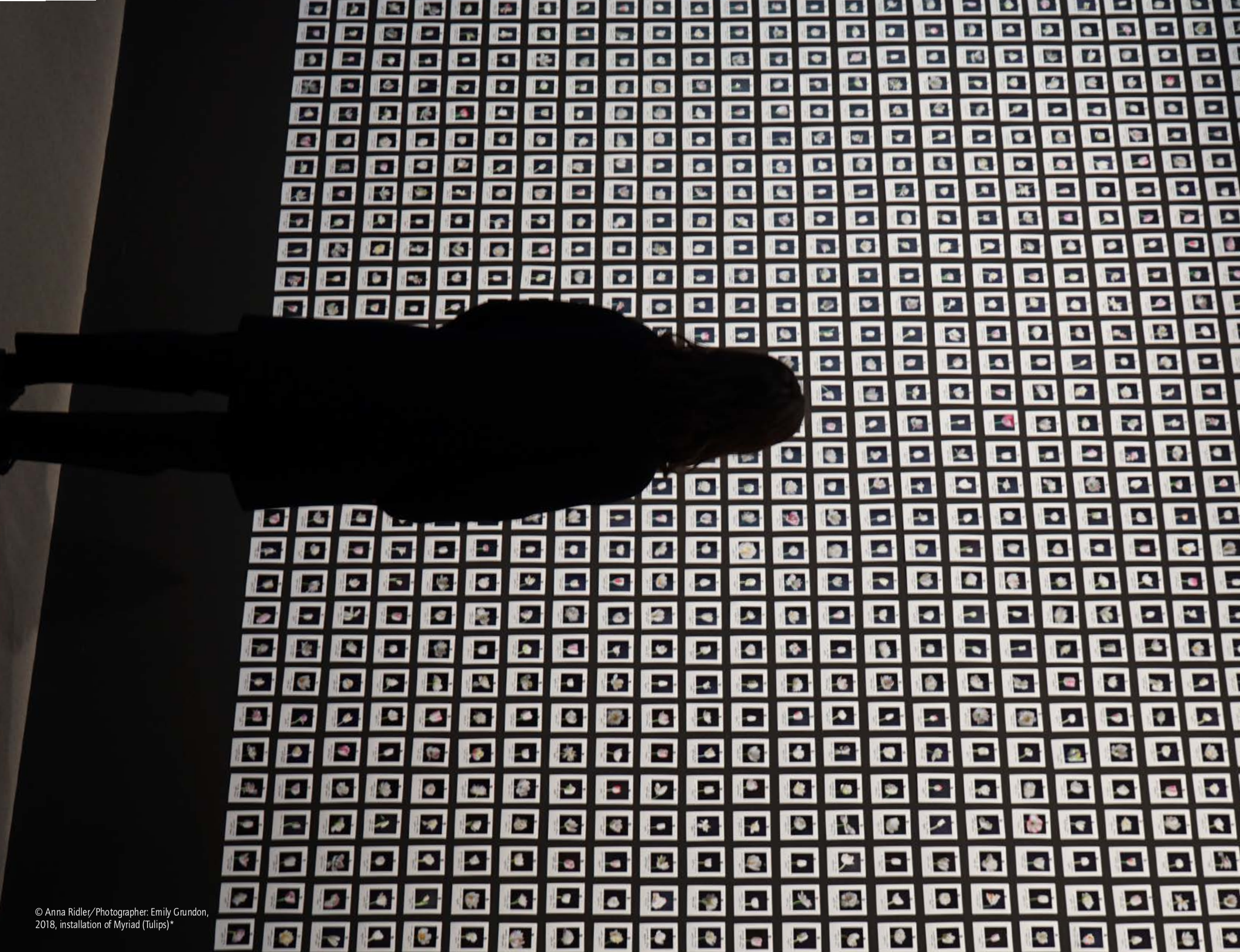
RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parties to the Convention

- Develop robust regulatory frameworks that enable interministerial cooperation in areas that directly involve the cultural and creative sector or affect culture professionals and access to culture. Collaboration should include ministries or agencies responsible for culture, education, foreign affairs, labour, trade, economy and business, finance, and related domains, aligning with growing interministerial cooperation trends.
- Substantially increase direct public funding for culture, to reverse the global decline in investment and reduce the gap between developing and developed countries, especially as developing countries are beginning to increase their cultural expenditure while levels in developed countries have stagnated or declined.
- Carefully assess the purpose and impact of indirect public expenditure through fiscal incentives to ensure that these incentives support, rather than undermine, the diversity of cultural expressions.
- Invest in information systems and institutional capacities in national statistical offices and cultural ministries to ensure continuous collection and analysis of cultural statistics for evidence-based cultural policy making, and to address recurrent challenges such as limited statistical expertise, reporting and resources.
- Support the formalization of cultural and creative sector activities to integrate them into the formal economy, governance frameworks, and mainstream economic development and innovation funding.
- Address the persistent precarity of work in the cultural and creative sector through policies targeting non-standard forms of employment and limited access to social benefits. Support initiatives that promote sustainable livelihoods for independent cultural workers, including those who are self-employed or engage in intermittent work.
- Establish and ensure the effective functioning of collective management organizations (CMOs) across creative domains, and promote public respect for Intellectual Property and copyright through coordinated legislation, capacity building, and public awareness measures. Digitization offers opportunities to improve CMO efficiency, particularly in certain domains and regions where coverage is limited or fragmented.
- Monitor and reassess education and training opportunities in the cultural and creative sector, as declining numbers of university-level programmes risk impoverishing the diversity of cultural expressions, widening training gaps, and weakening local, national and regional cultural production. Integrate culture and arts education in both cultural and educational policies, aligned with the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education, and respond to shifts in tertiary and TVET offerings and rising demand for digital literacy.
- Give greater recognition to STEAM education approaches (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths), as arts and science-based education complement each other and strengthen social, cultural and economic development.
- Expand digital education programmes to meet the needs of a digitalization-driven creative workforce, particularly in the context of Generative AI, and ensure that specialized arts schools provide foundational digital skills.

For UNESCO

- Continue supporting Parties in developing, monitoring and evaluating cultural policies that respond to current needs and rapid sectoral transformations, including by facilitating integration with education, labour, trade, innovation and other relevant policy areas.
- Continue assisting Parties in establishing effective cultural information systems that align with the Convention's Monitoring Framework and the updated UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, as reliable data and statistical capacity remain uneven across Parties.
- Build capacity in developing countries to support artists to monetize their work, compensating for weaker institutional infrastructure including limited coverage and effectiveness of CMOs beyond the music sector.
- Seize the opportunity of the Convention's 20th anniversary and the 2027 global reporting deadline to reinforce monitoring mechanisms and enhance knowledge products and tools, to better inform policy making from local to international levels and improve Parties' reporting capacities.
- Strengthen inter-agency relations by supporting sustainable cultural exchanges, co-creation processes and cooperation between actors across regions. Build on the growing integration of culture into multilateral frameworks at regional and international levels.



© Anna Ridler/Photographer: Emily Grundon, 2018, installation of Myriad (Tulips)*

Chapter 2

Reconfiguring media diversity

Audrey Yue

- As framed by the 2005 Convention, media diversity refers both to the availability of varied cultural content and to the presence of public, private and community-based media that reflect a plurality of cultural expressions and perspectives. It requires a media landscape with diverse types of media ownership and outlets, as well as the inclusion and representation of different social, cultural and linguistic groups in media content.
- Growing concentration of media ownership, the decline of independent and local outlets, and the homogenization of content are undermining diversity in the media ecosystem. These trends also weaken public trust in media institutions.
- Media freedom is in global decline. The number of countries scoring zero on media freedom has tripled since 2005. This decline is fuelled by economic instability, concentrated media ownership and the growing influence of dominant digital media conglomerates – all pressures that erode editorial independence and limit media diversity. This decline was exacerbated by a 38% increase in journalist killings in 2022 and 2023 compared to the previous two years.
- The number of UNESCO Member States with right to information laws has grown significantly, reaching 139 in 2025. However, this positive momentum is counterbalanced in some countries by developments that weaken responsible bodies for oversight and accountability.
- After 30 years of media monitoring, women make up only 26% of news subjects and sources. This figure has plateaued since 2010, showing stalled progress towards gender parity.
- The consolidation of digital platforms and media outlets risks reducing the range of available content and distribution channels. It also may further marginalize independent and minority voices, while favouring commercially driven content.
- Local media is foundational for civic engagement, social cohesion and democratic accountability. It provides space for diverse viewpoints and independent cultural expression. While digital platforms and social media are widely used to access information and content, they should not entirely replace the institutional role of traditional outlets, which are, however, weakening due to growing economic pressures and media consolidation. In response, Parties have adopted regulatory and financial mechanisms, including targeted funding, to sustain the operations of diverse media outlets.
- Support for public service media and cultural diversity is growing, particularly in developing countries. The share of developing countries with public service media mandated to promote cultural diversity rose from 84% in 2017-2020 to 99% in 2021-2024, reflecting a growing commitment to pluralistic media systems. Many Parties have introduced funding and legal measures to strengthen local, Indigenous and minority-language media and improve representation of vulnerable groups.
- Investment in the digital transition of public service and community media is growing. Countries increasingly support the shift from analogue to digital broadcasting, the development of online platforms for regional content, and training for media professionals in new technologies and digital media.
- Regulatory reforms and collective efforts, especially with civil society, have strengthened frameworks for media ownership and oversight, supporting media independence and plurality.
- While overall monitoring of the media has increased, coverage remains uneven across different areas of oversight. According to Quadrennial Periodic Report data, 72% of Parties have regulatory authorities monitoring diversity in media ownership, but only 50% monitor gender equality in the media and 57% monitor editorial independence.
- Monitoring media content in the digital environment has become a global priority. The share of Parties with mechanisms to monitor online media rose from 54% in 2017-2020 to 76% in 2021-2024, reflecting greater awareness of the risks associated with digital media.
- Media accountability models are evolving in the digital environment. New regulations are emerging to improve transparency around how digital platforms mediate access and recommend content. As media systems become more digital, traditional accountability instruments (press councils, codes of ethics) are facing challenges in adapting.
- Developing countries are more likely to require content diversity in regional and local broadcasting (90% compared to 84% in developed countries), which requires producing localized content for multiple linguistic and cultural communities. By contrast, linguistic diversity in media programming is higher in developed countries (89% compared to 83% in developing countries), with stronger policy frameworks that require multilingual broadcasting.
- Domestic content regulations for audio-visual media are expanding globally. The share of Parties with domestic content quotas rose from 68% in 2017-2020 to 80% in 2021-2024, reflecting growing efforts to safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity. However, significant differences remain between developed and developing countries.
- Only 24% of Parties have content quotas for subscription video-on-demand services, compared to 47% for free-to-air television. The gap is especially prominent in developing nations, where only 5% have subscription video-on-demand regulations, compared with 62% of developed nations.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

A diverse media landscape encompasses:

Diverse content representing different social, cultural and linguistic groups

Plurality of media outlets and ownership models (public, private and community media)

Freedom to operate without government control or censorship

PROGRESS

84% → 99%
Developing countries report having **public service media** mandated to **promote cultural diversity**

68% → 80%
Countries report **domestic content quotas** for audio-visual media, signalling increased support for local media ecosystems

Countries are implementing regulatory and financial measures to:

- Ensure the sustainability of **local**, **Indigenous** and **minority-language media outlets**
- Provide **training** for local media professionals, including from vulnerable groups
- Strengthen **media accountability** and compliance with service obligations for diverse **socio-cultural programming**

CHALLENGES

Digital media consolidation is contributing to:

- Erosion of **media pluralism**
- Algorithmic-driven **echo chambers** and **reduced content discoverability**
- **Misinformation** and weaker editorial safeguards

Only 26% of news subjects and sources are **women** – momentum towards gender parity has stalled

Only 24% of countries have domestic content quotas for **subscription video-on-demand services**

Monitoring of media remains unbalanced across areas of oversight – only **50%** of countries monitor gender equality and **57%** editorial independence

EMERGING TRENDS

Media diversity in the digital environment is a growing focus of policy making

54% → 76% Countries have **mechanisms monitoring media content** in the digital environment

- Investments are increasing in the **digital transition** of public service and community media
- New regulations are emerging to improve **transparency of content recommendation systems**

Approaches to **content diversity in programming** vary globally

- Developing countries report more mandates for **regional and/or local broadcasters**
- Developed countries often report mandates on **linguistic diversity**

INTRODUCTION

The media shapes our perceptions of the world as much by the stories it tells as by the people who tell them. Initiatives like *andererseits* (On the Other Hand), an independent media outlet in Austria, demonstrate how the media can actively promote inclusion and representation. Founded in 2020 as a digital magazine, *andererseits* drives socially relevant stories that reflect the full diversity of human experience, especially the perspectives of people with disabilities who remain significantly under-represented in newsrooms, using plain-language writing and innovative digital formats. By supporting young writers with disabilities to enter the professional media sector and fostering inclusive editorial approaches, *andererseits* provides a compelling example of media diversity in action.

This chapter examines media diversity through the lens of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) through two core indicators of its Monitoring Framework: (1) policies and measures that support diversity of media, and (2) those that support diversity of content. As framed by the Convention, media diversity refers to the availability of diverse media content and the presence of public, private and community-based media that reflect a plurality of cultural expressions and perspectives. It encompasses both the diversity of media types and the inclusiveness of content that ensures representation of different social, cultural and linguistic groups (UNESCO, 2008).

In the current digital era, however, media diversity is not merely being supported but actively reconfigured. The rise of platform monopolies, the algorithmic curation of cultural content, and the decline of independent local media outlets have transformed the landscape in which cultural expressions circulate. Aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and its Target 16.10 on access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms (UN, 2015), this chapter attests that safeguarding media diversity today requires adaptive, multi-stakeholder strategies, particularly in platform regulation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance and institutional capacity building. These strategies are in line with the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), the first global standard-setting instrument to align algorithmic governance with the protection of human rights and cultural sovereignty, ensuring that AI systems actively promote diversity in cultural production and discoverability of local content. In this context, cultural diversity is strengthened by the free flow of ideas and nurtured through continuous exchange and interaction between countries.

MEDIA PLURALISM: RESPONDING TO SHIFTING TRENDS

Media pluralism is a key approach to assess media diversity. At its broadest, it refers to the presence of a diverse range of media outlets and voices. UNESCO has always considered media pluralism as a foundational pillar of democratic societies. In its 1980 Report *Many Voices, One World*, UNESCO emphasized the need for a balanced flow of information and equitable access to communication channels to counter media concentration and promote democratic dialogue (MacBride, 1981). By the mid-2000s, the 2005 Convention positioned media pluralism within the broader framework of the diversity of cultural expressions, linking it explicitly to freedom of expression, cultural participation and democratic governance. Media pluralism became associated with not only diversity of ownership but also diversity of cultural content and the structural conditions necessary for inclusive societies.

In its Media Development Indicators, UNESCO (2008) formalized media pluralism as encompassing:

- plurality of media ownership (public, private, community).
- diversity of media content reflective of varied social groups.
- access to media for all sectors of society, especially marginalized communities.

More recently, UNESCO expanded this understanding to include issues such as algorithmic transparency, platform accountability and the risks posed by digital monopolies and misinformation (UNESCO, 2022a, 2024a). The evolving definition now addresses new challenges in the digital era, such as the role of AI in cultural content creation and curation, the need for inclusive regulatory frameworks, and the importance of ensuring discoverability of diverse cultural content online. UNESCO's evolving conceptualization reflects a shift from structural access and ownership to a rights-based, ecosystem-oriented approach, emphasizing media pluralism as a dynamic interplay of institutions, platforms, users and policies in safeguarding cultural diversity and democratic dialogue.

Keeping pace with these developments, this chapter uses media pluralism as an approach to examine media diversity. It defines media pluralism as encompassing both content choice and diversity across the media landscape, and addresses:

a. issues of media concentration, centralization and monopolization, which affect ownership and control over content production.

b. production, distribution and consumption of cultural content across platforms.

c. accessibility of media sources that serve the diverse needs of audiences – especially women, youth, rural populations, and linguistic or cultural minorities.

d. the role of user-generated content and digital participation within an algorithmically driven communication environment.

e. support for vibrant public spheres where multiple voices engage in open, inclusive and dialogic exchange (UNESCO, 2022a).

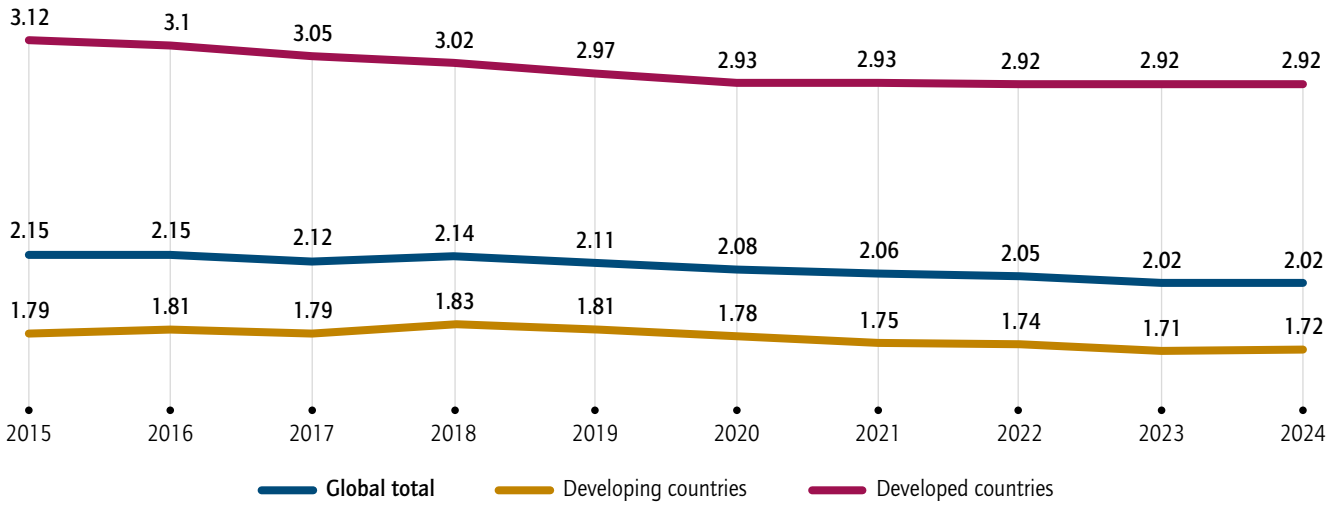
MEDIA FREEDOM: INCREASING RISK, INCREASING LEGISLATION

Media freedom refers to the right of the media to operate within legal frameworks, independently of government control, censorship or interference from state and non-state actors including commercial pressures. This right aligns with the SDG Target 16.10 and is grounded in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms freedom of expression and includes the right 'to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media' without regard to national boundaries (UN, 1948). Media freedom is essential for promoting transparency, accountability and informed public discourse, and protects the ability to safely criticize government (Whitten-Woodring and Van Belle, 2014). Furthermore, since media freedom provides an environment in which media actors can operate free from external interference, including by producing and disseminating diverse cultural content without fearing censorship and other restrictions, it is also a prerequisite for the creation of and access to diverse cultural expressions. Therefore, in a context in which a substantial share of people's access to cultural content exists in the media environment, media freedom can only reinforce achieving the goals of the 2005 Convention.

In 2025, media freedom is undergoing a significant global decline. The latest annual report of the international non-governmental organization Freedom House (2025), which assesses political rights and civil liberties across 195 countries and 13 territories, states that freedom has declined around the world for the 19th consecutive year in 2024. People experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties in 60 countries, and secured improvements in only 34 countries. Key factors driving the degradation in rights and liberties included violence and the repression of political opponents during elections, ongoing armed conflicts, and the spread of authoritarian practices. This decline is also acknowledged in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2025), which observed that over half of the 180 countries and territories assessed fall into the category of a 'difficult situation', a trend largely fuelled by economic instability, concentrated media ownership, non-transparent public subsidies and the growing influence of dominant digital media conglomerates. These structural pressures collectively erode editorial independence and limit media diversity, with more than 50% of responding countries reporting interference from media owners and nearly one-third observing the closure of media outlets.

Figure 2.1

Mean Freedom House 'free and independent media' score, by developing and developed countries



Source: Freedom House / BOP Consulting (2025)

This downward trajectory is not a recent development. Over the past decade, both developed and developing countries have persistently registered declining average scores for 'free and independent' media, an indicator assessed across multiple dimensions, including editorial independence from public or private actors, the extent to which journalists are able to fully exercise their profession without being subject to pressure or surveillance, and whether works of literature, art, music and other forms of cultural expression are censored or banned for political purposes. The number of countries and territories scoring 0 out of 4 (with zero representing the lowest degree of freedom) for the indicator on media freedom has nearly tripled, from 13 in 2005 to 34 in 2024 (Freedom House, 2025; see also Figure 2.1).

The scale of repression is extensive: according to the Freedom House 2025 report, more than 120 countries and territories experienced attacks on the media, ranging from censorship and artistic suppression to the imprisonment of journalists, physical assaults, legal harassment and other forms of violence. UNESCO's 2024 Report on the Safety of Journalists (UNESCO, 2024a) notes a 38% increase in journalist killings in 2022 and 2023 compared to the previous biennium, with 162 deaths recorded in those two years (equivalent to one every four days). The report emphasizes the urgent need for stronger protections and accountability mechanisms to safeguard journalism in particular, and media freedom in general, amid rising global threats.

In contrast to declining media freedom, there has been a significant rise in the adoption of right to information laws, with 139 UNESCO Member States having implemented right to information regimes as of 2025 (UNESCO, 2025a). Right to information laws are legal frameworks that give individuals the right to access information held by public authorities and are grounded in the principle that transparency is essential for accountability, democratic participation and good governance. This rise attests to UNESCO's sustained advocacy for media law reform through the promotion of normative frameworks that safeguard press freedom, media independence and public access to information (Mendel, 2021). However, this positive legislative momentum is counterbalanced by a concerning trend in several countries, where so-called information oversight bodies – that is, institutions charged with ensuring oversight and accountability for the implementation of regulations on access to information, such as information commissions, human rights commissions or ombudspersons – are being undermined by increasingly authoritarian regimes, thereby weakening essential checks and balances (UNESCO, 2022a). To meaningfully address the erosion of media freedom, the expansion of right to information legislation must be accompanied by robust regulatory safeguards that protect freedom of expression and the right to information, while also effectively responding to the challenges posed by harmful content, including misinformation and disinformation. Key here is to address the present challenges posed by the increasing consolidation of media ownership.

MEDIA OWNERSHIP: GROWING CONSOLIDATION, ADDRESSING CONCENTRATION

This section reviews the diversity of the current media ownership ecosystem, which refers to 1) the number and variety of media owners, 2) the structure of ownership (public, private, community), and 3) the concentration or pluralism in the ownership landscape. It explores how the dominance of large technology companies, the decline of local media and the growth of influencer-driven media have contributed to expanding media access but narrowing content choices, leading to a loss in cultural diversity. Furthermore, concentrated control and algorithm-driven filtering are increasing the risks to transparency in media ownership and market diversity. In response, a range of regulatory, financial and institutional mechanisms have been introduced, including support for the digital transformation of public and community media and initiatives to strengthen the capacities of media actors in content creation, distribution and audience engagement.

Expanding media control, shrinking local media, increasing platform power

Media concentration has intensified, with a few large companies increasingly dominating national media ecosystems (Media Reform Coalition, 2023). In Latin America, mainstream outlets remain concentrated among powerful conglomerates, while across Africa major companies shape television, radio and online landscapes (Mukhongo et al., 2024). Such models of conglomerate ownership have increased the risks of media homogenization that erode the diversity of viewpoints and cultural content, exert an outsized influence in shaping public opinion, reflect the biases and agendas of media owners, and accelerate the decline of local outlets.

Local media is particularly foundational for civic engagement, social cohesion and democratic accountability (Barclay et al., 2024; Friedland, 2016). It ensures that communities can access critical information on quality-of-life issues, current affairs and socio-cultural programming that is important for their local area, and it provides a platform for diverse viewpoints and independent cultural expressions. While other platforms and social media are widely used, they cannot substitute for the institutional role of traditional outlets (Newman et al., 2024).

The collapse of local media and other media outlets has been ongoing for several decades, driven by shifts in media consumption to digital platforms that have disrupted traditional revenue models. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, as many local outlets, like small businesses, struggled to maintain their operations. Policy responses from Parties to the 2005 Convention address these challenges through a diverse set of regulatory, financial and institutional mechanisms. Media laws have been introduced or reformed to prevent monopolization, regulate media ownership and curb excessive concentration. The European Media Freedom Act (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2024), for example, sets European Union-wide rules to ensure ownership transparency, editorial independence and oversight of mergers that may threaten media pluralism.

Financial and institutional mechanisms have also been introduced to diversify media ownership models by ensuring the sustainability of diverse media outlets. Many Parties now provide direct dedicated funds or annual subsidies to target support for local, regional, Indigenous and minority-language media. In Guinea, the *Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Médias* (Media Development Fund) was created in 2022 to finance structural investments that strengthen and professionalize public and private media, such as by facilitating access to loans for media outlets, supporting the development of regulatory frameworks for media sector labour protections and providing media training and equipment to local media professionals. Cabo Verde provides direct financial support for community and private radio stations to help alleviate the economic pressures faced by broadcasters and improve the conditions for accessing and delivering quality journalism. Lithuania's Media Support Fund, newly established in 2023 as part of national reforms, prioritizes the development of investigative journalism and minority-language and cultural media. Importantly, the Fund is managed by a depoliticized, self-governing Council that was jointly founded by the Ministry of Culture, the Public Information Ethics Association and the Association of Cultural Periodicals, which determines the Fund's activities and strategic management. New Zealand's Ministry for Culture and Heritage launched the Public Interest Journalism Fund in 2020, administered by the independent agency New Zealand On Air, to support at-risk journalism. From 2020 to 2023, a total of 55 million New Zealand dollars in funding supported 73 projects, 219 journalistic roles and 22 industry-development initiatives. Thirty-four per cent of funding went to historically underserved Māori media and Māori-related content, and targeted initiatives strengthening court, justice, and other community reporting. Funding for key Māori, Pasifika, and local reporting programmes has recently been renewed, underscoring their demonstrated value (Scoop, 2025; NZ On Air, 2023).

These mechanisms illustrate how targeted funding serves as both a tool to regulate concentration and a means to sustain the operations of diverse media outlets, thereby contributing to a more diverse media ownership ecosystem.

Addressing the digital transition

Against the backdrop of media consolidation, the digital transformation of the media industry has both broadened and restricted media diversity. Where traditional media consolidation involves fewer companies controlling legacy media, digital media consolidation involves new players from the technology sectors acquiring or shaping media distribution and production channels. The top five global media companies are Netflix, Walt Disney, Comcast, Alphabet (Google) and Meta (Facebook) (Zainib, 2023).

Digital media consolidation is a double-edged sword; while increased digital adoption has expanded audience reach, it also risks reducing content variety through monopolistic practices and platform dominance. Media consolidation constrains cultural diversity by narrowing the spectrum of content produced and limiting distribution channels, privileging commercially profitable material over independent or minority voices. This concentration also diminishes the diversity of cultural expressions by curtailing the visibility of local creators and restricting public access to pluralistic cultural content.

At the same time, while the rise of independent, influencer-led media has enabled more diverse and decentralized cultural content creation, it has also increased the spread of misinformation and fragmented public discourse (Bond, 2022; Dickel and Evolvi, 2022). These trends contribute to the formation of echo chambers – environments, often on social media, where users are primarily exposed to content and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs or preferences – amplified by algorithmic personalization and confirmation bias (Modgil et al., 2024; Törnberg, 2018). Increasingly, algorithmic recommender systems determine what types of content users see and engage with online, with significant implications on the discoverability of diverse cultural content, an issue that is further explored in Chapter 3. Furthermore, while independent media content creators can influence public discourse, they can do so without adhering to established editorial standards.

These dynamics undermine the 2005 Convention's commitment to safeguarding the diversity of cultural expressions by limiting exposure to varied perspectives and restricting equitable access to cultural content. They also limit opportunities for many artists and creative professionals to make their work known, ultimately undermining the sustainability of professional careers and business models.

UNESCO's updated 2025 Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms and Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) provides an important framework for public authorities and media stakeholders in this regard by providing practical guidance to safeguard freedom of expression, access to digital information and diverse cultural content while mitigating the risks of GenAI-facilitated disinformation, hate speech and other digital harms (UNESCO, 2025d).

In addition to the measures addressing media ownership identified earlier, developed and developing countries are also investing in the digital transition of the media sector as part of their strategies to support diverse forms of media that serve the public interest, including public service media and community media.[1] Amid today's commercial media landscape dominated by advertising pressures, misinformation and polarizing discourses, it is imperative to sustain and revitalize public interest media by supporting its social and civic value.

To upgrade public service media and community media, countries are investing in migrating to digital broadcasting, creating online platforms for regional content and providing training to media professionals on new technologies and digital media. Austria, for example, created the Fund for the Promotion of Digital Transformation to strengthen media companies and their digital services and promote the expansion of digital offerings. Under the European Union-funded 'Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans' project,[2] jointly implemented by UNESCO, the British Council and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, the 'Creative Spotlight' initiative, developed with the Thomson Foundation, equips media professionals and content creators in Montenegro and other beneficiary countries with training on cultural journalism and digital storytelling. The project offers online courses, workshops, production grants and mentorship opportunities to strengthen their capacity to produce high-quality cultural content that reaches and engages public audiences through innovative digital formats and storytelling techniques (Thomson Foundation). Portugal's media incentives scheme has also funded media outlets to modernize their operations, including through technological adaptation, the development of new content formats and business models, and the upskilling of media workers to enhance digital competencies. South Africa's public broadcaster, SABC, led the country's digital transition by moving from analogue to digital broadcasting and adopting online streaming, mobile platforms and virtual studios for its public media services.

Community media is also undergoing digital transition. In Latin America, for example, several countries have launched initiatives. Chile emphasized the role of community media in its 'Recommendations for the Democratization of the Media System' and collaborated with the United Nations to bring digital transformation to rural and Indigenous communities in regions like Ñuble and La Araucanía, by providing high-quality internet access and digital technologies to improve economic and social opportunities for vulnerable populations (UN, 2025a).

1. Public service media are independent, publicly funded media organizations mandated to provide accessible, diverse and high-quality content that serves public interest rather than commercial or political agendas. Community media refers to locally oriented, non-profit outlets, such as community radio, newspapers, television channels and digital platforms, owned and operated by members of a specific community.

2. The Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans project is being implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

BOX 2.1 • Public-private media partnerships: building resilience through cultural programming

The Radio Programme, implemented by the State of Palestine's Ministry of Culture, is a weekly one-hour broadcast focusing on cultural issues, arts, talents, intellectuals and initiatives. Partnering with five private radio stations (24FM, Radio Mawwal, Hebron Radio, Shabab FM and Zaman FM), the Ministry expanded its reach across Gaza and Palestine, including marginalized areas. Available on social media as well, and featuring interviews with youths, experts and cultural leaders, the programme demonstrates how public-private collaboration can strengthen cultural diversity, broaden distribution and build community trust.

In the current climate of ongoing conflict, however, regular cultural programming has faced frequent disruption, with resources redirected towards urgent humanitarian needs (UN, 2025b). This fragility highlights the vulnerability of such initiatives and the importance of resilient media partnerships that can adapt and continue to serve communities under crisis conditions.

The role of radios as sites of creativity and resilience is exemplified by Radio Alhara, an independent online community station based in Bethlehem. Its model of digital broadcasting allows the station to bypass the constraints of traditional radio airwaves to reach listeners worldwide, notably in 2021 when it sparked a global movement called the 'Sonic Liberation Front', during which DJs and artists around the world from Colombia to South Africa took turns hosting 24-hour live transmissions, contributing to music sets and producing talk shows spanning diverse music genres and themes in solidarity with the Palestinian people (Kalia, 2024).

Source: State of Palestine QPR, 2024; UN, 2025b; Kalia, 2024

Colombia implemented 'Territories in Dialogue', a programme designed to strengthen community media and communication activities developed by local social and cultural organizations and groups, including Afro-descendant communities, with the aim of fostering democratic and intercultural processes, citizen participation and peaceful coexistence (Foggin, 2020).

Against growing digital media consolidation, these policy responses are important strategies for enhancing diverse media. Through new laws to curb media concentration and increase funding for independent, local and minority-language outlets, Parties are enhancing the legal, structural and technological conditions for producing, disseminating and accessing diverse cultural content, thereby broadening the spectrum of cultural expressions available to the public and reinforcing media pluralism.

Equally important is the role of education to address the digital divide and the imbalance in cultural diversity online due to economic, geographical and social disparities (UNESCO, 2024b). Media literacy initiatives continue to be emphasized in many countries, including media education for both media professionals and the public, in order to fight disinformation, support digital resilience and rebuild trust and demand for quality local media. To further ameliorate the information void, a wide and widely dispersed media ownership is ever more essential to ensure equal participation and influence in the democratic process.

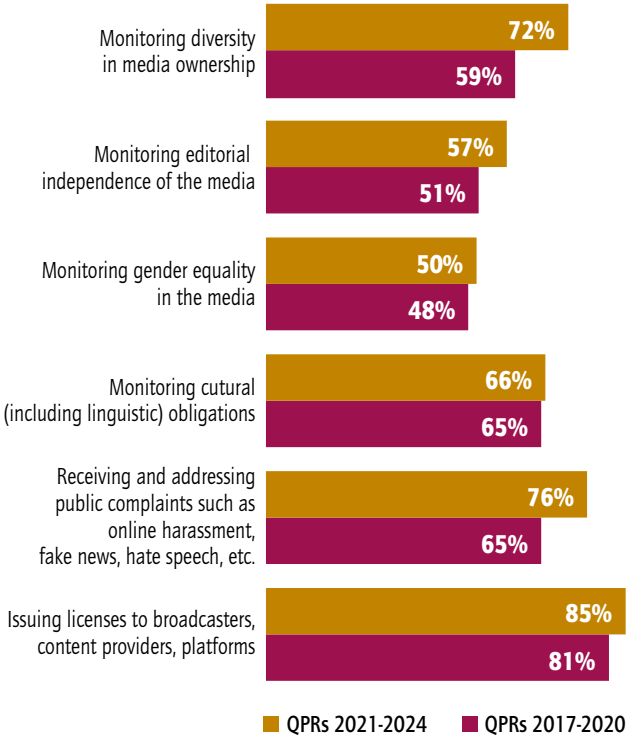
MEDIA MONITORING: STRENGTHENING OVERSIGHT

The 2005 Convention identifies media monitoring as a core responsibility of regulatory authorities to safeguard diversity, independence and accountability. Recent data from the Parties' Quadrennial Periodic Reports show an overall rise in the adoption of measures in the field of media monitoring, though progress remains uneven across the different areas that regulatory authorities are responsible for monitoring, from tracking media ownership and editorial independence to enforcing cultural and linguistic obligations and monitoring digital harms such as online harassment and disinformation, as illustrated by Figure 2.2.

Most recent data show that a large majority of Parties have regulatory authorities tasked with issuing licenses to broadcasters, content providers and platforms (85%), receiving and addressing public complaints such as online harassment, fake news or hate speech (76%), and monitoring diversity in media ownership (72%). Two-thirds of Parties monitor cultural (including linguistic) obligations, but the figure remains almost equal to that of the previous period. Meanwhile, only 57% of Parties monitor editorial independence, and only 50% monitor gender equality, these being the weakest areas of media monitoring in both reporting periods, with only very small increases of 6 and 2 percentage points, respectively, in the recent period. In almost all the areas, developing countries have higher rates of monitoring than developed ones, the sole exception being the monitoring of cultural (including linguistic) obligations.

Figure 2.2

Proportion of Parties reporting regulatory authorities monitoring media, and their responsibilities



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

As in other areas related to human rights and equality, civil society organizations play an important role in monitoring diversity in the media. One example is the Global Media Monitoring Project, an initiative of the World Association for Christian Communication and other organizations, which analyses, every five years since 1995, gender equality in the media. The latest survey from 2025 indicated that, although there has been a slow but steady increase over the last 30 years in the presence of women and girls as news subjects and sources (from 17% to 26%), women remain a minority in news media. Furthermore, progress began flatlining in 2010, as there has only been a 2 percentage point increase since then (GMMP, 2025).

At the national level, reforms to licensing frameworks[3] illustrate how states are modernizing monitoring mechanisms. Eswatini's 2023 Broadcasting Act created a national authority to formalize licensing and strengthen governance, while Cambodia's 2023 Promotion of Public and Private Media policy broadened access through new licensing pathways. In Europe, Denmark's *Medieaftale 2023-2026* reinforced transparent standards for public service broadcasting, while Canada's Indigenous Broadcasting Policy in 2023 embedded cultural and linguistic diversity into licensing by prioritizing Indigenous broadcasters.

Monitoring harmful digital content has also become a challenging global priority. The European Union's 2023 revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive extended obligations to on-demand and video-sharing platforms to implement measures protecting minors from harmful content. In Africa, the Central African Republic restructured its High Council for Communication in 2024 to monitor hate speech and manage public complaints.

Further exacerbating this issue of harmful content, is the fact that the World Economic Forum has once again identified misinformation and disinformation as the top short-term global risks in 2025, warning that the proliferation of such content continues to deepen political polarization and erode public confidence in governance structures (Schiffrin, 2024). It is therefore vital to put in place independent mechanisms to systematically track and monitor indicators for media pluralism and media ownership, as demonstrated in Box 2.2. At the global level, UNESCO is leading media monitoring efforts through its quadrennial World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report series. These reports provide comprehensive analyses of the state of media freedom, pluralism, independence and safety for journalists in collaboration with media and research institutions.

Furthermore, there are notable differences in the existence of monitoring mechanisms across media types. As Figure 2.3 shows, public media monitoring remains nearly universal (96%), though slightly declining (from 99% in 2017-2020). Monitoring of private media has grown to 86% (up from 73% in 2017-2020), with examples including Germany's expansion of its media diversity monitoring mechanism, the *Medienvielfaltsmonitor*, implemented through cooperation among regional media authorities to analyse risks of media ownership concentration. In Iceland, a committee appointed by the Minister for Education and Culture was tasked with monitoring the conditions affecting the operations of private media outlets.

3. Licensing is the process by which authorities grant permission to broadcasters, content providers and platforms to operate, often based on compliance with criteria to promote pluralism and prevent monopolies. Its purpose is to ensure a diverse media landscape by supporting access to a variety of cultural expressions, voices and viewpoints in the public sphere.

Box 2.2 • The Media Pluralism Monitor as a model for media monitoring

The Media Pluralism Monitor, developed by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute, is a research project that assesses the health of media ecosystems in Europe by identifying threats to media pluralism and transparency across the European Union and candidate countries. It provides policy makers and civil society with systematic, comparative data, making it a strong model for media monitoring.

Since 2016, it has tracked media ownership rules, noting that most member states imposed no restrictions on foreign ownership (EUI, 2017). By 2023, its risk score for media ownership transparency reached 51% (EUI, 2024).

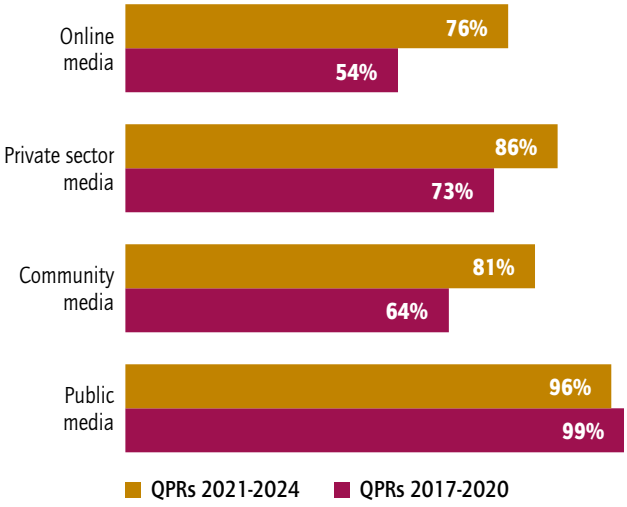
In 2024, no country was classified as low risk, while 13 were identified as medium risk and 19 as high risk (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2024). This was the first time the indicator reached the high-risk band, driven by deteriorating media market conditions, digital concentration, platform dominance, political and commercial interference, and declining safety and standards for journalists (Nenadić, 2024; Del Monte and Faucheux, 2024).

Source: European Union QPR, 2024; EUI, 2017, 2024; Bleyer-Simon et al., 2024; Nenadić, 2024; Del Monte and Faucheux, 2024

Its findings and recommendations to support media pluralism informed the introduction of grants in 2023 to support independent Icelandic media outlets for news, culture and current affairs. Online media monitoring, once marginal, rose from 54% in 2017-2020 to 76% in 2021-2024. A notable example is Canada's 2023 Online Streaming Act, which marks a major reform to the 1991 Broadcasting Act; the 2023 Act monitors and puts in place obligations for broadcasters, including digital platforms and streaming services, to ensure that their content and programming is representative of Canada's diverse society. These initiatives reflect authorities' increasing awareness of the need to address digital media and the risks associated with it from the perspective of diversity, as also illustrated by the Republic of Korea's 'Mediastat' initiative (Box 2.3). Community media monitoring has increased from 64% in 2017-2020 to 81% in 2021-2024, particularly in countries where such outlets are vital for rural, Indigenous and multilingual communities.

Figure 2.3

Proportion of Parties reporting regulatory authorities monitoring media, by media type



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

BOX 2.3 • Broadcasting statistics for diversity promotion

In 2009, the Republic of Korea strengthened its Broadcasting Act by introducing Article 35-4, which enshrined the protection of diversity of public opinion as a guiding principle of broadcasting policy. To operationalize this commitment, the government launched Mediastat in 2018, a comprehensive statistics portal to monitor broadcasting usage, audience behaviour and market competition. Operated by the Korea Communications Commission (KCC, 2024a), Mediastat has become a central tool for policy makers, researchers and the public. In 2023, the platform underwent a significant upgrade, adding interactive dashboards, visualizations and infographics, alongside new datasets covering over-the-top* services. In addition, Mediastat regularly publishes studies conducted by the Korea Communications Commission, providing important statistics and data on media consumption patterns and public perceptions of broadcast media that can inform media policies and strategies to support a vibrant and inclusive media landscape (KCC, 2024b).

* Over-the-top services are platforms that deliver video, audio or other media content directly to viewers via the internet, bypassing traditional cable, broadcast or satellite distribution methods.

Source: Republic of Korea QPR, 2022; KCC, 2024a, 2024b

Overall, these trends demonstrate that monitoring systems are broadening across regions, media types and issues. Yet gaps persist, especially in the monitoring of gender equality and sustainable support for community media, underscoring the need for stronger data collection mechanisms to ensure transparency, pluralism and resilience in rapidly evolving digital ecosystems.

EVOLVING MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY

Parties to the 2005 Convention are navigating tensions between regulation, freedom of expression and pluralism within a shifting ecosystem of media accountability, which assesses the extent to which the media reflects a plurality of voices, maintains objectivity, upholds ethical standards and adheres to professional norms. Traditional media accountability instruments, such as press councils and codes of ethics, are facing challenges in adapting to the digital era.

In response, Parties continue to prioritize the development of regulatory mechanisms for media accountability, including self-regulatory bodies and professional development standards to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to monitor, report and ensure the media's compliance with ethical and professional standards, editorial independence and public-interest obligations. For example, Slovakia has established new editorial and service standards for public broadcasters, mandating compliance with service obligations in areas including the diversity of content, promoting media literacy and multilingual programming for national minorities and ethnic groups.

To strengthen media accountability and reduce inequalities in people's ability to access, create and critically engage with media, a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary – one that involves collaboration between independent regulatory authorities, digital platforms, civil society organizations, artists and other relevant institutions (UNESCO, 2023a). The Parties' Quadrennial Periodic Reports reveal varied approaches to advancing this objective.

- Media and information literacy programmes have explicitly promoted critical media engagement and institutional transparency. Portugal's Informal Group on Media Literacy is one such example of a multisectoral initiative that combines awareness-raising campaigns and educational programming to equip citizens with the tools to critically assess media content, question information sources and hold media institutions accountable.
- It is essential to ensure that culturally diverse media products and expressions are equitably created, represented and made discoverable in digital environments by enhancing platform access, amplifying marginalized voices and investing in public,

community-based and locally rooted infrastructure to support cultural visibility and participation. One example is the National System of Radios of Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), which has expanded community-run radio stations broadcasting in Indigenous languages. By providing equipment and training in radio production, the initiative enables Indigenous communities to both access and create media that is socially and culturally relevant.

- Support for free and independent media is essential to safeguarding civic space and enabling media professionals to operate freely in accordance with professional and ethical standards. For instance, the United Arab Emirates has established associations for journalists and media professionals to foster media ethics and skills through training, dialogue and peer accountability.

BOX 2.4 • Building media resilience in Ukraine

Ukraine's media reforms to strengthen diversity, transparency and accountability highlight the urgent need to build resilient, independent and pluralistic media amid the overlapping crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing armed conflict affecting the country. The Draft Law on Media emerged as a landmark initiative, modernizing outdated legislation, regulating digital platforms, establishing community broadcasting and reinforcing safeguards against disinformation. Developed through broad consultations with journalists, non-government organizations and the Council of Europe, the proposed legislation takes a participatory and European Union-aligned approach (Council of Europe, 2025). The National Public Broadcasting Company has consolidated its independence and broadened minority-language and cultural programming; for example, through the Coordination Center for Broadcasting of National Minorities and the documentary series *Shades of Ukraine*. Meanwhile, the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting has enhanced its oversight, reinforcing ownership transparency, tracking gender equality in media content and extending its remit to include online providers. Complementing these structural reforms of the media landscape, the Youth MediaLab has promoted media literacy and youth engagement, equipping new generations to critically navigate complex informational environments during crisis and recovery.

Source: Ukraine QPR, 2024; Council of Europe, 2025

- Digital platforms should be encouraged to increase transparency in their content moderation and curation policies. In Germany, for example, the revision of the Interstate Media Treaty (*Medienstaatsvertrag* or MStV) introduces legal requirements for greater algorithmic and media intermediary transparency, including obligations to disclose how content is moderated and ranked.

Overall, models of media accountability are quickly changing. In 2024 alone, many new models have been enacted. For example, Spain enacted the European Media Freedom Act to strengthen media accountability by requiring transparency regarding ownership and funding, enforcing editorial independence, and creating robust safeguards from political forces and commercial interests (RSF, 2025). In the same year, the government of Indonesia issued a Presidential Regulation on the Responsibility of Digital Platform Companies to Support Quality Journalism, which includes provisions on 1) regulation of digital platform companies, 2) collaboration with media outlets, 3) the establishment of an independent committee by the press council to oversee compliance of digital platforms and their obligations, and 4) funding to carry out the committee's duties and functions.

DIVERSITY OF CONTENT IN THE MEDIA: EXPANDING DEMAND AND BROADENING CHOICE

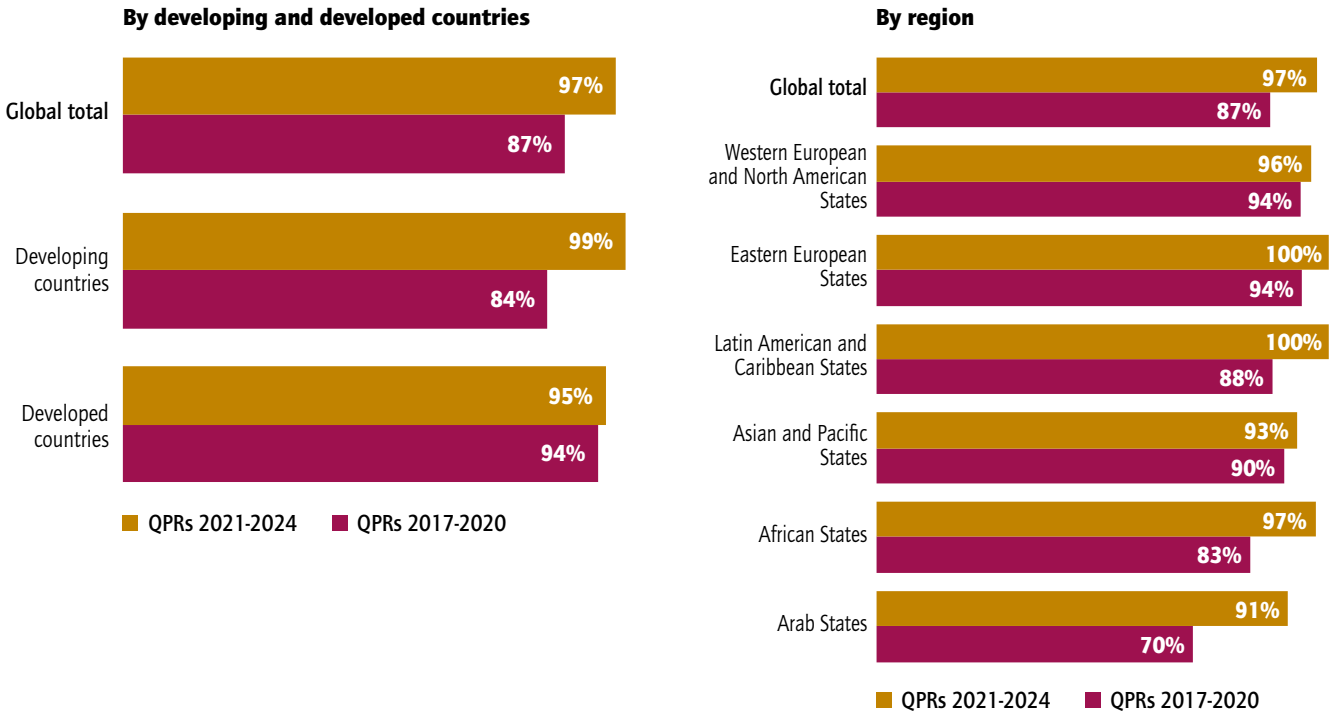
As populations change across the world, consumer-citizens expect to see media reflect the world around them (Westcott et al., 2024). With audiences becoming more diverse and anticipating heterogeneous content, their demand for diversity is matched by content and programming across all forms of media. As the following section demonstrates, over the past five years there has been an increase in public service media with a cultural mandate, greater diversity in programming and audiences, and expanded initiatives to support domestic content production and programming.

Public service media with cultural mandate

Between 2021 and 2024, Parties to the 2005 Convention reporting public service media with a statutory remit to promote a diversity of cultural expressions increased (Figure 2.4). The global average rose to 97%, compared to 87% in 2017-2020. Developing countries reported a 13 percentage point increase, while developed countries reported a 1 percentage point increase. The global increase can be attributed to several driving factors, including efforts to improve the representation of marginalized communities, strengthen democracy and cultural preservation, and respond to demands from community groups and civil society organizations.

Figure 2.4

Proportion of Parties reporting public service media with a statutory remit to promote a diversity of cultural expressions



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

For example, Peru's National Institute of Radio and Television's initiative on the 'Visibility and Care of Prioritized Populations in National Media' has produced content addressing Indigenous peoples, Afro-Peruvian communities and other marginalized groups. Uruguay's 'MVD Socio Audiovisual Accessibility Support' initiative supports audio-visual productions in providing subtitling for deaf viewers, audio description for blind people and Uruguayan Sign Language in line with the principles of universal accessibility established in the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In return, the beneficiary projects are expected to grant rights for screening on Montevideo's public television channel and in cultural programmes of the Department of Culture, thereby ensuring the broad accessibility of national productions.

At the regional level, the most notable increases were in Africa (14 percentage points) and the Arab States (21 percentage points) (Figure 2.4). Within Parties in the Arab region, there have been collective efforts to preserve radio and maintain its role in spreading information and promoting culture, in particular, as a bridge between generations and cultures. In Algeria, public radio stations curate thematic programmes on African dialogue and national historical memory, reinforcing cultural identity and regional engagement; in Morocco, reforms under Law No. 77-03 support the regulation and development of audio-visual media, including public radio, in line with the principles of editorial independence and the promotion of the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. In Africa, radio continues to play a central role in supporting media diversity and broadening access to information for diverse communities as illustrated in Box 2.5.

BOX 2.5 • Radio as a tool for media diversity and social inclusion in Africa

Across the continent of Africa, radio remains a vital tool for bridging geographical, informational and social divides. In Kenya, new community radio frequencies and enhanced opportunities for direct audience feedback have boosted youth engagement and intercultural dialogue, particularly in rapidly changing, diverse urban areas (UNESCO, 2024c). In Madagascar, stations such as Studio Sifaka continue to deliver rural-, youth- and health-focused broadcasts, often in partnership with non-governmental organizations and international agencies (Fondation Hirondelle, 2024). Cameroon has benefited from UNESCO-led initiatives to build local radio capacity and thematic programming, notably ahead of key public events (UNESCO, 2025b). South Africa's Strategic Plan (2021-2025) targeted providing funding to community radio stations, operated by women managers, alongside capacity building and support for media projects that are owned or managed by women, addressing issues pertinent to women and girls (MDDA, 2020). Zimbabwe's nationwide community radio toolkit, launched in 2024, has standardized resources and guidance to establish, strengthen and sustain healthy community radio stations deeply rooted in their communities (ZACRAS and UNESCO, 2024). These efforts, supported by regulatory reforms and capacity building for independent broadcasters, have widened the representation of marginalized voices and reinforced the critical role of community-run radio in fostering social inclusion.

Source: UNESCO, 2024c, 2025b; Fondation Hirondelle, 2024; MDDA, 2020; ZACRAS and UNESCO, 2024

Content diversity in programming

Regarding content diversity in programming (Figure 2.5), which requires localized content produced for multiple linguistic and cultural communities, developing countries more frequently report mandates for regional or local broadcasters (90% compared to 84% in developed countries). National broadcasters contribute to diversity by supporting the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultural traditions. In South Africa, for instance, 50% of the annual budget is allocated to independently produced programmes in previously marginalized local African languages, and from regions outside metropolitan centres such as Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg (ICASA, 2024).

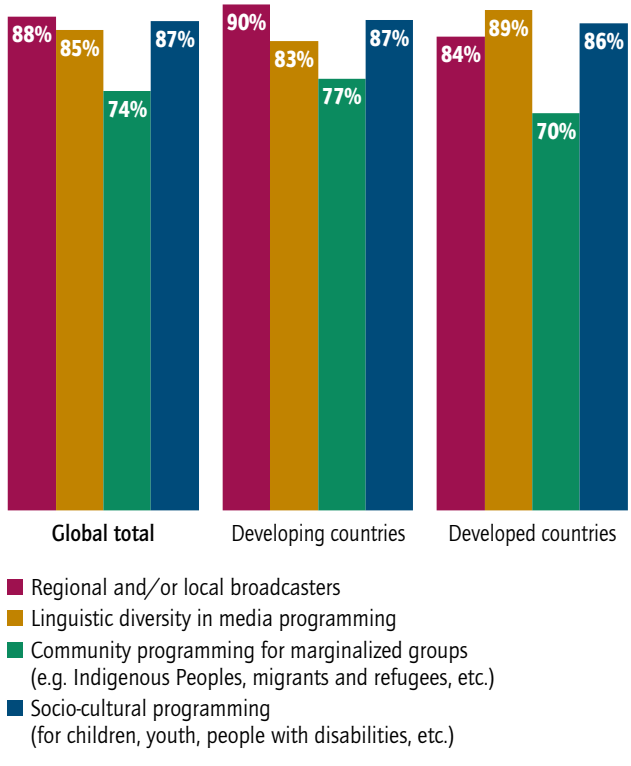
These measures directly address the cultural marginalization of many African languages; by channelling substantial resources to independent productions, they redress past neglect, support linguistic vitality and expand the cultural narratives represented in national media.

Similar strategies are also evident in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's programming, which features Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya and Somali content to promote and safeguard different local cultural traditions and practices of diverse communities. In Mauritania, the national public broadcaster launched a dedicated channel for culture that provides diverse programming in the country's principal national languages, which include Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof. These initiatives highlight the rise of localized cultural content programming and public investment in independent and regional media production.

Linguistic diversity in media programming is more frequently reported in developed countries (89%) than in developing countries (83%), reflecting the presence of legal and policy frameworks that support institutionalized multiculturalism and multilingual broadcasting (ACMA, 2020).

Figure 2.5

Proportion of Parties with policies and measures that support content diversity in programming, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Several public broadcasters illustrate these approaches. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation operates in English and French, while also supporting Indigenous languages. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation provides public broadcasting in French, German, Italian and Romansh. In Australia, multilingual content is delivered through the multicultural television and radio services of the Special Broadcasting Service. In countries such as Australia and Canada, immigration and multicultural policies have contributed to structured mechanisms that facilitate access to multilingual media. International streaming services with multilingual media are also readily available in these countries. In addition, international streaming services offering multilingual content are widely available, further expanding linguistic choice within national media environments.

As shown in Figure 2.5, however, community programming specifically for marginalized groups – such as Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees – remains less widespread. Relevant measures are reported by 70% of developed countries and 77% of developing countries. This suggests that, despite broader multilingual media availability, targeted support for under-represented creators and communities is uneven.

BOX 2.6 • Strengthening Indigenous voices through audio-visual storytelling

Argentina's 'ORIGEN' initiative illustrates how targeted policies can expand content diversity by supporting under-represented creators. Led by the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs and funded in 2023 by the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity, the programme trained young filmmakers from five Indigenous communities (Mbyá Guaraní, Wichí, Kolla, Huarpe and Qom) in cinematographic skills and independent production (UNESCO, 2023b). It fostered peer exchange across Indigenous groups and established a national Indigenous film network to promote visibility (Mukhongo et al., 2024). By enabling Indigenous communities to tell their own stories, ORIGEN directly addresses gaps in representation within national media systems. It demonstrates how investment in culturally specific training and distribution nurtures local talent as well as broadens the diversity of cultural expressions available to audiences. Its success has also led to the development of a similar programme, the pan-African Film Residency for Young Women Filmmakers (for details, see UNESCO, 2025c).

Source: Argentina QPR, 2024; UNESCO, 2023b, 2025c; Mukhongo et al., 2024

Existing examples demonstrate that strengthening such support can play an important role in fostering greater diversity in media content (Box 2.6).

Support for socio-cultural programming aimed at children, youth and persons with disabilities is significantly higher, reaching 87% in developing and 86% in developed countries. Chile's CNTV Infantil cultural and educational television, for example, focuses on high-quality children's programming on free-to-air television with the aim of fostering development, learning and cultural awareness among its young audiences. These trends distinguish two distinct rationales for promoting content diversity in programming.

For marginalized groups, diversity recognition is rooted in justice (addressing cultural bias and discrimination), while for broader socio-cultural groups, diversity is aimed at inclusion (addressing access bias and exclusion) (Kymlicka, 2010). At the same time, recent research has shown that, at least in some countries, private broadcasters are now less inclined to invest in the production of children's programmes than in the past. This decline is being driven, at least partly, by changing viewing habits, as more children are turning to streaming services such as Netflix or YouTube (Burke, 2025), something which could have significant implications on the types and quality of educational or cultural content that children access.

BOX 2.7 • Commitment to diversity of voices and experiences

The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) has made immigrants a central focus of its programming, guided by the motto 'human is the essence'. TRT features immigrant-related content across channels such as TRT News, TRT Children and TRT Documentary, aiming to foster understanding and support the integration of immigrants into society (TRT, 2025). With about one million migrant children receiving education in the country (as of 2022), TRT Children has initiated plans to produce a cartoon episode to introduce educational services for these children (ECRE, 2025). Such programming is designed to promote social harmony and reflect TRT's commitment to representing diverse voices and experiences within Türkiye.

Source: Türkiye QPR, 2021; TRT, 2025; ECRE, 2025

There is also a growing commitment to advancing gender inclusion within media institutions and content frameworks. Bulgaria's National Television and Radio networks have adopted policies for balanced gender representation in media content and implemented editorial guidelines that ensure diversity in programming across age, gender and socio-cultural groups. Ireland has established 'An Coimisiún', a new media regulator with an explicit mandate to promote gender equality in media output and leadership. Austria reported on 'Vorlaut Kollektiv', a feminist collective providing a platform for young online journalists to explore gender and socio-political issues through independent reporting using digital media formats popular among younger audiences, such as TikTok stories or Instagram reels. Qatar-based institutions, including the Al Jazeera Media Institute and the Qatari Media Centre, have organized training initiatives to empower women in journalism and media production (Qatar News Agency, 2024). Bangladesh and Uganda have also hosted UNESCO-supported workshops focusing on gender-responsive reporting and addressing gender disparities in the media as well as on guidelines for gender equality, disability representation and inclusive news coverage. These initiatives, at the levels of production, representation, programming and leadership, are gradually fostering gender parity and building talent capability for current and future female media professionals.

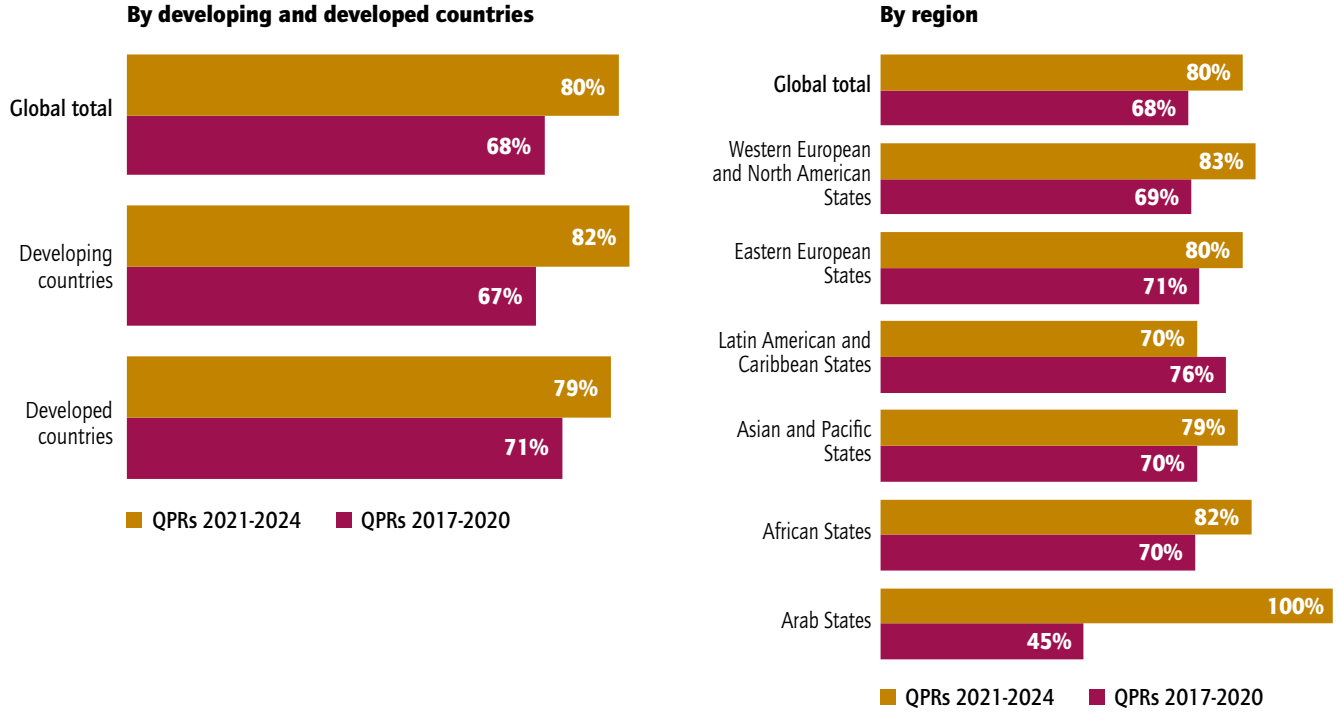
Domestic content incentives

Globally, reporting of domestic content regulations for audio-visual media rose from 68% in 2017-2020 to 80% in 2021-2024 (Figure 2.6). This trend is reflected in evolving legislative and regulatory frameworks across regions. In Europe, for example, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2018) has recommended that at least 30% of content provided by video-on-demand services (excluding news, sports and games) consist of European works.

In other regions, notably Latin America and the Caribbean (where 70% of Parties report having domestic content regulations), regulatory frameworks have been slower to adapt to the rapid growth and transnational character of over-the-top platforms; as a result, such services remain less subject to domestic, regional or language quotas than linear television. According to desk research conducted for this report, only 24% of Parties have quotas for subscription video-on-demand services, compared to 47% for free-to-air television.

Figure 2.6

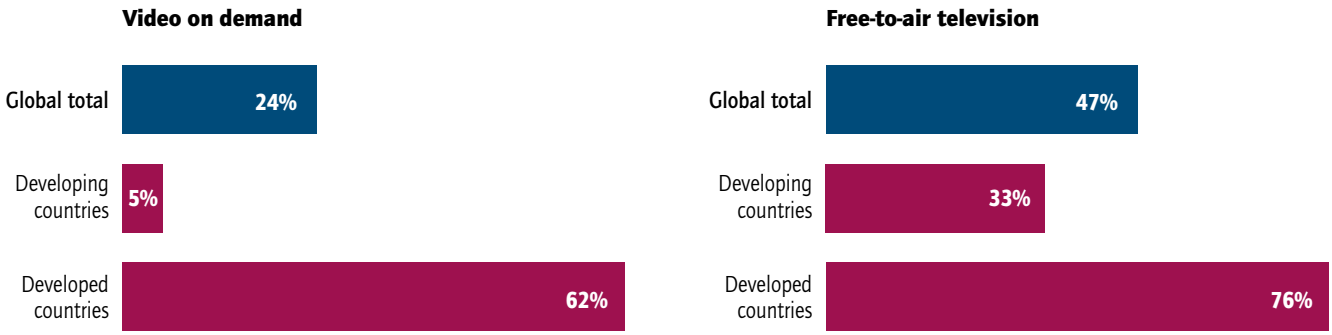
Proportion of Parties reporting domestic content regulations for audio-visual media



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Figure 2.7

Proportion of Parties with domestic, regional or linguistic content quotas for subscription video on demand and for free-to-air television, by developing and developed countries



Source: BOP Consulting (2025)

It is important to note that the percentage of Parties that have established domestic, regional or linguistic content quotas varies widely between developed and developing countries, across all categories examined: free-to-air television (76% and 33%, respectively), pay television (68% and 20%), subscription video on demand (62% and 5%) and radio (36% and 24%) (Figure 2.7).

For subscription video on demand, 62% of developed countries, compared to 5% of developing countries, have domestic, regional or linguistic content quotas in place. The low prevalence of subscription video-on-demand quota legislation in developing countries reflects several factors, including a continued regulatory focus on traditional media such as free-to-air and public broadcasting rather than streaming services, as well as limited institutional capacity to regulate global platforms that operate outside national jurisdictions and are therefore not bound by local content quotas. With a global average of 24%, both developing and developed countries face challenges in strengthening legal frameworks that impose discoverability requirements or content quotas on subscription video-on-demand platforms. These challenges include considerations related to technical capacity (drafting and enforcing digital media regulation), political will (prioritizing cultural and linguistic diversity on digital platforms) and policy coordination (addressing international pressures while advancing local content objectives).

Box 2.8 • Colombia's 'smart regulation' and the audio-visual boom

Colombia illustrates how Latin American states are using flexible regulation to attract investment while stimulating local production. Law 1556 introduced incentives including a 40% cash rebate on audio-visual services and a 35% transferable tax credit, drawing major platforms such as Netflix and Amazon to produce series like *Narcos* and *Distrito Salvaje*. These measures have generated over US$499 million in investment and thousands of jobs, boosting skills and positioning Colombia within the region's 'audio-visual boom' (CFC, 2023). Yet this model reflects broader risks: reliance on global platforms can marginalize independent producers, concentrate ownership and homogenize content. While Colombia's policies showcase the benefits of 'smart regulation' for capacity building and global integration (Enriquez and Melguizo, 2021), they also highlight the challenge of balancing foreign investment with safeguards that protect cultural sovereignty and diverse local expressions.

Source: CFC, 2023; Enriquez and Melguizo, 2021

CONCLUSION

Building on the trajectories traced by UNESCO's *Re|Shaping* reports – from the 2015 to the 2022 edition – it is clear that media diversity must be positioned as a critical policy priority. Where earlier editions identified specific risks, this report highlights that governments and institutions are responding with stronger regulatory frameworks, expanded monitoring systems, and statutory cultural mandates for public service and community media. These efforts are particularly important in crisis and conflict contexts, where media serves as vital infrastructure for social cohesion and resilience. Overall, this evolution reflects a shift from risk identification towards strengthening resilience through regulation, platform accountability and investment in inclusive content systems.

At the same time, challenges identified earlier remain all-pervasive and will continue to require action to support the diversity of media outlets and content, enabled by increased media freedom, accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

Parties to the 2005 Convention have reported meaningful progress: over 80% have introduced domestic content regulations for audio-visual media; nearly all report public service media with a statutory cultural mandate; and there has been a significant rise in media monitoring frameworks, particularly in the Global South. Measures to support community media, regional content and multilingual programming have also expanded, alongside increasing investment in digital transition and media literacy initiatives. However, these advancements are occurring in a context of intensifying challenges, such as platform consolidation and algorithmic opacity.

Against this backdrop, governments must reinforce the policy foundations of the 2005 Convention by aligning national measures with global frameworks such as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), which provides an overarching normative framework for aligning AI governance with the protection of human rights and cultural sovereignty. Doing so will require renewed commitment to regulatory innovation, platform accountability and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in digital governance. This includes strengthening independent media institutions, ensuring transparent oversight of AI and content moderation systems, and expanding equitable access to public interest media. Ultimately, safeguarding media diversity today is essentially about building inclusive, pluralistic and resilient societies that not only enable full and meaningful participation in democratic life but also will protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the diversity of the media

- **Regulate media concentration and platform dominance:** Governments, regional regulatory authorities and competition bodies should adopt and enforce media ownership laws to ensure fair competition and prevent monopolies and excessive consolidation. This involves overseeing media mergers and implementing financial and institutional tools to diversify media ownership and ensure the sustainability of diverse media outlets.
- **Enhance media ownership transparency:** National regulatory authorities, parliaments and watchdog bodies should require public disclosure of media ownership structures and funding sources to ensure democratic accountability, safeguard editorial independence and enable citizens to evaluate the sources of the information and cultural content they consume.
- **Invest in community and public service media:** National governments, cultural ministries and development donors should provide stable financial and institutional support for public service and community media. Support should expand access, promote cultural diversity and ensure inclusive participation of rural, Indigenous and vulnerable communities.
- **Expand and harmonize media monitoring systems:** National media regulators and relevant international organizations should 1) strengthen the legal mandates and resources of media monitoring bodies to track pluralism, ownership, independence and gender equality across traditional and digital media; and 2) facilitate regional and international cooperation through shared data and good practices, such as the Media Pluralism Monitor or UNESCO's quadrennial *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* report series.
- **Strengthen context-appropriate media accountability mechanisms:** Develop regulatory frameworks that strengthen media accountability mechanisms and ethical standards. Build the capacity of relevant actors to monitor compliance, protect editorial independence and public-interest obligations, promote content diversity, and address mis- and disinformation and other digital harms.
- **Ensure algorithmic transparency and AI accountability:** Governments, platform operators and international digital governance bodies should 1) require platforms to disclose their content moderation and curation algorithms, and to conduct risk assessments of AI systems that influence public discourse; and 2) encourage co-regulatory approaches involving civil society and academia, in line with UNESCO's updated Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms and Generative Artificial Intelligence.
- **Strengthen collaboration with civil society:** Empower civil society organizations to advocate for media pluralism, monitor ownership concentration and promote media literacy, strengthening public resilience against mis- and disinformation.

To support the diversity of cultural content in the media

- **Implement domestic cultural content quotas and discoverability requirements:** National governments and audio-visual regulatory agencies should adopt and enforce content quotas, incentives and discoverability requirements for national, regional and linguistic content, especially on streaming and subscription platforms, to preserve cultural sovereignty and support local cultural and creative industries.
- **Ensure diversity in cultural media content and production:** Governments should address representation gaps within national and local media systems, by adopting policies that promote media production and content with diversity across age, gender and socio-cultural groups.
- **Promote inclusive and localized programming:** Public broadcasters, community media networks and cultural councils should develop editorial guidelines and funding schemes, which support programming that reflects linguistic and cultural diversity, gender equality and under-represented voices. Efforts should also prioritize independent productions from non-urban regions and minority communities.
- **Strengthen capacity for independent content creation:** Development agencies, international donors and national training institutes should fund initiatives that train content creators from Indigenous, youth and minority communities in media production and digital storytelling, and promote their visibility.
- **Strengthen data collection on cultural content diversity:** National statistics agencies and regulatory bodies should build technical capacity to collect and disaggregate data on cultural media content diversity, including by region, language, gender and age, to inform evidence-based policy adjustments and meet the 2005 Convention's monitoring requirements.

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Chapter 3

The digital environment: online culture, offline implications

Heritiana Ranaivoson

KEY FINDINGS

- Digital transformation in public institutions is a prerequisite for the broader digital transition of the cultural and creative sector. Public institutions' growing adoption of digital cultural strategies responds to both evolving sector and stakeholder needs and the transformative effects of digitization on the creative value chain.

- Digital cultural governance has become a central pillar of cultural policy making. Between 2021 and 2024, 85% of Parties developed policies to promote the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sector, up from 80% in 2017-2020. Progress is also evident in Parties' efforts to support vibrant domestic digital cultural and creative markets (64%) and to enhance the discoverability of domestic cultural content (80%), representing a 20 percentage point increase in both areas since the last reporting period. However, in 2025, the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention noted that existing regulatory frameworks are inadequate to address challenges posed by Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI).

- The global digital marketplace is characterized by a small number of major platforms that dominate the digital ecosystem; this raises concerns about market imbalance and its implications for creativity and diversity. In this environment, a limited group of highly visible artists captures a disproportionate share of revenues and exposure, while many lesser-known creators struggle to achieve comparable visibility.

- Access to digital cultural content is increasingly provided through private services such as music and video-streaming platforms, whose non-transparent content-curation practices are often driven by commercial priorities. These platforms tend to prioritize mainstream content, limiting the discoverability of less-known works and increasing the risk of cultural homogenization.

- Against this backdrop, Parties are adopting targeted measures to support local creatives in the digital environment and promote the diversity of cultural expressions. Parties are implementing practical initiatives such as trade fairs, financial mechanisms, incubators for creative startups, and obligations requiring global streaming platforms to invest in the production of local audio-visual content.

- Revenues from digital services now represent the main source of income for creators, up from 17% in 2018 to 35% in 2023. At the same time, digitization has intensified income instability and exposure to Intellectual Property infringements for many artists. Policy responses aimed at ensuring fair remuneration in the digital environment remain limited.

- Inequalities persist in access to digital technologies, infrastructures and skills. Digital literacy gaps are particularly pronounced: 45% of the population in developed countries possesses intermediate digital skills, compared to only 16% in developing countries. Similarly, 67% of individuals in developed countries have basic information and communications technologies skills, versus 28% in developing contexts. Gender disparities also persist, with women receiving lower pay and occupying fewer senior positions in many professions across the digital cultural sector.

- Gaps in data regarding access to and consumption of digital media cultural content remain a global challenge. Only 48% of Parties report measures to develop statistics or studies in this area. Data collection is constrained by methodological difficulties, the reluctance of major streaming platforms to share user data, and the limited transparency in AI systems, all of which affect the online discoverability and visibility of creative works.

- The rapid rise of AI, particularly GenAI, is reshaping various cultural and creative sectors. Creative professionals report overwhelmingly negative perceptions of its impact, with 79% viewing AI as a threat to art workers. Economic projections forecast substantial risks for creators, estimating global revenue losses of 24% for music creators (around 4 billion euros per year by 2028) and 21% for audio-visual creators (approximately 4.5 billion euros annually). Additional concerns include the technology's capacity to replace human work, the unlicensed use of copyrighted data to train GenAI systems, and potential losses in cultural and linguistic diversity.

- Despite growing policy attention to AI, its implications for the cultural and creative sectors remain insufficiently addressed. Between 2016 and 2023, 148 AI-related bills were adopted across 128 countries, yet only one identified culture as its primary subject matter.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Digital transformation of cultural and creative sectors

Global concentration among online platforms

New forms of remuneration and skills requirements for creators

Unequal access to digital technologies

Rapid adoption of AI technologies

PROGRESS

85% of countries support **digital transformation** of the cultural sector through:

- **Digitizing** public services and functions
- **Interministerial** collaboration
- **National digital cultural strategies** and plans
- Targeted **sector-specific support** (e.g. gaming)

Countries support **local digital creative sectors** through:

- **Trade shows** and networking events
- **Incubators** and financing mechanisms for entrepreneurship
- Investments in **local content production**
- **Digital skills** development

CHALLENGES

Digital divides persist

- Only **16%** of people in **developing countries** have **intermediate ICT skills**
- **Women creators** are concentrated in **lower-income brackets**
- A small number of platforms dominate with **non-transparent content curation practices**, limiting discoverability
- Only **48%** of countries are **developing statistics** on consumption of digital media cultural content

Digitization has increased **precarity for creators**

- Unstable **employment**
- **Intellectual Property** infringement
- Challenges for **fair remuneration**

Culture remains a **blind spot** in **AI governance**

- Only **1 in 148** AI bills focuses on culture
- **Legal disputes** over **copyright and transparency**

EMERGING TRENDS

Digital priorities shaping countries' cultural policy

- **64%** support **vibrant domestic cultural markets**
- **80%** enhance **discoverability of domestic cultural content**
- **85%** support **digital skills development** as **35% of creators' revenues** come from digital services

Opportunities and challenges presented by AI

- A **powerful tool** to enhance creative production, experimentation and access
- But poses **threats** to cultural and linguistic diversity and creators' rights and livelihoods
- Preliminary projections for global revenue loss by 2028: **24%** for **music creators** and **21%** for **audio-visual creators**

INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, at the time of the drafting of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention), online distribution platforms were in their infancy, with most operating in niche domains such as book retail or music streaming, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) was far from being as pervasive as today. While the Convention itself predated some of the major transformations brought about by the digital revolution, reflections on this issue gained momentum in the years that followed, leading to the adoption of the Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the Convention in the Digital Environment in 2017. The Guidelines acknowledged the impact of technological change on the cultural and creative sectors and started a new process aimed at addressing the challenges raised by digitalization while leveraging its potential for creative innovation and for democratizing access to the creation and enjoyment of diverse art forms.

Today, the Convention continues to remain technologically neutral as the principles and rights it enshrines apply regardless of the technologies involved. Nevertheless, in light of the rapid and significant disruptions to the creative sectors brought on by digital technologies, the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention expressed, during its meeting in June 2025, their concern that existing legal and normative instruments are insufficient to address these pressing challenges, hence the need to strengthen or to complement them.

The core question that this chapter seeks to address is: What cultural policies are needed to promote and protect the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment?

This chapter focuses therefore on the cultural policy responses pursued by Parties and the role the Convention has played – and will continue to play – in order to guide Parties, cultural sectors and professionals in these sectors to benefit largely from digital technologies. Fulfilling this role requires analysing current trends in the adoption of digital technologies, and the potential impact of such adoption on the diversity of cultural expressions.

THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR

Digital technologies have transformed cultural creation, production (including financing), distribution and consumption, opening up significant opportunities in cultural sectors. Creators now have broader access to technologies that enable the production of high-quality content at a fraction of the previous cost, and online platforms have expanded their visibility, reach and monetization opportunities, giving creators access to valuable data and analytics on audience engagement and preferences (CISAC and PMP Strategy, 2024). Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis accelerated the adoption of digital technologies by both creators and organizations on the one side and consumers on the other, and the pace of change only continued to intensify in the years that followed, with the emergence of technologies such as Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) ushering in new modes of creation and access as well as concurrent challenges and opportunities.

Policy responses to digital transformation

The increasing adoption of digital technologies and its pervasive influence across the cultural and creative sectors have prompted a cultural policy response at both national and international levels by Parties to the 2005 Convention. The digital transformation is reshaping not only cultural production but also the governance of culture itself. Public bodies and institutions responsible for cultural policy have expanded their mandates to encompass areas of digital policy such as supporting digital innovation and entrepreneurship, developing digital skills and literacy, and investing in digital cultural infrastructure.

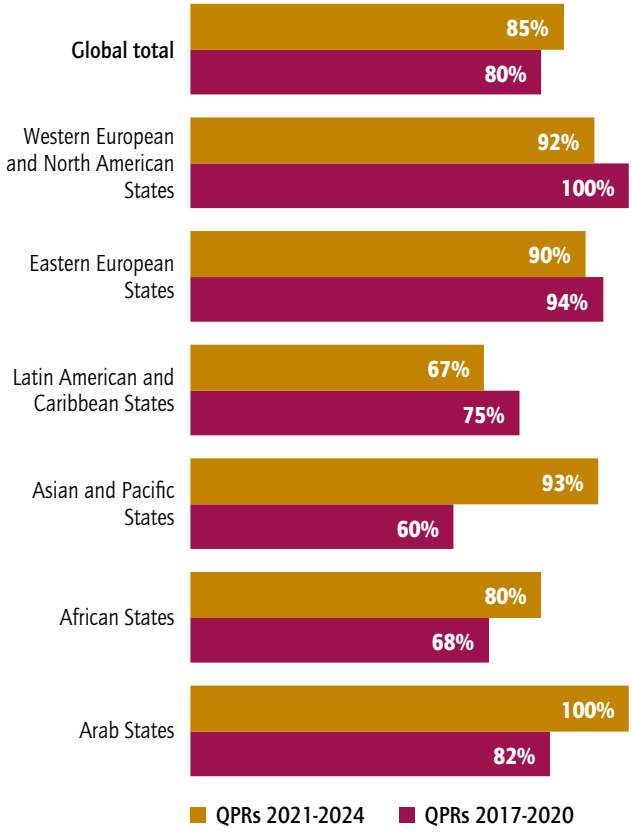
Digital cultural governance has thus become an important dimension of cultural policy making. At the global level, the share of Parties revising or developing regulatory frameworks, sectoral strategies and national plans to adapt the cultural sectors in the digital environment has increased from an already high baseline of 80% in 2017-2020 to 85% in 2021-2024 (Figure 3.1). This growth is driven in part by significant increases in certain regions, particularly among the African, Asian and Pacific, and Arab States regions.

▪ Digital public services

Several Parties have digitized the operations of public cultural institutions to improve service delivery and raise awareness among the creative community of existing cultural policies and support schemes. In Oman, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth developed a Smart Portal as one of the key initiatives of a broader Government Digital Transformation Program (2021-2025).

Figure 3.1

Proportion of Parties with policies, measures or mechanisms supporting the digital transformation of cultural and creative industries and institutions, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

The Smart Portal centralizes access to information and services, enabling artists and cultural organizations to stay informed about the latest cultural policies, events and opportunities, while also facilitating administrative procedures such as registering cultural events or licensing literary or artistic works. Similar initiatives have been reported in Czechia, Morocco and Slovenia, where digital platforms are being developed or updated to digitize administrative procedures, enabling artists and cultural professionals to apply for funding grants or access social security services, tax reductions and other public support mechanisms.

Several countries have also implemented digital management systems enabling the systematic collection of data for the monitoring and evaluation of public cultural institutions and informing decision making. In Uganda, for example, 150 district officials have been trained to operate the Culture Management Information System, which is designed to be interoperable with other e-government systems to support real-time data collection and reporting on artists, cultural institutions and organizations.

Interministerial collaboration

The effective design and implementation of digital cultural policies is often hampered by a lack of collaboration between ministries of culture and other relevant ministries, such as those responsible for digital affairs. Of the 3,908 reported measures in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, only 214 were designed through interministerial collaboration; among these, 5.1% were designed in collaboration with ministries of communications and 3.1% were designed with ministries of innovation. Such coordination requires sustained mechanisms for joint planning, data sharing and capacity building across ministries. This helps ensure that cultural policy perspectives not only inform digital policy but also actively shape inclusive and context-sensitive digital transitions.

For example, in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, dedicated ministerial departments for digital transition are responsible for implementing the government's digital policies across various policy areas, including the cultural sector. Policy actions implemented through interministerial collaboration include the development of both digital infrastructure to expand connectivity across the country, and education and training programmes to strengthen the digital competencies of youth, artists and cultural professionals, as well as digital governance measures, particularly regulatory frameworks to protect Intellectual Property and encourage ethical use of digital technologies.

National digital strategies

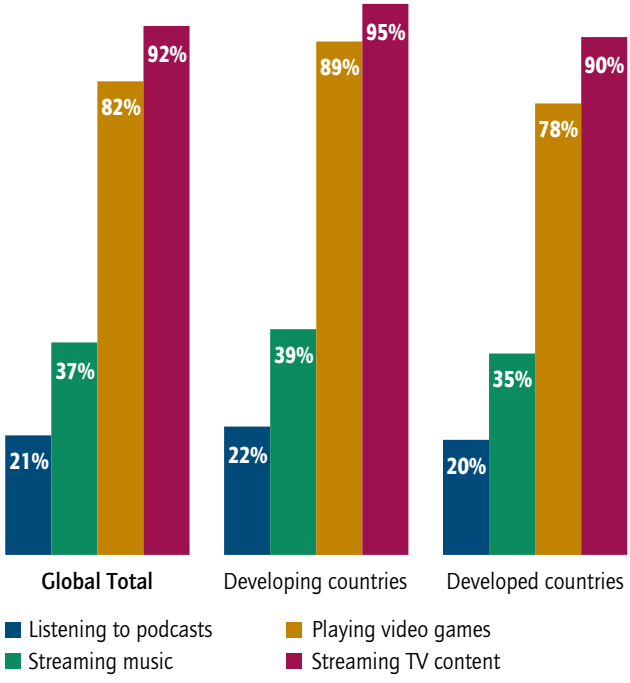
Several Parties have adopted comprehensive national strategies and plans to guide the digital transformation of their cultural and creative sector. These frameworks serve as a practical road map, outlining national priorities and expected outcomes, allocating resources, and engaging key stakeholders responsible for their implementation. China's Action Plan for the Innovative Development of Metaverse Industry (2023-2025) is led by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology in coordination with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and focuses on encouraging innovation and the use of immersive technologies, in fields such as gaming, animation and installations in cultural sites or commercial spaces. Australia's national Digital Culture Strategy (2021-2024) takes a diagnostic approach by assessing the digital readiness of the creative sectors and developing tailored capacity-building programmes based on the gaps identified to develop the skills and capacities of artists and organizations. Australia's strategy also includes a digital First Nations strategy to safeguard and promote Indigenous cultural Intellectual Property, an issue that has gained increased importance in light of GenAI technologies and their implications for copyright and cultural ownership.

Targeted sectoral strategies

Considering the diversity of creative ecosystems and the different dynamics at play that shape how they are impacted by digital technologies and processes, several Parties have implemented targeted strategies that address specific cultural sectors. Among them, the gaming sector has emerged as a growing policy priority in countries such as Chile, France, Germany, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Türkiye and Viet Nam, which have implemented a range of targeted measures supporting its development: from dedicated funding schemes and training programmes in collaboration with film and university institutions to trade fairs connecting game developers with investors and gaming hubs equipped with advanced technical infrastructure.

Figure 3.2

Proportion of the population accessing types of digital content, by developing and developed countries



Source: GWI (2022) / BOP Consulting (2025)

Data from GWI (formerly GlobalWebIndex) highlights the widespread popularity of video games as a form of digital cultural consumption. In both developed and developing countries, the largest share of internet users accesses digital content through streaming television content (92%), closely followed by playing video games (82%), while music streaming accounts for only 37% (Figure 3.2). The video game sector has emerged as a new frontier for on-screen diversity, as evidenced by the numerous policy measures that emphasize the strategic role of games development in showcasing national cultures, languages, folklore and visual aesthetics.

Other sector-specific strategies include those implemented by Sweden and the Republic of Korea for the performing arts sector. Although the sector was among the hardest hit by revenue loss due to venue closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis also created opportunities to innovate new monetization models and strategies for audience outreach. Measures included investing in recording equipment and streaming infrastructure to support high quality digital broadcasting and providing free access to recorded performances for underserved communities, while exploring new remuneration models for digital distribution.

As evidenced in the discussions above, the digital transformation encompasses a complex interplay between technologies, processes, and the artists and cultural institutions shaping cultural production. To respond effectively to these changes, digital cultural strategies should consider the specific ways in which digitization is reshaping the creative value chain, and identify the evolving needs of the sector and its stakeholders, including shifts in remuneration models and how audiences are engaging with digital culture.

At the international level, recognizing the urgent and growing demands from Parties for clearer policy guidance in order to keep pace with a rapidly evolving digital environment, the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention convened an expert reflection group, which formulated a series of recommendations to support effective policy responses in the digital environment (Box 3.1). Complementing this work, the Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the Convention in the Digital Environment are being updated to provide a revised framework to address emerging challenges, including those arising from GenAI.

BOX 3.1 • The Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment

Over the years, the 2005 Convention has served as an important multilateral forum where culture and digital technologies have been addressed as an explicit and sustained focus of international cooperation and policy dialogue. In this context, at its ninth session in June 2023, the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention requested the Secretariat to create a Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment composed of leading experts in the field, which would engage in an in-depth reflection on four themes identified by the Parties, namely, the promotion of linguistic diversity of cultural content, the discoverability of national and local cultural content on digital platforms, the importance of greater and meaningful transparency on digital platforms regarding cultural issues, and the impact of AI on cultural and creative sectors.

The work carried out by the Reflection Group culminated in the formulation of 11 recommendations, which are organized within four areas of action, plus one additional area addressed specifically to UNESCO:

- **Normative action**
  1. Adopt an Additional Protocol to the Convention in the digital environment
- **Exchange of information and good practices**
  2. Optimize the collection and sharing of information
  3. Revise the framework for Quadrennial Periodic Reports
- **Awareness raising and advocacy**
  4. Create a consultation and dialogue framework
  5. Support advocacy actions
  6. Raise public awareness on cultural responsible practices and behaviours in the digital environment through cultural education initiatives
- **Capacity building**
  7. Creation of national digital culture capacity plans
  8. Update arts education curricula and methodologies
  9. Support the creation of new UNESCO Chairs in digital culture
  10. Creation of a global network of experts in digital culture and AI
- **Final recommendation addressed to UNESCO**
  11. Reinforce UNESCO's action on AI and Culture

Recommendations 2 to 11 were adopted by the Conference of Parties at its 10th session in June 2025 and are currently being implemented. The first recommendation, which calls for the adoption of an Additional Protocol, was proposed by the Reflection Group in response to the urgent need to strengthen the normative architecture for protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment, through a legal instrument with the same binding force as the Convention. While discussions on its adoption are ongoing, the Convention's governing bodies have expressed concern that the rapid development of GenAI technologies is fast outpacing the establishment of international norms and the regulatory safeguards needed to uphold the value of human creativity, the rights of creators, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Source: UNESCO, 2025

THE CONCENTRATION AMONG ONLINE PLATFORMS: IMPACT ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

As highlighted in the 2018 edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report, linear cultural value chains where creation, production, distribution and consumption once followed a sequential model have been transformed by the digital environment into dynamic ecosystems. In this networked model, the boundaries between these stages are increasingly blurred: creators, distributors and audiences interact in real time, often through platforms whose core business lies outside the cultural and creative sector. For example, in the music sector, artists can compose, produce and distribute their work independently on online streaming platforms, while audiences influence trends and visibility by engaging with content through clicks, views and shares. In the film sector, streaming platforms not only distribute but finance and produce original content, reshaping traditional roles in the film value chain.

A small number of major online platforms now dominate global markets for cultural and creative content. For example, Netflix continues to lead the video-on-demand market in Europe and in the Americas, Kinopoisk in Central Asia and Showmax in Africa. This concentration is reinforced by cross-side network effects, which is when the value of a platform increases with the number of users on both sides of the market (Ranaivoson, 2019). For instance, the more viewers on YouTube, the more creators are attracted and vice versa. This self-reinforcing cycle makes it difficult for new or smaller platforms to compete. Once a platform has reached a certain scale, it benefits from a 'winner-takes-all' advantage, where successful platforms continue to grow exponentially and crowd out other competitors. As such, the concentration of power in a few dominant platforms raises concerns about monopolistic practices and the potential undermining of creativity and diversity (Gardiner, 2024).

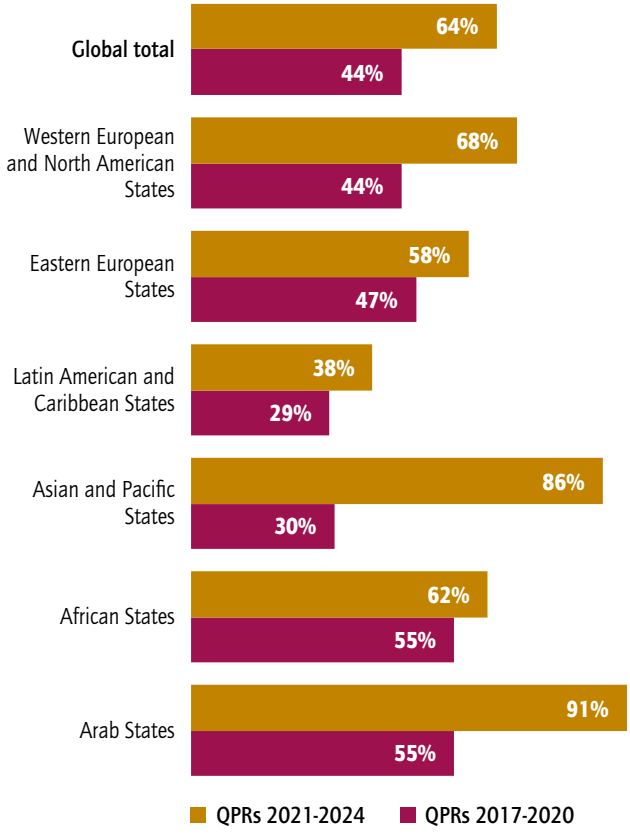
These dynamics also affect artists and creators. In a highly competitive digital landscape where vast amounts of content are being uploaded daily, a small number of popular artists capture an outsized share of revenues and visibility, leaving the majority of lesser-known artists on the margins. Policies are therefore needed to support local ecosystems of artists and organizations in creating and producing creative works and to promote the discoverability of such works.

Supporting local ecosystems of artists, intermediaries and organizations

The proportion of Parties with policies and measures ensuring vibrant domestic digital cultural and creative industries markets with a diversity of actors of all sizes, has increased from 44% (2017-2020) to 64% (2021-2024), with almost the same proportion in developing and developed countries. Noticeable increases can be observed in regions such as the Arab States (from 55% to 91%) and the Asia and Pacific region (from 30% to 86%), underscoring the importance of digital creative and cultural industries in these regions as emerging cultural powerhouses (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3

Proportion of Parties with policies and measures ensuring vibrant domestic digital cultural and creative industries markets with a diversity of actors of all sizes, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Parties have reported diverse measures to support local creative ecosystems, notably by strengthening the capacities of creators, producers and intermediaries to participate in the digital creative economy through initiatives ranging from trade fairs and fiscal measures to digital incubators and capacity-building initiatives.

Trade shows and networking events

Several Parties have implemented initiatives that promote networking and visibility, to support independent creators and small cultural enterprises in gaining access to markets and investment opportunities. In Morocco, the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication organized the first Moroccan Gaming Expo in 2024 to promote the country's gaming industry and to position Rabat Gaming City as a hub for local and international companies. The event enabled young Moroccan game developers to present their projects to an international audience, paving the way for potential collaborations with investors and industry professionals. Furthermore, the event included a varied programme of pitch talks, networking sessions and showcases, covering diverse themes ranging from the integration of Moroccan heritage and culture to game development and the role of national banks in Morocco's gaming ecosystem.

Incubators and financing mechanisms for creative startups

Artists and creative enterprises often face barriers to accessing finance as they are frequently perceived as high risk by conventional lenders and may be unaware of opportunities for public financing or lack the skills and resources to produce investment-ready business plans (OECD, 2022). Parties, however, reported a range of financing mechanisms such as direct grants, fiscal incentives, tax credits or incubators to support products to reach markets.

In France, the National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image provides grants to support the creation of works across various digital fields, including digital arts and cultural content, virtual reality, and video games. It has a dedicated Digital Creators Fund ('CNC Talent'), which supports the creation of content that is distributed free of charge on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The Fund has supported over 600 creators producing diverse works ranging from youth fiction series and art history documentaries to podcasts and animated series. New Zealand has implemented video game tax credits which work as fiscal incentives that allow game production companies to deduct expenses from their taxes.

Fostering digital innovation and entrepreneurship

In Malawi, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) took active steps to strengthen the digital creative ecosystem through its 'Local Digital Content Development Initiative', which awarded grants to five local digital content creators working across diverse creative sectors, including music recording and digital artistic and video production. The initiative aims to empower Malawi storytellers, innovators and artists to produce high-quality digital content and foster sustainable opportunities in the digital economy (Tech Review Africa, 2025). In parallel, MACRA has introduced the draft Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship Bill (2024), which is expected to establish a framework to promote entrepreneurship and digital innovation, creating a more favourable environment and attracting Malawian talent and capital.

Investments in local content production

An area receiving growing attention from policy makers is regulations requiring global streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video to invest in the production of local audio-visual content. Proponents of these regulations argue that as global streaming platforms profit from national markets and often operate outside of local tax regimes, they should contribute to the development of domestic audio-visual ecosystems to ensure that local stories and voices are also represented on-screen. In the European Union, following the 2018 revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, several countries have introduced investment obligations for non-domestic video-on-demand service providers. The regulatory pressure appears to be showing results. In 2022, platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime reached or surpassed the required 30% local content quotas in key markets in Europe such as Belgium, France, Germany and Italy, boosting commissions for local productions and fostering collaboration with national broadcasters (Keslassy, 2022). Such investment obligations have demonstrated considerable potential to support independent European audio-visual productions, thereby contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity (Kostovska et al., 2023).

Similar discussions are underway in several countries including Australia, Canada, Mexico and South Africa. However, such efforts have faced strong opposition from global streaming platforms, which argue that such regulations constitute discriminatory practices and are therefore in violation of bilateral free trade agreements. The picture is further complicated when considering the varying degrees of consensus within each national context for the regulation of streaming platforms, as well as disagreements between media stakeholders, political actors, creators and artists over whether platforms should be regulated in the first place and, if so, for what purposes and through which mechanisms (Vlassis, 2023).

The discoverability of diverse expressions online

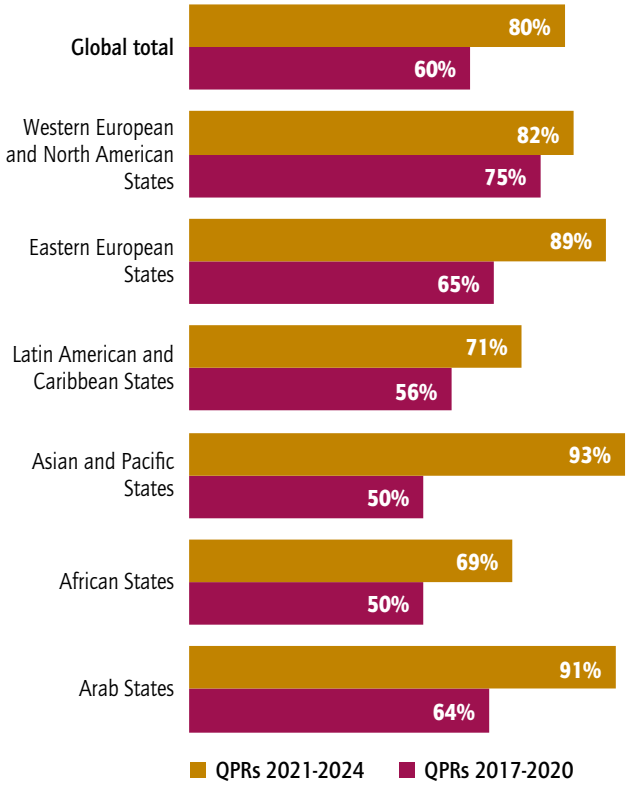
As cultural content is increasingly shared and accessed through online platforms (such as search engines, app stores, streaming platforms and social media), discoverability has emerged as an important concept for understanding how the digital environment affects the visibility of diverse linguistic and cultural expressions online.

Discoverability refers to the likelihood that an item will be encountered and engaged with by someone who was not previously aware of its existence nor actively seeking it (Salganik et al., 2024). A necessary but insufficient condition for discoverability is availability: if a work is not available, or if no information is available about this work and its creators, there is no room for discoverability.

Discoverability gained prominence as an area of policy concern in the francophone context, leading to the establishment in 2019 of the joint France-Quebec Mission on Online Discoverability of French-Language Cultural Content, which addresses the challenges francophone content faces in standing out amid the vast volume of English-language content. These concerns have only intensified over the years and have since become a global concern, as many countries recognize that local artists and cultures are struggling to gain visibility online. This shift is reflected in the significant increase across all regions in the share of Parties reporting policies to enhance access to and discoverability of domestic culture, an increase from 60% in 2017-2020 to 80% in 2021-2024 (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4

Proportion of Parties with policies and measures enhancing access and discoverability of domestic cultural content in the digital environment, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Discoverability is closely related to issues around the production and capture of data. Regarding capture, data are tightly controlled by platform providers, who harvest them to gain pervasive insight into their users – their interactions, contexts and preferences – and act on them through their interfaces and algorithmic systems. The ensuing lack of transparency prevents all other ecosystem stakeholders (including policy makers, consumers, public service broadcasting commissioners and creators) from making informed production, consumption or policy choices.

The lack of transparency can also result from the technical challenges in setting up and applying standards regarding metadata. In the musical field, when works or sound recordings are poorly indexed, it hampers the ability of collectives to pay rights holders their due royalties and reduces the discoverability of musical content. Notable initiatives addressing this challenge include MétaMusique (Box 3.2) and the Pan-African Digital Licensing Hub. The Hub includes 17 collective management societies across Africa that license digital music services. These societies retrieve musical works by authors and artists, which were previously released on digital services without proper registration and were appearing in large databases of unidentified musical works.

BOX 3.2 • MétaMusique

In Quebec, Canada, the 'MétaMusique' initiative was founded in 2020 by a consortium of professional associations, collecting societies and unions in the music sector. It provides a guide designed to help rights holders in the music value chain index their content using metadata. It aims to establish a common metadata model for all music content, offering detailed instructions on how to use and apply it effectively, highlighting metadata fields that are mandatory, recommended or specific to certain stakeholders. This initiative contributes to strengthening the Quebec music industry by promoting standardized indexing practices.

The initiative has attracted more than 42,000 visits to its webpage to date. Beyond the educational component, a second component still under development is a tool for capturing and distributing musical metadata, which will further facilitate the referencing process and thus promote the influence of Quebec musical artists in the international ecosystem. Its application in other countries and regions is under study, for example in the European Union.

Source: Canada QPR, 2024

Furthermore, the dominance of large multinational streaming platforms has raised concerns regarding the discoverability of diverse cultural content, as non-transparent algorithmic recommender systems driven by commercial interests tend to promote English-language hits, blockbusters and bestsellers that appeal to a wider global audience as opposed to lesser-known national or local cultural content. In response, countries have taken concrete measures to address the risks of cultural homogenization and have partnered with a range of stakeholders, including global streaming platforms, to invest in developing local talent and supporting their visibility online.

In the case of the music sector, a 2023 study examining the impact of music streaming on the types of songs and artists popular with consumers in several European countries found that among those surveyed, the top 10 streamed songs were predominately by domestic artists and composed in native languages (Page and Dalla Riva, 2023). The authors of the study described this as a phenomenon of 'glocalization', observing that local artists and music dominate domestic charts even as global streaming platforms offer access to a vast array of international catalogues. Data from the Global Music Report 2025 published by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry also point to growing cultural and linguistic diversity in global music streaming. The world's top 10 markets now include Brazil, China, Mexico and the Republic of Korea, while emerging markets in the Arab States, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest growth in revenues from recorded music (IFPI, 2025).

According to the Global Music Report 2025, the impressive growth of emerging music markets is driven by sustained investment in local talent and support for artistic development. In a landscape of digital abundance where anyone with access can create and upload their music online, intermediaries such as record music labels play an important role in discovering, nurturing and promoting artists. For instance, global record music labels are investing in local talent through their regional subsidiaries and partnerships. In Madagascar, a strategic partnership was signed in 2023 between Universal Music Africa and Renala Music, the music branch of Manoova, a Madagascar-based organization. Through Virgin Music Africa, Universal's label for digital distribution, the partnership aims to valorize the rich musical heritage of Madagascar by digitizing and enabling the streaming of its catalogue locally and internationally.

Likewise in the audio-visual sector, global streaming platforms such as Netflix are adopting 'localization' strategies to expand in foreign markets by investing in the production of original local content and licensing of legacy film or television catalogues to attract domestic viewers (Ramachandran, 2025). In 2022, the Kenyan Ministry of ICT, Innovation, and Youth Affairs signed a two-year memorandum of understanding with Netflix to promote the growth of Kenya's film industry. The agreement outlined areas of partnership such as content investment, capacity building and training of local talent and collaboration with public institutions such as the Kenya Film Commission, Kenya Revenue Authority and the National Treasury to ensure the development of an enabling environment for the production of films (Kitili, 2022). These initiatives represent a comprehensive approach to strengthening the film value chain, from talent development to production and access, demonstrating how strategic public-private partnerships can enhance the visibility of locally produced content. At the same time, some of these approaches have raised concerns about the risk of privileging standardized content, misrepresenting local realities and generating dependency on foreign investment (Alcorn, 2024; Thuillas and Wiart, 2023).

In many countries, local and regional video-on-demand services or national broadcasters and public service media offer streamed content on their own platforms, some of which may have existed before the arrival of global streaming platforms. In India, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has encouraged over-the-top (OTT) platforms to produce and promote regional content since 2018, contributing to a greater availability of diverse cultural influences and content in regional dialects as well as providing a platform for regional creators to reach a wider audience. A study conducted in 2025 found that although there is growing competition for Hindi and English content streamed on international streaming platforms, regional OTT platforms offering content in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam remain extremely popular in India (Das and Rousseau, 2025). A strong preference for domestic content can also be observed in countries such as South Africa, where national platforms such as DStv, Showmax and SABC Plus (a government-owned platform) dominate. Many of these platforms offer free or free-with-ads options and have a competitive advantage over international platforms as they tend to have lower subscription fees (Fabric, 2025).

BOX 3.3 • Kibanda Xpress: Uganda's video-on-demand platform dedicated to local films

In 2019, Ugandan filmmakers and producers approached MTN Uganda, a telecommunications company, highlighting the absence of a centralized digital platform for distributing local films in the country. In response, MTN partnered with Pearlwood, a consortium representing key stakeholders across Uganda's film sector to create Kibanda Xpress, a video-on-demand platform that was launched in 2021. The platform is hosted on the YOTVChannels mobile app, enabling users to stream Ugandan films, new releases and other local entertainment content. Payments can be made through mobile money applications, providing a locally adapted digital payment system. The initiative aims to reduce copyright infringement and increase the visibility of Ugandan films and artists. In addition, MTN covers promotion and marketing costs for film productions, which traditionally account for a significant proportion of distribution budgets, thereby helping to strengthen the commercial viability of local films (PC Tech, 2021).

While at the time of writing this chapter, Kibanda Xpress no longer appears to be supported by MTN, Pearlwood launched a new regional streaming platform in 2025, called Stream East, dedicated to showcasing the works of East African filmmakers. The platform was developed as part of the 'Revitalizing the Film Industry for Livelihood Enhancement' project supported by the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity (Muwado, 2025).

Source: Uganda QPR, 2023; PC Tech, 2021; Muwado, 2025

Another strategy that countries are adopting to expand access to local content is the digitization of books, music and film archives, along with the development of online platforms that make these cultural resources publicly available. For example, in Latvia the National Library developed a digital library compiling 3.8 million digitized books, objects, films and other cultural materials from over 500 cultural institutions, while Cuba launched the virtual library Patria Libros, expanding online access to the country's documentary heritage. Brazil digitized the services of the public library network in the State of Rio de Janeiro during the COVID-19 pandemic to enable all citizens to access e-books, audiobooks and videos. In Slovenia, the Slovenian Film Database serves as a national platform providing information on Slovenia's film heritage, which recently expanded its offerings to include on-demand viewing of films.

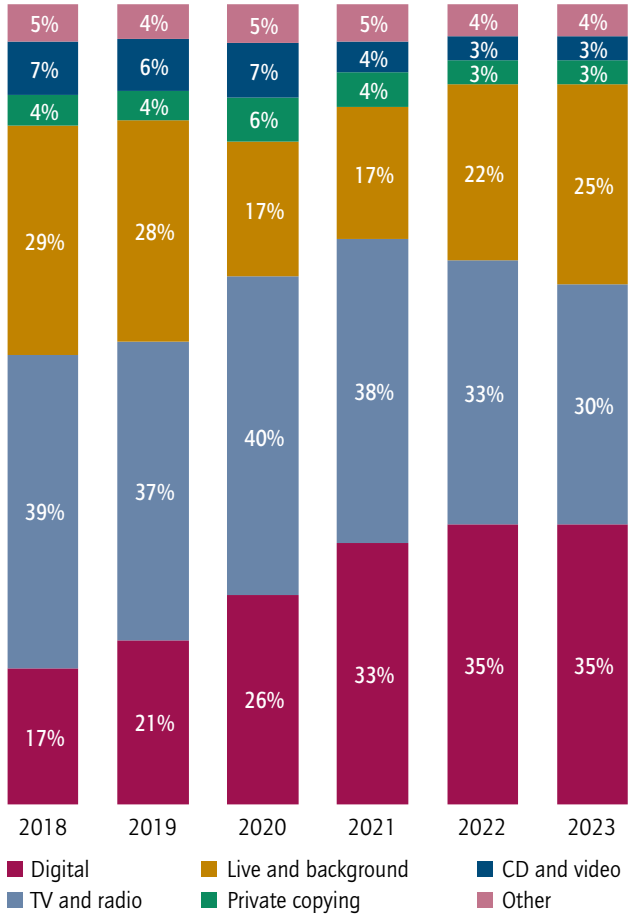
WORKING CONDITIONS AND SKILLS OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS

Digitalization and working conditions

Rights remuneration data from the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC) attempts to quantify the impact of digitalization on creators' revenues (Figure 3.5). At the global level, the share of digital in the source of revenues kept on increasing from 17% in 2018 to 35% in 2022. From 2022 forward, digital represented the largest source of revenue for creators in sectors that include music, audio-visual, visual arts, literature and drama.[1]

Figure 3.5

Global share of creators' income, by income stream (2018-2023)



Source: CISAC (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024) / BOP Consulting (2025)

1. 'Digital' corresponds to collections from licensing digital services as well as the use of creative works on digital recordable devices such as photographic images on USB keys.

It is therefore clear that digitization has impacted the working conditions of creators and cultural professionals. While digital tools and platforms offer an enticing promise of creative autonomy, flexible work practices and unlimited access to audiences, the reality faced by many creators has been marked by even higher job and income precarity (De Voldere et al., 2024), infringement of Intellectual Property (Bonadio et al., 2022), the rise of new gatekeepers in the form of large online technology platforms, and algorithmic bias that amplifies the visibility of artists that already have a significant following (Ranaivoson et al., 2024).

In the longer term, the International Labour Organization notes a rise in precariousness among cultural workers, which takes notably the form of temporary and part-time employment, wage inequalities and gaps in social protection. Regarding the rights and working conditions of artists and cultural professionals in the digital environment, the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist (1980 Recommendation) especially calls for fair remuneration for creators online, the strengthening of artists' digital literacy skills and competencies, and increased access to the equipment and infrastructures required to produce, disseminate and access creative works online (UNESCO, 2022).

Despite persistent challenges in ensuring fair remuneration for artists in the digital environment, policy responses have been limited. Nonetheless, some countries have implemented noteworthy initiatives. For example, the Guiding Principles on Diversity of Content Online, initially developed by Canada and endorsed by Australia, France, Finland and Germany, include provisions for fair remuneration and economic sustainability for content creators.

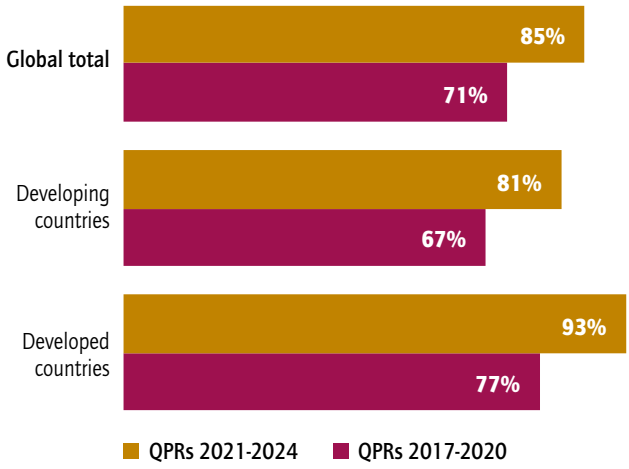
Effective policies for skills development

Digitization has had a considerable impact on the prerequisite skills needed to participate in the digital creative economy since it has introduced new modes of creation and production as well as business and monetization models. For example, artists may need to learn how to use new software for content creation and editing; professionals require training to learn how digital tools can be leveraged to increase the visibility of their work on social media and streaming services; and cultural institutions increasingly rely on digital tools to manage core operations such as online ticketing and data analytics to better understand and engage audiences, which is crucial for informed business decisions.

Recommendation 8 of the UNESCO Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment (Box 3.1), which calls for the updating of arts education curricula and methodologies, acknowledges the importance of equipping learners and cultural professionals with the skills to critically engage with digital technologies, including AI. There has been a notable increase in the proportion of Parties reporting measures aimed at equipping artists and cultural professionals with the competencies, knowledge and skills needed to work with new technologies. As shown in Figure 3.6, the share of Parties promoting digital creativity and competency for artists and other cultural professionals has increased from 71% in 2017-2020 to 85% in 2021-2024. However, a gap remains between developing countries, where the proportion has increased from 67% to 81%, and developed countries, where it has increased from 77% to 93%.

Figure 3.6

Proportion of Parties with measures and initiatives promoting digital creativity and competencies of artists and other cultural professionals working with new technologies, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Countries have reported a wide range of measures to develop digital skills and literacy among their populations. In countries such as Cabo Verde, Oman, Paraguay, Qatar and South Africa, national initiatives have focused on establishing training centres and hubs providing educational courses in technical fields, such as coding and data science, to create a highly skilled workforce and facilitate entry into specialized professions in programming and advanced technologies.

A number of countries are encouraging innovation and experimentation in the arts by providing access to specialized facilities, laboratories and mentorship opportunities. For example, Slovenia has established an extensive network of six artistic research laboratories in partnership with higher education institutions. These laboratories serve as hubs for digital experimentation in virtual and augmented reality, robotics, immersive media and interdisciplinary artistic research. Such initiatives provide important creative learning spaces to help artists and youth critically engage with emerging technologies and develop new art forms.

Furthermore, several Parties have introduced targeted initiatives to strengthen digital skills within specific creative sectors. Screen Ireland's National Talent Academy network includes five academies across the country for film, television, animation and crew. In many countries where training institutions tend to be concentrated in capital cities, such a regional model ensures that opportunities for skills development are accessible nationwide.

BOX 3.4 • Strengthening digital competencies of artists in the Republic of Moldova

As part of the 'Digital Creativity Lab' project, supported by the UNESCO-Republic of Korea Funds-In-Trust for the Development of Creative Industries, a mapping exercise was conducted to assess the digital competencies of artists and cultural professionals in the Republic of Moldova and identify recommendations to support the digital transformation of the creative sector. The assessment revealed that 75% of small and medium-sized enterprises surveyed do not have their own website and the most urgently needed digital skills identified by respondents include the use of GenAI technologies, digital content creation and business development for creative startups.

The study also highlighted key challenges Moldovan higher education institutions face regarding the integration of digital creative skills within education curricula and the promotion of digital innovation and research. The findings from this mapping exercise led to the development of new courses, such as in graphic design, new media and animation, at the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts, and will continue to guide capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the digital competencies of both teachers and students while equipping education institutions with the necessary digital tools and technologies.

Source: UNESCO, 2023

In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Digital Culture Network connects cultural institutions with a network of 'Tech Champions' who provide free consultancy services in areas such as data analytics, website creation, digital marketing and strategy. The initiative supports cultural organizations in digitizing their operations, strengthening managerial capacities and investing in the digital infrastructure and resources needed to adapt to new forms of audience engagement and creative practices (Digital Culture Network, 2025). Investing in digital skills development is therefore essential to ensure that creators and cultural organizations can fully harness the creative opportunities offered by new technologies and build sustainable career pathways.

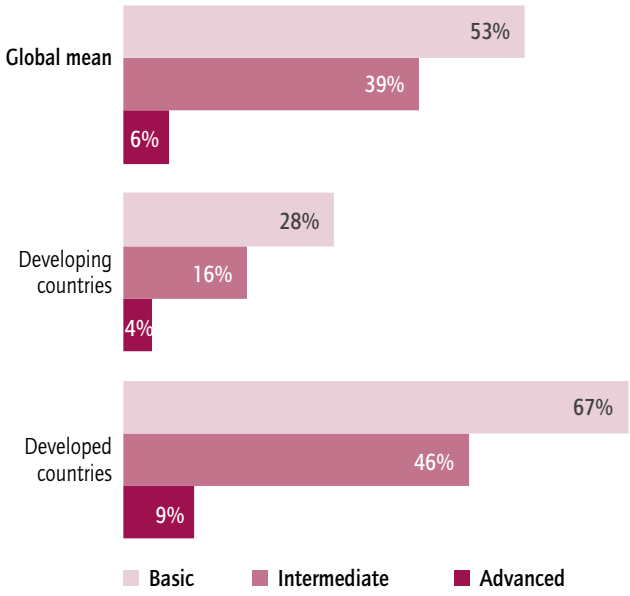
At the international level, UNESCO has advocated for increased international cooperation in ensuring a sustainable and inclusive digital transition in the cultural and creative sector. Since 2022, it has been implementing a 'Digital Technical Assistance' programme, with funding from Belgium, Canada and France. The four pilot countries, Cameroon, Georgia, Uganda and Zimbabwe, have benefited from this programme in areas such as training artists in the audio-visual sector, as well as conducting impact studies on the digital music sector and national mappings of the digital creative sectors. The programme underscores the commitment of the international community to invest in knowledge sharing and capacity building to support the participation of countries in the digital creative economy.

DIGITAL DIVIDES

Digital divides and inequalities in access to digital technologies persist between countries and regions in the world. Limited internet access, notably driven by infrastructural inequalities and the high costs of access relative to purchasing power, creates barriers for some populations in accessing (and producing) diverse cultural content. These inequalities are further compounded by significant gaps in digital literacy. According to data from the International Telecommunication Union, 67% of the population in developed countries have basic information and communication technology skills, compared to 28% in developing countries, while 46% of people in developed countries have intermediate skills, compared to 16% in developing countries (Figure 3.7). When it comes to AI capabilities, the gap is even more pronounced between countries such as the United States of America (United States) and other developed countries on the one side, and countries in the Global South on the other, due to entrenched inequalities in access to capital, infrastructure and the research and development capacities needed to build AI ecosystems (Kulesz, 2024).

Figure 3.7

Mean share of the population with basic, intermediate or advanced information and communication technology skills, by developing and developed countries (2020-2023)

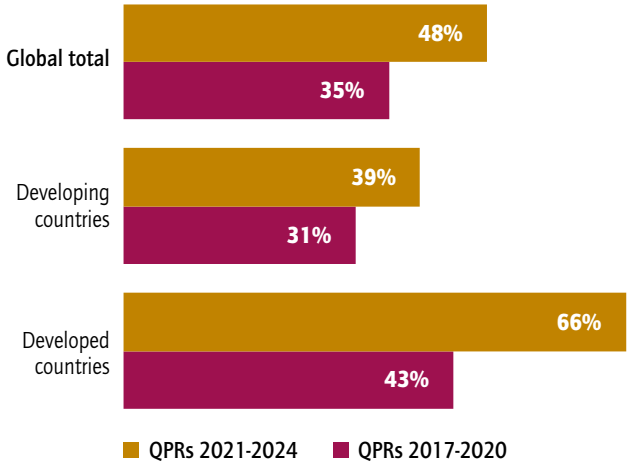


Source: ITU (2023) / BOP Consulting (2025)

Furthermore, the lack of available statistics or studies on access to digital media remains a global challenge, with only 48% of Parties reporting measures in this area, representing a marginal increase from 35% in the previous reporting cycle (Figure 3.8). Several factors may explain this: 1) platforms' reluctance to share data on audience engagement and creator demographics, 2) the lack of transparency in algorithmic systems, which can introduce biases in the visibility and promotion of certain types of content and 3) general lack of data on how people access and engage with cultural content online, or on how artists and creators use digital tools and platforms, given the wide range of privately owned services (for sectors such as gaming, music and video streaming), many of which operate globally and are not required to share user data. This is an area where governments should work closely with the private sector and academic or research institutions. Indeed, much of the available information on digital creation and access is derived from user surveys conducted by major global platforms, underscoring the importance of strengthening cross-sector collaboration and establishing clearer obligations for data sharing, both of which are critical for informed cultural policy making in the digital age.

Figure 3.8

Proportion of Parties that have statistics or studies on access to digital media, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Within countries, divides persist in digital access and use, often depending on age, gender, income and other factors. These disparities include differences in digital literacy and, more generally, users' capabilities. Of particular importance is the gender divide. While innovation can improve gender equality, the United Nations Pact for the Future raises concerns about the growing digital divide between genders. In the cultural and creative sector, women are well represented among digital content creators, yet significant gaps persist in income levels, representation in certain creative sectors and access to management positions. A user survey of content creators conducted by the marketing platform ConvertKit (rebranded as Kit in 2024) shows that women are more represented in low-income categories (earning less than US$25,000 per year), but under-represented in high-income categories (earning more than US$150,000 per year) (ConvertKit, 2022). The issue of horizontal and vertical segregation within creative professions and the challenges to gender equality in the digital environment are addressed further in Chapter 9.

Several countries have developed policies aiming at reducing digital divides among their populations, including vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Launched in March 2023, the Mercosur Audiovisual Platform, which includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, aims to expand access possibilities for all audiences, in particular for people with visual or hearing impairments. In Qatar, the Mada Assistive Technology Centre is dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities to fully participate in cultural life and access quality education.

BOX 3.5 • TACIR: Empowering vulnerable youth in Tunisia's digital creative economy

Launched in 2023, the 'TACIR' programme (Talents-Arts-Creativity-Inclusion-Research), led by the Multimedia and Audiovisual Association, aims to foster the social and professional inclusion of vulnerable youth aged 22 to 35, particularly young women in low-income regions of western Tunisia by supporting their participation in the digital creative sectors. The programme is structured around several key components and is adapted to the context-specific needs and resources of low-income regions through partnerships with local associations and universities. Its main activities include:

- TACIR-Training: Establishing digital cultural hubs that offer training and mentorship programmes in fields such as digital arts, gaming and immersive media as well as in cultural project creation, management and promotion.
- TACIR-Innov: Supporting creative entrepreneurship through pre-incubation and incubation programmes.
- TACIR-Diffusion: Creating community cultural spaces to expand access to cultural infrastructure and resources.
- TACIR-Research: Conducting research to deepen understanding of creation, innovation and development processes in the cultural and creative industries.

During the first year of its pilot phase, the TACIR programme engaged over 900 young participants, established seven regional partnerships with local cultural associations and set up three fully equipped and operational TACIR'LABs. In 2024, the programme was a beneficiary of the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity. By democratizing access to culture and developing the creative and entrepreneurial skills of young people, the TACIR programme aims to generate employment opportunities in the digital creative industries and support a more inclusive cultural ecosystem.

Source: Tunisia QPR, 2024

In 2022, the Centre signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Culture to collaborate on joint projects, including a training programme for ministry employees to raise awareness of digital accessibility and integrate assistive technologies in cultural programming. For instance, during the Doha International Book Fair in 2024, the Centre organized interactive theatre activities for children with disabilities (Mada, 2024).

There are also policies that take a community-based approach aiming to expand digital infrastructure to rural areas and opportunities to engage with new digital art practices. In Timor-Leste, the 'Naroman ba Suku' programme, led by the State Secretary for Social Communication, equips villages with information and communication technologies to promote public access to information especially in rural areas. Notably, participating villages (31 in 2024) were able to showcase their cultural events and their local cultural assets through social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to promote cultural tourism and attract visitors to the villages. In Indonesia, the Media Arts Community Festival stands out as an innovative initiative seeking to bring media art to under-represented regions. Organized by the Indonesian government in collaboration with local communities, each edition of the Festival is hosted in a city that does not have an established media arts scene. The Festival encourages local artists to engage with artist collectives from other regions and participate in workshops, experimenting with new technologies to create multimedia artworks, among other activities (Ok Jeon et al., 2024).

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Specific challenges and opportunities related to AI

Arguably, the most significant shift in the digital environment for cultural and creative sectors has been the rapid adoption of AI technologies, especially GenAI, across the creative ecosystem. While early applications to the cultural field such as algorithmic recommender systems shaped dissemination of and access to cultural content, GenAI has radically transformed the creation and production of culture itself. Powered by large language models trained on vast datasets to learn complex patterns, these systems are able to generate text, images, audio and other forms of content (Kulesz, 2024).

Before examining the challenges and risks, it is worth recalling the opportunities AI and GenAI bring to the cultural and creative sector, which partly explains their rapid adoption. Respondents to the survey on the implementation of the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration conducted in 2024 and addressed to governments, civil society organizations and artists, identified several opportunities. AI can help creators in their creation process, either by generating an initial idea on which the creator can work, or by improving the work of art or parts of it. It can also facilitate the dissemination of cultural expressions, for example through personalized recommender systems.

While such AI technologies have emerged as powerful tools to enhance human creativity, they also pose significant risks as growing concerns point to GenAI's potential to automate certain creative tasks performed by artists such as writers, illustrators, literary translators, voice-over actors and photographers, thereby leading to job losses and the devaluation of creativity. When asked about the impact of AI on their livelihoods, the creative professionals responding to the MONDIACULT survey expressed overwhelmingly negative views, with 79% considering AI a threat to art workers. A study on the economic impact of AI in music and audio-visual industries carried out by CISAC estimates that the market penetration by GenAI outputs could put 24% of music creators' and 21% of audio-visual creators' revenues at risk in 2028, for an annual loss reaching respectively 4 billion euros and 4.5 billion euros by 2028 (CISAC and PMP Strategy, 2024).

The inundation of AI-generated 'synthetic' content on the internet also threatens the diversity and quality of creative works and their ability to convey the identities, values and meaning unique to human creativity. Such content generated entirely from AI prompts with limited human input, is characterized by being of low to medium quality and imitates existing styles from the copyrighted works on which its AI systems are trained. As training datasets become increasingly saturated with synthetic AI-generated content instead of human-created content, there is a risk of 'model collapse', where AI-generated content ends up polluting the outputs of subsequent models, leading to their progressive deterioration (Shumailov et al., 2024).

Yet, despite these risks, certain AI content such as AI-generated songs have proven to be extremely popular and have even topped Spotify and Billboard charts (Down, 2025). A study conducted by Deezer, a digital music streaming platform, found that over 50,000 bot-generated tracks are being uploaded daily, while the vast majority of audiences are unable to distinguish between AI-generated music and human-produced music. This underscores the need for transparency requirements that clearly label AI-generated music as such and ensure that artists are fairly compensated for the use of their work as training input for AI models (Deezer, 2025). It is also notable how rapidly opinions and views on the use of AI are shifting. A study of over 1,200 independent artists conducted by Ditto, a global music distribution company, found that the proportion of artists surveyed who had used AI in their music projects dropped from 60% in 2023 to 48% in 2025, with the primary reason being the lack of personal creativity AI offers (Ditto Music, 2025).

While such figures offer valuable insights into emerging trends, they provide only a partial picture, since much of the data on how AI is used and its impact on artists remain held by private companies with no obligations to share user data. Strengthening research and advocating for studies in this field are therefore essential as without reliable data, policy makers cannot fully assess the implications of AI on creative labour and develop informed measures to support artists in navigating an increasingly AI-dominated landscape.

As GenAI becomes more widespread, it has also introduced new challenges for the preservation of linguistic diversity. Unsurprisingly, large language models perform best in English, as a significant amount of their training data comes from the abundance of high-quality English-language sources available online (Kulesz, 2024). When AI tools are developed and trained in a small number of languages, entire populations risk being excluded from using and benefiting from them. Not only does this deepen existing digital divides, it could also accelerate the decline and potential erasure of certain languages. It is therefore important to support local language initiatives that promote linguistic diversity and respond to the specific needs of countries and communities.

Major issues in AI regulation: copyright and transparency

Despite all these challenges and opportunities brought by AI, current debates on AI regulation in the creative sector have largely focused on the unlicensed use of creative content drawn from a vast array of books, music, artworks and other copyrighted works as training data for AI models. While several large datasets are publicly available for AI training, the situation is more ambiguous when they include copyrighted works that have not been licensed for such use (EUIPO, 2025). AI providers claim their use is allowed by legal exceptions, such as fair use law in the United States, while rights holders from across the creative sectors claim that their authorization should be requested and a compensation given for training uses. As a result, there is a rising number of legal disputes between rights holders and GenAI system providers, notably in the United States (EUIPO, 2025).

In September 2025, the AI firm Anthropic agreed to pay US$1.5 billion to compensate book authors whose books had been downloaded from pirated websites to train its chatbot (Down, 2025), while in Germany, a ruling in November 2025 found that OpenAI had infringed German copyright laws by training its AI model on copyrighted songs by German musicians (Poltz and Heine, 2025). Depending on how the various court cases play out, the resulting rulings could set important legal precedents in other jurisdictions.

For instance, in Asia and the Pacific, where countries have taken varied approaches to AI development and copyright protection, no major AI litigation has arisen yet. Whereas some countries such as Japan and Singapore have taken a more liberal approach to copyright rules for AI training, the Republic of Korea, where copyright-related entertainment industries are extremely significant, has taken a more proactive approach to protecting the interest of rights holders while putting in place enabling policies to encourage AI development (Hays, 2024).

Alternately, some countries have created or are working on legislation on the issue, most prominently the European Union through its Artificial Intelligence Act, the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI (Box 3.6).

BOX 3.6 • The European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act

The European Union's AI Act, which entered into force in 2024, includes various provisions that have implications for the cultural and creative sector, in particular related to copyright, transparency and labelling obligations for GenAI systems and deepfakes. For general-purpose AI models, which are often trained on copyrighted material, the AI Act requires a policy to respect European Union copyright law and transparency about the content used for the training. It also requires providers of general-purpose AI models to assess systemic risks, including biases.

The AI Act is deemed the most ambitious AI law passed to date. Several countries attempting to enact AI laws refer to it, like Chile or the Republic of Korea (Mcque et al., 2025). While the AI Act does not contain a dedicated focus on cultural and creative sectors or cultural expressions, its implementation remains relevant for safeguarding the diversity of cultural expressions.

Provisions of the AI Act are coming into force progressively between 2024 and 2026. The European AI Office is responsible for the supervision and enforcement of the rules on general-purpose AI models. To facilitate their implementation, it has provided a Code of Practice. Its chapters on transparency and on copyright are designed to help AI system providers disclose relevant information on the models they use and respect copyright in their activities.

Source: Mcque et al., 2025

The possibilities for policy action remain the subject of extreme scrutiny, legal action and lobbying from AI systems providers and cultural and creative sectors as well as national economic and political interests.

More generally, the debate on the ethical and fair use of AI revolves around three principles: fair compensation (for the use of performers' voices, likenesses, or images in AI-generated content); informed consent (contracts must ensure that artists know the specific uses of their digital replicas or likenesses and performers must give explicit permission for the use of their names, images and likenesses in AI applications); and controls (creators need to be able to govern how their works, identities and creative inputs are used, adapted or reproduced by AI systems) (Berg et al., 2025).

A central issue is the lack of transparency in how GenAI systems use content (Kulesz, 2024). Algorithmic transparency largely remains unidentified and hence unregulated (Ranaivoson and Rozgonyi, 2023). In addition to the unlicensed use of copyrighted data to train GenAI systems, other potential problems include the inability to identify content produced at least partially by such systems, and the possibility that outputs may infringe on copyright because they are too similar to an existing work.

In response, the German Commission for UNESCO has proposed labelling requirements for input data and final output of AI systems (German Commission for UNESCO, 2024). This way, creators could be informed of the reuse of their content, allowing them also to protect their copyright, and end-users would know the nature of the content to which they are exposed. These are examples of actions that could be taken to promote ethically sourced and open datasets in order to maintain trust and integrity in AI applications (Kulesz, 2024). The Creative Australia Principles on GenAI and creative work underscore the importance of recognizing and compensating the human creative inputs used to build AI applications and to uphold the transparency of AI use in creative outputs (Creative Australia, 2024).

The lack of connection between AI and culture in policy making

Although AI has recently become a point of attention for policy makers all over the world, its connection with the creative sector remains largely overlooked. The AI Index Report shows that of the 148 bills on AI passed in 128 countries between 2016 and 2023, only one had culture as primary subject matter (Maslej et al., 2024).[2]

2. 'Arts, culture or religion' is the specific wording in the study's typology.

Civil society is playing a key role in advocating for strengthened AI governance and regulation for the creative sectors. In Canada, from 2020 to 2023, the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, along with its members and its partners carried out a number of activities to contribute to the development of legislation and policies relating to AI that are in line with the 2005 Convention. This includes a partnership with ALL IN which, with 1,400 participants, describes itself as 'the largest artificial intelligence event in Canada', making it possible to give culture a place in this major event.

The disconnect between AI and policy agendas is also evident at the international level. Despite the proliferation of documents and declarations on AI adopted by international organizations, most fail to take into account the cultural and creative sector (as explored further in Chapter 7).

UNESCO has made notable efforts to connect AI and the cultural and creative sector. The 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence aims at balancing the benefits and the drawbacks of AI. Culture appears as one of the 11 areas of policy action.[3] The Readiness Assessment Methodology, which supports enforcement of the Recommendation, also includes culture-related questions, currently focused on the preservation of minority and Indigenous languages and cultural heritage. Likewise, the 2024 UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education includes guidance on implementation related to digital technologies and AI. Finally, the Outcome Document of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025 (29 September – 1 October 2025, Barcelona), in which the theme of AI and culture is one of the focus areas, calls for advancing AI in ways that foster human creativity. It emphasizes supporting the creation, discoverability, availability, accessibility, cultural preservation, and exchange of diverse and multilingual cultural content of human origin, as well as ensuring recognition and appropriate protection for artists, communities and cultural professionals.

Failing to integrate culture into AI governance creates significant risks, including a lack of data on AI adoption and its impact, insufficient policy responses, and increased challenges for artists and creative workers in an already precarious sector. As Estela Aranha, a member of the United Nation's High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, notes, global coordination is essential when it comes to AI regulation since AI technologies surpass borders (Mcque et al., 2025).

UNESCO is well positioned to carry out such an effort, given its mandate and initiatives it has undertaken in this regard. The UNESCO Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment also recommends reinforcing UNESCO's action on AI and culture. Furthermore, as a global platform for cultural advocacy, the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference demonstrated its convening power and ability to sensitize high-level policy makers on the critical importance of mainstreaming cultural and creative sectors in digital and AI policies. In this context, it is also worth noting the constructive synergies that characterized the Conference's preparatory process, particularly through the independent expert group on AI and culture — established at the initiative of UNESCO's Culture Sector — whose report substantially informed the discussions at the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference (CULTAI, 2025).

One challenge that is still downplayed is the environmental impact of digitalization. The Convention should be implemented by Parties and stakeholders to develop policies and industrial actions towards digital technologies, cultural sectors and climate transition. It is even more relevant in combination with the advent of AI, as AI is particularly problematic due to its high environmental impact, notably through its energy consumption (Tabbakh et al., 2024). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 of this report.

3. Its Policy Area 7 (Culture) encourages the application of AI systems where appropriate. It calls for the assessment of their cultural impact, notably in terms of cultural diversity, discoverability, market concentration, and participation; and the evaluation of AI, notably in relation to Intellectual Property. It bids UNESCO Member States to promote AI education for professionals in the cultural and creative sector.

For Parties to the Convention

- Establish and enforce clear governance frameworks for digital culture and AI. These should support ethical, inclusive and sustainable development in cultural and creative sectors, including technologies used for creation and distribution, while protecting creators' Intellectual Property rights. Public bodies responsible for cultural policy should also have an explicit role in supporting digital innovation, building digital skills and literacy, and investing in digital cultural infrastructure.
- Make the diversity of cultural expressions a core consideration in AI legislation, regulations, and policies at national and regional levels. This should be done in line with international frameworks, including the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, the recommendations of the UNESCO Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment and the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference Outcome Document.
- Increase transparency around AI systems' use and development. This includes clear disclosure of training data, in line with open data principles, and clear identification of AI-generated outputs. Parties should also put in place safeguards to ensure fair compensation for creators, require informed consent for the use of works, voice and likeness, and give creators control over how these are used, adapted or reproduced by AI systems, including for training purposes.
- Strengthen collaboration between ministries responsible for culture and digital policies, by establishing sustained mechanisms for joint planning, data sharing and capacity building.
- Develop practical strategies and action plans that respond to how digitization affects creative value chains and the needs of artists, cultural professionals and organizations. These should identify the policy, funding and capacity-building measures needed to support digital transformation and improve the discoverability of diverse cultural content.
- Foster strategic public-private partnerships to strengthen local digital creative ecosystems. These partnerships should support skills development, creation, financing, production and visibility for local creators by providing grants, fiscal incentives, trade fairs and incubator programmes, while also incentivizing global streaming platforms to invest in local content.
- Strengthen digital and AI skills across the cultural sector. Develop national capacity-building plans to improve digital literacy and AI skills among artists and cultural professionals, working with local private actors and civil society through open and inclusive consultations. Update arts education curricula and methodologies to reflect new technologies, including AI. Promote cultural education initiatives that help the public understand digital tools and culturally responsible practices.
- Close digital gaps in access and participation. Partner with local cultural associations and education institutions to ensure equitable access to digital infrastructure, creative tools and training. These efforts should include vulnerable and under-represented groups, including people with disabilities, Indigenous communities and those living in remote or rural areas, so that they can enjoy digital cultural content and participate actively as creators and producers within the digital creative economy.
- Raise awareness of the impacts of digital technologies on the cultural and creative sector. Promote discussion of ethical and fair use of AI, particularly in regional and international fora, and strengthen dialogue with technology companies, civil society and other private actors to identify shared solutions and concrete actions.
- Improve data collection on the cultural and creative sectors in the digital environment. Work with international organizations, researchers, the private sector and civil society to strengthen the systematic collection and sharing of data, particularly on AI use and impacts across the creative value chain, including in terms of gender-disaggregated data. Monitor domestic digital markets, the diversity of actors and access to local content to complement international data collection efforts.

For civil society and the private sector

- Advocate for stronger digital and AI governance and regulation for the cultural and creative sector at national and global levels. This includes transparency requirements for AI systems, such as disclosure of input data and labelling of AI-generated outputs, to better protect creators' rights.
- Raise awareness of how AI affects cultural diversity and creative work. Engage cultural and creative professionals, organizations and the broader public, and promote ethical and culturally responsible practices in the digital environment, including transparency and fair use of creators' works.
- Advocate for better data collection on digital culture. Contribute to data collection efforts in partnership with public authorities and regional or international organizations.
- Strengthen international cooperation and exchange. Support networking, share experiences and encourage good practices through policy and legislation related to the digitization of cultural content. Promote collaborative frameworks that facilitate visibility and access to diverse cultural expressions.
- Support local creators in digital markets. Encourage global platforms to invest in original local content and to license national catalogues, improving visibility for domestic creators and fostering diversity in digital cultural markets.

For UNESCO

- Reinforce UNESCO's action on AI and culture. This could include setting up a global network of experts in digital culture and AI, supporting the creation of UNESCO Chairs on digital culture and promoting research and capacity building, particularly in developing countries. Consider developing guidance and ethical frameworks for the use of AI in cultural and creative sectors, with a focus on transparency, inclusion and the protection of creators' rights.
- Revise the 2005 Convention's framework for Quadrennial Periodic Reports to improve the collection and sharing of information on policies and measures related to online discoverability and linguistic diversity. This should include clear indicators regarding AI, such as the use of AI by artists and measures to support fair remuneration.
- Reinforce cooperation with international partners. Work closely with organizations such as the World Intellectual Property Organization and the International Labour Organization on joint advocacy and knowledge sharing to better protect Intellectual Property and fair working conditions for creators in the digital environment. Expand partnerships to include research institutions, civil society and private sector stakeholders for joint initiatives on AI transparency, ethical practices and capacity building.

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Chapter 4

Civil society, voices for culture and action

Ayeta Anne Wangusa

KEY FINDINGS

- While 91% of Parties report having elaborated policies promoting the diversity of cultural expressions in consultation with civil society, only 74% include examples of civil society measures in their Quadrennial Periodic Reports. This suggests a gap between consultation and meaningful inclusion. Nevertheless, developing countries have made notable advances towards parity with developed countries, particularly in policy dialogue and policy design.
- The percentage of Parties submitting a Civil Society Organizations Form has dropped, especially in developed countries (a decrease of 14 percentage points, from 73% to 59%). Combined with the fact that measures from civil society account for only 20% of the total reported, this trend suggests a potential weakening of participatory monitoring mechanisms at the national level.
- Civil society organizations continue to play a key role in protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions by engaging in shared governance, filling gaps that are not fully addressed by public functions and acting as mediators for marginalized groups, especially youth, women, ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities.
- Civil society organizations' priorities when implementing the Convention vary globally. In developing countries, these organizations primarily emphasize culture's role in sustainable development (69% of measures reported) and cultural mobility (68%). In contrast, organizations in developed countries place greater emphasis on human rights and fundamental freedoms (41%).
- The formalization of cultural associations and professional organizations accelerated during the 2021-2024 reporting period, becoming nearly universal in cultural domains such as visual arts (96%) and music (94%) but lagging in media arts (76%). However, the existence of professional organizations and trade unions does not necessarily imply that these bodies are operating at full capacity to deliver concrete benefits for their creative communities.
- The share of Parties reporting capacity-building opportunities for civil society organizations increased by 15 percentage points (from 71% to 86%) across all regions, but growing reliance on national and international networking between organizations suggests efforts to build resilience in the face of emerging challenges. Significant barriers, particularly related to funding and visa restrictions, continue to hinder international collaboration.
- Although reported public funding schemes for civil society organizations increased globally by 11 percentage points since the previous reporting period, these mechanisms are increasingly inadequate to meet civil society's needs. This shortfall is compounded by a global decline in cultural funding and a shift towards short-term, project-based financing. Recent funding cuts at the global level are already impacting civil society programmes, with initiatives related to human rights, democracy and gender equality the most affected.
- Civil society organizations often face legal barriers to accessing public benefits. In some countries, their activities are not legally recognized as serving the public interest, limiting their eligibility for public funding, tax relief and related support measures.
- While international financing mechanisms, such as the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, are trying to fill these gaps, they are also encountering difficulties in terms of financial sustainability.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Civil society plays a crucial role in:

- **Cultural policy making and filling policy gaps**
- **Monitoring public initiatives**
- **Fostering transparency and public trust**
- **Ensuring equitable participation in cultural life**
- **Acting as mediators for vulnerable groups**

PROGRESS

Formalization of professional organizations accelerated, representing artists and cultural professionals in:

96% of countries for **visual arts**

94% of countries for **music**

However, progress is lagging in **media arts** (**76%** of countries)

71% → 86%

Countries reported increasing **capacity-building support** for civil society

Developing countries are involving civil society more in **policy dialogue and design**

CHALLENGES

Public funding schemes are inadequate to meet civil society's needs

- Major **disruptions to global funding** are endangering work on human rights, democracy, gender equality
- Short-term and one-off project-based funding models are **hindering sustainability and continuity**
- **Legislative barriers** to civil society accessing **public benefits and funding from abroad**
- **International funding mechanisms** are struggling with financial sustainability

Participatory monitoring mechanisms are weakening

Proportion of developed countries submitting a **Civil Society Organizations Form** decreased (73% → 59%)

Barriers to international networking

- **Funding models** do not allow civil society to devote time and capacity to networking
- **Restrictive visa policies** in developed countries prevent peer learning

EMERGING TRENDS

Priorities vary in **implementing the Convention**

- **Developing countries** focus on sustainable development and cultural mobility
- **Developed countries** focus on human rights and fundamental freedoms

In the face of emerging challenges and in efforts to **build resilience**, there is growing reliance on **national and international networking**

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Culture Congress is a national event held every five years to formulate and evaluate Indonesia's cultural strategies, attended by civil society, cultural actors and policy makers at the national and regional levels. The Congress in 2018 achieved the landmark outcome of creating a new Indonesian Strategy for Culture. Building on this progress, the 2023 edition of the Congress contributed to the development of a 2025-2029 National Action Plan for Culture Advancement, which serves as the blueprint for Indonesia's national cultural policy over this period. The initiative succeeded in fostering interaction with civil society to improve the inclusiveness of culture.

Twenty years ago, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) enshrined the role of civil society[1] as a key actor in the development and implementation of cultural policies. Article 11 of the 2005 Convention states that 'Parties (to the Convention) acknowledge the fundamental role of civil society in protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions. Parties shall encourage the active participation of civil society in their efforts to achieve the objectives of this Convention'. This commitment has since been reaffirmed by the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, in its two editions, through the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration and the MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document.

The Indonesian example above also demonstrates the Convention in practice, through the creation of formal structures that enable effective civil society engagement in policy-making processes. However, around the world, civil society organizations are facing a declining environment for their work due to a combination of factors, including funding cuts, limits on their operations and a diminishing global civic space.

Drawing on the Quadrennial Periodic Reports and Civil Society Organizations Forms,[2] this chapter illustrates how civil society is indeed a key contributor to the goals of the 2005 Convention and examines the variety of approaches taken by Parties to the Convention to support civil society's role. In light of the growing challenges civil society organizations face, this chapter also explores the conditions needed to create an enabling environment for their engagement and to support their long-term resilience in protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions.

CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE AT THE CENTRE OF DYNAMIC POLICY MAKING

This section examines how civil society has participated in the implementation of the Convention at both national and global levels, in areas including policy dialogue, engagement in policy design and monitoring, as well as through independent initiatives launched by civil society organizations.

Civil society organizations have an important role to fulfil in the conception, implementation and monitoring of cultural policies, in a variety of ways. Their involvement can improve transparency and accountability; reinforce public trust in policy-making processes; promote adaptation to changing realities and the revision of policies; provide a feedback channel from communities, artists and cultural practitioners; and guarantee equitable impact across different, often marginalized groups.

Opening dialogue for collaborative policy making

Policy-making processes should start with an analysis of needs and the establishment of priorities through dialogue. Spaces where needs can be identified and discussed among governments and civil society, in the form of meetings, consultations or working groups, are therefore crucial to gather the perspectives of civil society organizations and consult their specialized knowledge on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

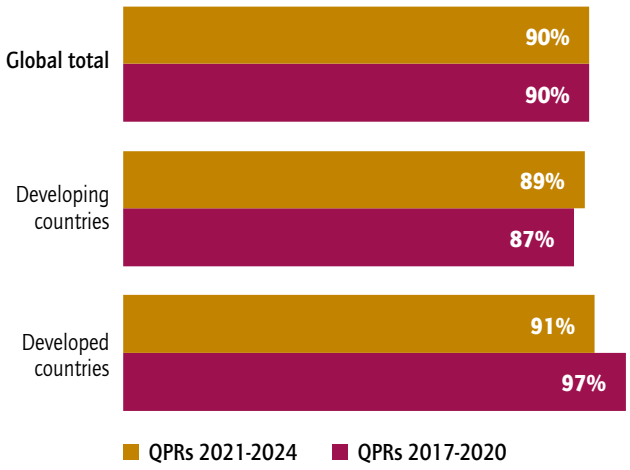
In this field, evidence from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports shows continuity: 90% of countries report the existence of dialogue mechanisms between public authorities and civil society organizations for cultural policy making and/or monitoring. This proportion has not changed in this reporting period compared to the previous one (2017-2020). Some disparities, however, become visible when distinguishing between developing and developed countries – with developed countries demonstrating a decrease in reported dialogue mechanisms, and developing countries a slight increase, as shown in Figure 4.1.

1. As defined in the 2005 Convention's Operational Guidelines, civil society means 'non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, professionals in the culture sector and associated sectors, groups that support the work of artists and cultural communities'. For the purpose of this report, civil society, therefore, encompasses a diversity of actors that includes non-governmental organizations, as well as trade unions, professional associations, trade bodies, think tanks and others.

2. As part of their Quadrennial Periodic Reports, Parties to the Convention are strongly encouraged to gather measures implemented by civil society organizations in their countries through the Civil Society Organizations Form. For the 2021-2024 cycle, 89 out of 121 Parties submitted a Civil Society Organizations Form together with their Quadrennial Periodic Report. Through this mechanism, civil society organizations reported 798 (out of 3,908 total) measures.

Figure 4.1

Proportion of Parties reporting dialogue mechanisms between public authorities and civil society organizations for cultural policy making and/or monitoring, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

As detailed in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, civil society organizations engaging in structured dialogue to support policy processes did so through a variety of mechanisms, including workshops, forums, committees, working groups and task forces. These structured dialogue platforms are formally designed to support partnerships between civil society and government and to bring civil society organizations' influence to bear on policy making. Several developing countries in particular submitted a range of measures including diverse approaches toward dialogue mechanisms with civil society.

For instance, in Peru, the Ministry of Culture launched the 'Citizen Participation in Cultural Industries and the Arts' initiative in 2020, with the aim of strengthening public involvement and the transparency of public management in the cultural sector. Citizen participation mechanisms were implemented, including informative talks, dialogues, meetings and information sharing. In 2023, civil society participation informed the establishment of Sectoral Working Groups for music, theatre and circus, and traditional arts to participate in structured policy dialogues and contribute to the Draft Law for the Promotion of the Artistic Sector. From 2020 to 2023, a total of 808 participatory mechanisms were implemented.

In February 2024 in the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Culture together with the National Center for the Promotion and Development of Non-Profit Associations, launched a series of cultural dialogues with non-profit cultural associations, to establish an open and consistent channel of communication with civil society. Six dialogue sessions were held involving 76 associations who put forward three key agendas: regularizing grant payment processes for civil society organizations, clarifying eligibility criteria for state grants, and prioritizing training activities based on the priorities identified by the associations.

Several countries in Africa also reported a range of initiatives through their periodic reports, demonstrating increasing formalization of dialogue mechanisms in the region, with one example illustrated in Box 4.1.

At the same time, the rapid growth of digital communication has enabled civil society organizations to survey and mobilize public opinion more effectively. Digital tools have also facilitated greater participation in virtual government consultations and cultural debates, a trend accelerated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, from 2015 to 2023, the European Union maintained 'Voices of Culture', a structured dialogue between civil society stakeholders and the European Commission, bringing together up to 50 civil society representatives through a hybrid modality that included both online channels and physical meetings.

Box 4.1 • New policy dialogue frameworks in Benin

The establishment of the *Conseil National des Organisations d'Artistes* (National Council of Artists' Organizations) in Benin in 2023 has created a new framework for consultation with civil society organizations. The Council is organized across seven cultural domains and maintains a central database of sector associations, while also holding regular meetings with an advisory committee from the grassroots sector. At present, the Council includes 237 associations and places an emphasis on the professionalization and improvement of working and living conditions for artists and cultural professionals. Through this structure, it has established dialogue with a range of government agencies, set up quarterly meetings with the Arts and Culture Development Agency, and contributed to the monitoring and revision of several key frameworks including the National Culture Policy and the development of the *Maison de l'artiste* (Artist's House).

Utilizing its position as a credible interlocutor between cultural professionals and public authorities in Benin, the Council has also leveraged international support for its work, including through the establishment of partnerships with the Institut Français and the World Bank.

Source: Benin QPR, 2024; CNOA, 2025

Dialogue mechanisms may also take place at territorial levels. For example, in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), the Municipality of La Paz has held five editions of its Cultural Working Days, the last of which took place in 2023. These are open participation events for workers in the arts and cultural sector, with the twin objectives of involving them in strategic policy planning and evaluating existing legislation and policies. The 2023 edition of the Cultural Working Days focused on the review and adjustment of the Municipal Autonomous Law No. 265-319 on the Promotion, Safeguarding, Development and Promotion of Cultures and the Arts, the renewal of the Intercultural Citizen Council for the Planning of Cultures and the Arts, the renewal of the Territorial Councils of Culture, and the design of strategic planning guidelines.

At the regional level, the Pan-African Cultural Congress of the African Union is a triennial gathering of African Union member state representatives, cultural policy makers and experts, civil society organizations, cultural workers and entrepreneurs contributing to policy-making efforts to develop the arts and culture sectors on the continent. The 2024 Congress was organized under the theme 'Arts, Culture, Heritage, and Education: Levers for Building the Africa We Want' (African Union, 2024). The initiative highlights the importance of continental dialogue mechanisms, which can strengthen advocacy efforts at the regional level.

International non-governmental organizations also play a fundamental role in facilitating dialogue with governments concerning the review or adoption of public policies related to the cultural and creative sector. For example, the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity works to open dialogue and raise awareness among governments about the impact of digital technologies on artists and cultural professionals. In 2022, it organized the conference 'Protecting and Promoting the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in the Digital Environment: An Overview of Legislative Reforms Around the World', which highlighted the state of policy making on the issue.

Meanwhile, dialogue between civil society organizations, UNESCO and Parties to the 2005 Convention has also been facilitated through civil society's inclusion in the work of the Convention's governing bodies (Box 4.2).

Designing policies through participatory processes

A strong enabling environment for civil society should involve opportunities for its direct engagement in the design and implementation of concrete policies and programmes, drawing on these organizations' technical expertise. The 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report found that, while most Parties reported on the existence of participatory dialogue mechanisms, civil society organizations were still rarely involved in effective decision making, thus suggesting a need for more inclusive and transparent processes.

Box 4.2 • Civil society engagement in the 2005 Convention's governing bodies

UNESCO, recognizing the key role that civil society plays in implementing the Convention, has engaged in coordination with Parties to strengthen the participation of civil society organizations in the work of the Convention's governing bodies.

As part of this process, since 2016, an item on civil society's role in the implementation of the Convention has been included in the agenda of every session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Additionally, a working meeting has been held between the Bureau of the Committee and representatives from civil society organizations, allowing civil society to highlight specific issues of importance to their work.

One of the most significant activities carried out by civil society organizations in this framework is the Civil Society Forum, organized biennially since 2017 in advance of each session of the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention. The Forum brings together civil society actors working across the areas covered by the Convention and provides a framework for dialogue on shared challenges and solutions, as well as for formulating joint recommendations to inform the work of the governing bodies. Most recently, the fifth edition of the Civil Society Forum was organized in June 2025. It resulted in 14 recommendations to UNESCO, the Parties, and civil society, organized around three themes:

- Education, culture and sustainable development.
- Advancing civil society organization expertise and participation through strategic collaboration and governance mechanisms.
- Digital, Artificial Intelligence and data.

Source: UNESCO

Other analyses have also emphasized the need to adapt governance models to respond to periods of uncertainty and change, and to develop models allowing the participation of all actors concerned (Bailey et al., 2024).

In Latin America, an analysis of cultural policy developments in the first quarter of the 21st century suggests that, alongside the establishment of institutions in charge of cultural policy in most countries, a common trend has been a recognition of diversity, as a result of both internal demands and international frameworks, including the 2005 Convention. However, this has not fully translated into more horizontal cultural policy frameworks engaging artists, cultural professionals and groups in a genuine cultural democracy (Nivón Bolán et al., 2024).

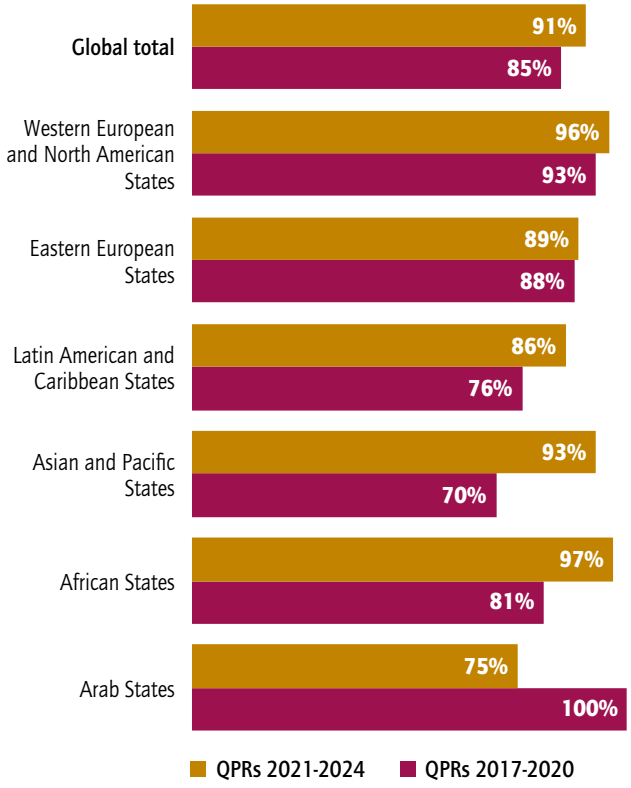
In their Quadrennial Periodic Reports, as shown in Figure 4.2, a large majority of Parties (91%) report that policies and measures that promote the diversity of cultural expressions have been elaborated in consultation with civil society. This has increased globally by six percentage points compared to the previous reporting period (2017-2020). While this suggests a very positive environment for civil society participation, it must be considered in conjunction with other data showing that, under the reporting cycle 2021-2024, only 74% of Parties included measures from civil society organizations in their Quadrennial Periodic Report submissions (Figure 4.3). Taken together with recent academic findings discussed above, the differences between these two datasets provide a more accurate picture of the current state of civil society inclusion in policy-making processes.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that periodic report data show there has been an increase in civil society participation in certain regions, such as Asia and the Pacific (by 23 percentage points), Africa (16 percentage points) and Latin America and the Caribbean (10 percentage points) (Figure 4.2). Analysis of reported measures reveals a wide range of approaches in these regions supporting civil society's participation in policy design. In Africa, the Central African Republic undertook a process of validating the national culture policy document through consultation with the public, private and civil-society sectors, and Guinea included the participation of cultural civil society organizations in the development and implementation of the new Cultural Policy of the Republic of Guinea.

In Gabon, with support from the European Union-UNESCO programme 'Advancing evidence-based policies and actions and supporting policy making to enhance the contribution of creative sectors and industries to sustainable development', a strategy for the cultural and creative industries was elaborated in 2020 through online consultations with civil society across eight regions and seven cultural domains.

Figure 4.2

Proportion of Parties reporting policies and measures promoting the diversity of cultural expressions which have been elaborated in consultation with civil society organizations, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Through the same programme, in Djibouti, the *Agence Nationale pour la Promotion de la Culture* (National Agency for the Promotion of Culture) was supported in creating a plan for the growth of the cultural entrepreneurship ecosystem, which included mapping and consultations with cultural enterprises and civil society.

An example of participatory policy making in Latin America and the Caribbean is illustrated by the case of Chile, presented in Box 4.3.

While it is not possible to directly attribute the increased involvement of civil society organizations in policy design in these countries to only one factor, the increase in training and mentoring opportunities reported in many countries from the periods 2017-2020 to 2021-2024 (as outlined later in the section on capacity development) may have helped to close the capacity gap and implement policy-making processes more effectively. Other factors, including public trust in institutions, decentralized opportunities and increasing digital engagement, may have played a role as well.

Box 4.3 • Participatory processes in Chile's cultural policy

The latest Quadrennial Periodic Report submitted by Chile provides several examples of participatory processes in policy design. Among them is the design of a new National Arts Education Policy, which seeks to guarantee the right to arts education for all people throughout their lifetime, by promoting access to quality training in formal and non-formal education.

During 2023, the Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage (MINCAP) and the Ministry of Education implemented a participatory process of involving civil society in policy development. Ten priorities, which were identified through a forum organized by MINCAP, were then discussed in more than 60 working groups in regions across Chile in 2023, including more than 600 participants. The resulting Arts Education Policy, which aligns with UNESCO's 2024 Framework for Culture and Arts Education, was adopted in 2024 and will remain valid until 2029.

Other examples of participatory policy making in Chile include the drafting of 16 regional quinquennial strategies covering the 2024-2029 period, and the subsequent elaboration of a national quinquennial strategy for cultural development. Each region designed its own participatory process, which involved local cultural agents, unions and associations. Between 70 and 275 participants took part in each of the in-person meetings held throughout Chile, where they discussed issues including access to cultural life, arts and heritage training as well as awareness raising, creative ecosystems and citizen participation in the public management of culture.

Source: Chile QPR, 2024; Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio, 2025a, 2025b

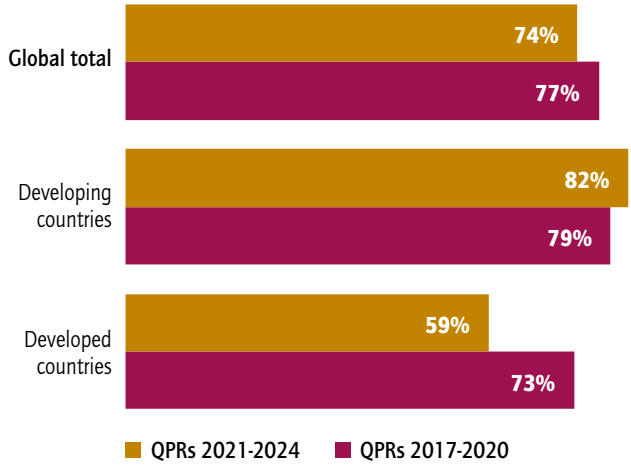
Civil society engagement in policy monitoring

Civil society also plays a key role in the monitoring of cultural policies during and after their implementation, including through promoting transparency and fostering public trust. In this respect, one key indicator of civil society involvement in policy monitoring in the framework of the 2005 Convention is the proportion of Parties that submit a Civil Society Organizations Form – a tool through which civil society organizations can contribute to the country's Quadrennial Periodic Report.

Compared to the last reporting period, the data show a small global decrease in the proportion of Parties including the Civil Society Organizations Form in their periodic report submissions (Figure 4.3). At the same time, measures reported through submitted Civil Society Organizations Forms represent only 20% of the total number of measures (798 out of 3,908) from this reporting period (2021-2024). Taken together with the decline in the proportion of Civil Society Organizations Forms submitted by developed countries (which decreased by 14 percentage points, from 73% in 2017-2020 to 59% in 2021-2024, as seen in Figure 4.3), this presents cause for concern. These trends could point to less consultation and collaboration with civil society in data collection processes, or more limited relationships between governments and civil society organizations, at least in some countries. Future reporting cycles should clarify whether this decline continues or is a short-term trend.

Figure 4.3

Proportion of Parties that submitted a Civil Society Organizations Form as part of their Quadrennial Periodic Report, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Analysis of consultation processes reported by Parties in their Quadrennial Periodic Reports reveals several mechanisms commonly used to formalize civil society involvement in policy monitoring. These include multi-stakeholder consultation meetings; training workshops attended by government ministries and civil society; support and coordination provided by research institutes, universities or other intermediary organizations; supervision committees consisting of both government ministry and civil society representatives; and surveys distributed for civil society input.

Substantial financial and human resources are needed to engage civil society organizations in policy monitoring through these processes. Germany's Federal Foreign Office, for instance, provided funding to support the participation of civil society in the development of Germany's 2024 periodic report, which was overseen by the German Commission for UNESCO alongside the German Coalition for Cultural Diversity. Civil society actors in the cultural sector were actively involved through online and in-person consultations, and their perspectives on the core challenges and opportunities for cultural policy development were incorporated into the Quadrennial Periodic Report.

Box 4.4 • Support for civil society's role in policy-monitoring processes

Civil society's role in participatory monitoring of the 2005 Convention has been strengthened through the UNESCO-Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency programme 'Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity and Artistic Freedom', with a focus on bringing together artists, civil society and public authorities in advance of the Quadrennial Periodic Report submissions in 2024.

As part of the initiative, in South Sudan, the civil society organization Hope Society implemented a series of capacity-building, awareness-raising and cultural activities, which included a national training workshop on the Convention and the importance of participatory policy monitoring, as well as a cultural performance featuring local artists, internally displaced women, and persons with disabilities – showcasing how creativity can promote inclusion in post-conflict communities.

In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the civil society organization XYZ Art and Culture Center organized the 'Artists' Talk Series' in 2022 as part of the consultation process for the country's Quadrennial Periodic Report. By organizing sessions across cultural domains, the series provided a platform for exchange and became a cornerstone initiative for enhancing the visibility, professionalization and policy engagement of national artists.

The initiatives expanded the cultural policy discourse and improved understanding of the 2005 Convention in South Sudan and Lao People's Democratic Republic. By fostering broader engagement, they also actively promoted the participation of civil society in cultural policy monitoring through the countries' Quadrennial Periodic Report submissions.

Source: UNESCO

The draft report was also disseminated for comment and quality control by civil society organizations before final submission to UNESCO.

The Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa is an example of a pan-African civil society organization that focuses on monitoring cultural trends, advocating for cultural policies, and promoting information exchange, research and capacity building (OCPA, 2025). Likewise, at the national level, the South African Cultural Observatory, a national statistical research project based at Nelson Mandela University, reviews public programmes and monitors government spending in the cultural sectors (SACO, 2025).

To enhance civil society's involvement in policy monitoring through periodic reporting, UNESCO has also provided support to organizations in several developing countries, including Lao People's Democratic Republic and South Sudan (Box 4.4).

Despite these good practices, the lowering global rate of Civil Society Organizations Form inclusion in Parties' periodic report submissions, particularly by developed countries, demonstrates that such participatory monitoring mechanisms are weakening at national levels. This underlines the necessity for Parties to first ensure transparent and participatory systems of civil society monitoring at the national level, which in turn may strengthen the pertinence of international information sharing instruments and allow for a more accurate understanding of the global civil society environment. Further attention should accordingly be devoted to this area in the coming years, to investigate whether this trend continues into future reporting cycles.

Civil society acting as mediators

Due to the nature of their work, civil society organizations often have a unique ability to act as mediators between public authorities and citizens. Frequently, Parties rely on these organizations' professional capacities and community-based relationships to implement measures engaging local communities and to animate cultural and community spaces.

These types of localized support programmes also allow civil society organizations to reach marginalized and under-represented groups. While many such programmes may be established by public authorities, civil society organizations reported delivering a wide range of self-initiated programmes that advanced the Convention's goals within these communities. Analysis of the Quadrennial Periodic Report measures from civil society organizations suggest that of 375 measures relating to specific groups, the most targeted include youth and children, women, ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities.

For instance, 'Key to the City' is a multi-stakeholder movement delivered by the Zimbabwean non-profit House of Arts Association; it integrates creativity and cultural expressions in development strategies and frameworks to support health and well-being. Through partnerships with various ministries, youth-led organizations, local councils and the police, the initiative addresses young people with mental health and addiction challenges through creative expressions across the performing arts, music, radio programming, podcasting and visual arts. As of December 2023, the initiative had benefited almost 10,000 young people through the grant-making strand, with more than 100,000 individuals cumulatively reached through online arts programming.

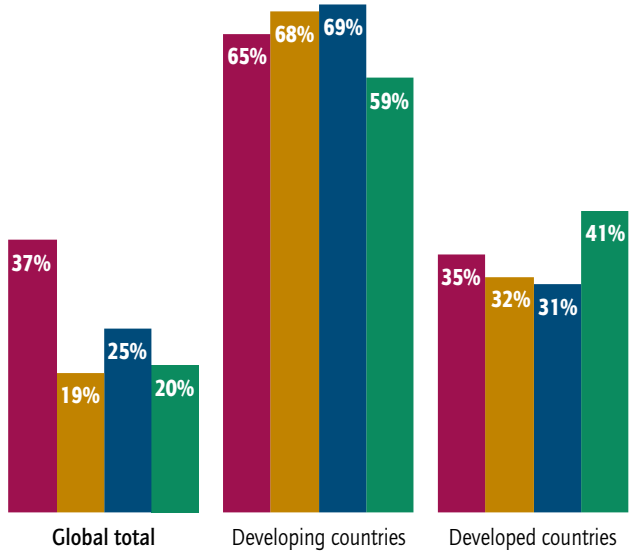
Meanwhile, the 'Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples' programme demonstrates the Canada Council for the Arts' commitment to reaffirming and revitalizing its relationship with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in Canada. The programme provides support to Indigenous individuals and groups, Indigenous-led arts organizations, and cultural sector development organizations that foster a vital and resilient Indigenous arts ecosystem. Collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists are also encouraged and facilitated. Since 2022-2023, the programme has supported 74 arts organizations, 27 groups and 267 artists.

The proximity of civil society organizations to vulnerable and under-represented groups allows them to identify and analyse obstacles to these groups' access to and participation in cultural life. Debates held during the Civic Agora, a civil society forum organized alongside the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference in Barcelona, for example, emphasized territorial and gender inequalities in access to culture. In this respect, stakeholders underlined the important role that local governments can have in addressing these imbalances and called for declarations on cultural rights to be backed with adequate resources and effective action. Simultaneously, they urged the adoption of a more holistic understanding of the place of civil society and cultural organizations in public life, going beyond quantitative assessments to recognize their civic value and contribution to community development and cultural diversity.

By implementing their own initiatives independently, civil society organizations can help fill policy gaps that are not fully addressed by public functions, often because they lack the resources or capacity to respond quickly to emerging areas of needs. Therefore, civil society organizations often reflect innovative approaches that vary across regions. Accordingly, analysis of the 798 measures reported by civil society organizations between 2021 and 2024 presents a strong variation in the policy areas targeted by civil society between developing and developed countries (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Share of measures reported by civil society organizations under each goal of the 2005 Convention, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

In developing countries, civil society organizations reported the highest share of measures contributing toward Goal 3: integrate culture in sustainable development frameworks (69%), closely followed by Goal 2: achieve a balanced flow of cultural goods and services and increase the mobility of artists and cultural professionals (68%).

For example, in Mexico the civil society organization Zorro Solar A.C. has implemented measures since 2021 to raise awareness of the importance of the creative economy in sustainable development through strategic partnerships with the UNESCO National Office in Mexico, the Secretariat of Economy of Aguascalientes, the municipalities of Calvillo and Tepezála, and private sector partners. The initiative developed awareness-raising and training activities targeting women cultural entrepreneurs, including by organizing the *Foro Internacional La aportación de las mujeres, desde la creatividad y la innovación, para el desarrollo sostenible* (International Forum on the Contribution of Women through Creativity and Innovation for Sustainable Development).

Meanwhile, Culture and Development East Africa's 'Creative Economy Incubator and Accelerator Initiative' focuses on youth, women and creative enterprises in the early stages of artistic development or market entry in the audio-visual and design industries. Its main objective is to promote inclusive and sustainable tourism and export trade. Between 2022 and 2024, the initiative provided industry skills training for ten Tanzanian and ten Ugandan fashion brands and for five women in animation from East African countries.

In comparison, for developed Parties, the highest share of measures reported by civil society organizations are under Goal 4: promote human rights and fundamental freedoms (41%), followed by Goal 1: support sustainable systems of governance for culture (35%).

'D-Arts, Project Office for Diversity', founded in Austria in 2023, is one such measure promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms for diverse groups. D-Arts encompasses a project office and a network of cultural institutions, initiatives and actors that promote the diversification of the Austrian arts and culture sector by challenging discrimination and building equitable spaces for marginalized groups, often through dialogue in the urban realm. By implementing open calls and its D-Arts Sessions, the initiative aims to transform the Austrian cultural landscape to be more just and inclusive for all.

FOSTERING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

While the first section of this chapter demonstrated the crucial role civil society organizations play in cultural policy making, the second part explores some of the key conditions, mechanisms, structures and resources that can be fostered to strengthen civil society's ability to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

It is important to first acknowledge that recent developments have contributed to a degrading global climate for civil society organizations. A sense that global civic space is shrinking has, alarmingly and most recently, become more pronounced. This is highlighted, for instance, by the EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE), a European Union grant-funded programme launched at the beginning of 2025 and led by a consortium of international civil society organizations, together with a network of members in 86 countries covering all different regions.

The EU SEE Early Warning and Monitoring Mechanism, which sheds light on critical trends in the enabling environment for civil society, has identified several key threats since January 2025 amplifying the existing challenges facing civil society, particularly in developing countries. These threats include reduced funding for civil society organizations, shifting donor priorities, an increase in restrictions on freedom of expression in the digital realm, and other challenges (EU SEE, 2025). Prolonged economic crises, particularly those stemming from geopolitical conflicts, are further constraining access to sustainable funding for many organizations.

Increased formalization of civil society in the creative sector

The existence of multiple strong professional bodies and trade unions across different cultural domains is a particularly important facet enabling the work of civil society. These institutions offer multiple benefits, including making it easier to act collectively; raising the visibility of the sector; organizing and campaigning on issues such as working conditions, rights and equity; coordinating training, development and standard setting; and providing expertise and data for policy-making processes.

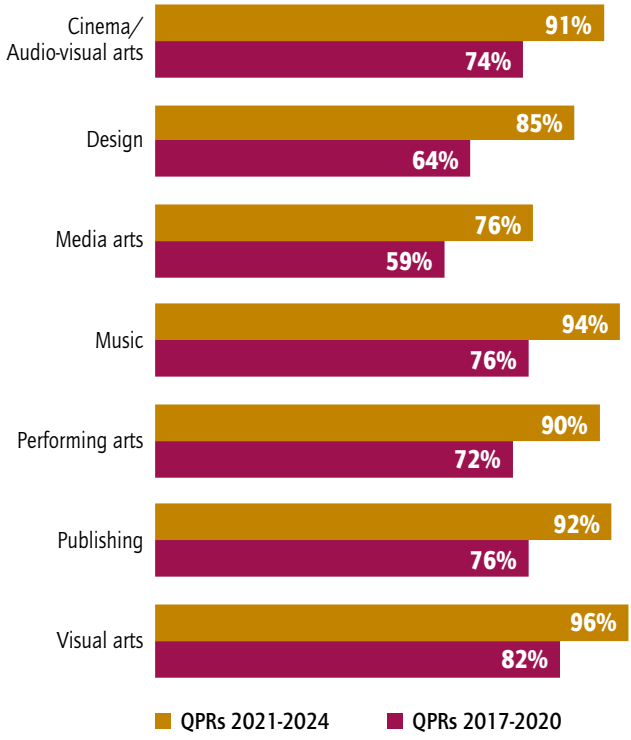
Therefore, legislation that enables and supports the work of civil society organizations should include procedures to formalize the structure of cultural and creative associations and professional organizations, including by facilitating their acquisition of legal status. Such legislation can help foster more structured dialogue between the public and private sectors, support the professionalization and enhanced effectiveness of civil society, and strengthen their capacity to deliver programmes.

During the 2017-2020 reporting period, between 59% and 82% of Parties to the Convention reported the existence of professional bodies and trade unions across various cultural domains. During the 2021-2024 reporting period, this share increased significantly, with a higher proportion of Parties reporting professional organizations and/or trade unions representing artists and/or cultural professionals (Figure 4.5). The increase is consistent across all cultural domains, with current levels ranging from 76% to 96%. These developments indicate a growing consolidation and structuring of civil society organizations within the cultural and creative sectors.

However, despite this progress reported by the Parties, an analysis of the measures reported by civil society organizations shows that only 2% relate to unions, associations, trade bodies and networks – similar to the share of measures related to funding (3%). By comparison, these proportions fall far below measures on capacity building and education (23%), indicating that these are areas where civil society organizations receive limited support.

Figure 4.5

Proportion of Parties reporting professional organizations and/or trade unions representing artists and/or cultural professionals, by cultural domain



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Furthermore, even in countries where professional organizations and trade unions do exist, this does not necessarily imply that these bodies are operating at full capacity to deliver concrete benefits for their creative communities. In the African region, this limited operational capacity may be partially explained by the high levels of informality in the creative sector, which limits the ability of artists and cultural professionals to organize and participate in collective bargaining for social and economic rights (ILO, 2023).

Figure 4.5 also shows that significant differences persist in the existence of professional organizations and trade unions across cultural domains. Visual arts are the most formalized, with 96% of Parties reporting professional organizations, while media arts are the least formalized, at 76%. This suggests that additional support may be needed to encourage the formalization of professional organizations covering certain mediums of cultural expressions.

Nevertheless, the increased structuring of civil society organizations in the cultural and creative sector is evident through examples from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports. In the field of cinema and audio-visual arts, for instance, the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland is the representative body for directors involved in the Irish audio-visual industry. The Guild promotes the economic and creative rights of screen directors, raises awareness of their role and status as artists, represents its members nationally and internationally, and encourages dialogue between film and arts organizations. Since the Guild is recognized as a professional association, it receives funding from the Irish Film Board and the Arts Council.

Meanwhile, in Guinea, an initiative is underway to structure stakeholders within the cultural sector into umbrella civil society organizations and improve governance of the sector. During 2021-2024, partners operating in the cultural sector signed a series of agreements to support an advocacy system that better involves them in developing and implementing cultural programmes. These advocacy campaigns primarily aim to ensure that their concerns are considered in the government's *Programme cadre d'appui au secteur de la culture* (Framework Programme for Supporting the Culture Sector).

In Uzbekistan, the government has made a series of commitments to improve the legal framework for the development of civil society. A road map was established to expand state support for these organizations, to increase the number of members in the National Association of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations in Uzbekistan, and to support the integration of civil society organizations in policy making. Likewise, Sudan passed the Law of Organizing the Activities of Cultural Groups, which led to the creation of a Cultural Activities Organizing Committee responsible for evaluating cultural activities and providing recommendations. To date, more than 700 cultural organizations have been officially registered, and the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism is working to encourage their formalization into unions.

Building shared governance with civil society

Apart from the structuring of civil society organizations, governance models also play a key role in the creation of partnerships involving civil society. Partnerships may involve public authorities entrusting leadership or specific responsibilities within projects or initiatives to civil society organizations or individuals within them.

For instance, the National Council for Culture in Slovenia has the task of acting as an advisory body and providing expert opinions and recommendations to public authorities on the country's cultural policy and strategy. The Council is made up of experts and representatives of cultural disciplines, with the role of reviewing proposed legislation, launching research studies and developing initiatives to address issues in the sector.

Likewise, in Oman, a portfolio of partnership agreements between the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth and civil society organizations has allowed for the support and delegated delivery of more than 35 cultural activities and events between 2020 and 2024. This included the Oman Film and Theatre Society, Omani Society for Writers and Literati, Cultural Club and Literary Forum.

In other instances, government and civil society share roles by working together, in what could be termed 'shared' or 'cooperative' governance, to promote freedom of artistic expression, ensure citizen participation and enhance accountability. Coordination and cooperation with civil society organizations can take place at different levels of government including local, provincial and national.

Box 4.5 • Creation of a regional cultural alliance in Lautém, Timor-Leste

In Timor-Leste, the civil society organization Many Hands International received funding from the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity in 2024 to launch an initiative to create a cultural alliance in the municipality of Lautém. The coalition, comprising representatives from government, communities and civil society, aims to promote culture as a driver of sustainable development through a community-empowerment approach.

Following a survey that identified community interest in locally driven cultural development, the Alliance received support from local government, which agreed to participate. Working groups were established, and stakeholders engaged in multiple rounds of community feedback to design the 2025-2035 Lautém Cultural Strategy, a sustainable cultural development plan for the region. Implemented in part by the Lautém Cultural Alliance, the plan emphasizes the value of decentralized governance through the active involvement of communities and civil society, as well as the ability of culture to diversify local economies.

Many Hands International hopes the foundation of the Lautém Cultural Alliance will be the first step toward the creation of a network of regional-level alliances across the country, and eventually the establishment of a national cultural alliance representing the entirety of Timor-Leste.

Source: Timor-Leste QPR, 2024; UNESCO, 2025b

For example, Brazil's Cultura Viva National Policy, launched in 2004, sets out a system for shared governance between the public administration, civil society and local communities. Roles and responsibilities for cultural policy implementation are decentralized to the state and municipality levels, reflective of a broader strategy of cultural decentralization in Brazil. The policy certifies cultural collectives and entities as Cultural Points or Hubs, which enables them to access funds allocated in public tenders. Currently, Cultura Viva is present in all Brazilian states and approximately 1,400 municipalities. Over the past 20 years, approximately 3,500 Cultural Points were supported.

Another example of a cooperative governance model including civil society can be found in Timor-Leste (Box 4.5).

Opportunities for capacity development

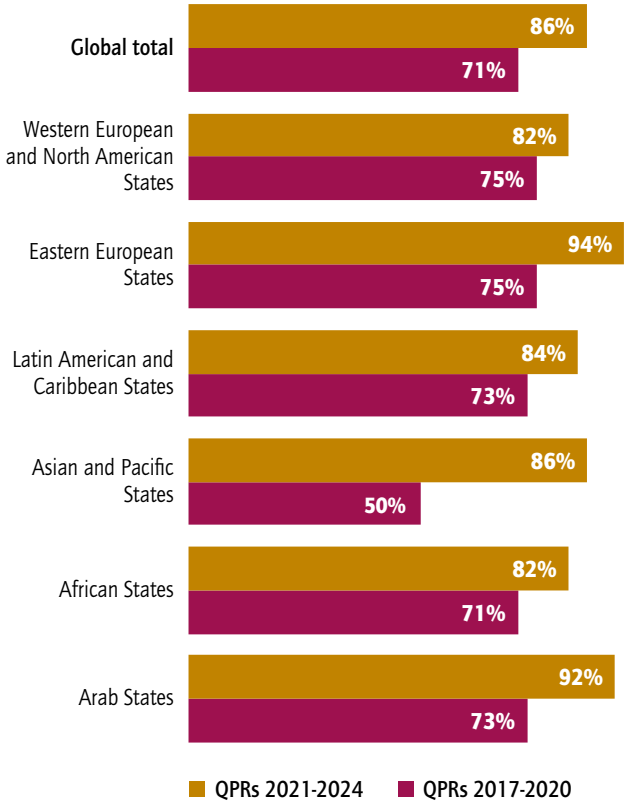
Capacity-building initiatives, including through programmes to develop civil society organizations' skills and capabilities, is a key approach used by public authorities to create an enabling environment for civil society's work.

Accordingly, a large majority of Parties to the Convention (86%) report that public authorities in their countries organize or support training and mentoring opportunities for civil society organizations involved in the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions – to build skills in communication, advocacy and fundraising. There has also been an increase in the proportion of Parties reporting such capacity-building measures since the 2017-2020 reporting period, rising from 71% to 86%. This increase is present across every region, with the greatest increase in Asian and Pacific States (up by 36 percentage points). This development appears to signal increasing awareness by Parties of the need to strengthen skills and capacities in the cultural and creative sector in the face of emerging challenges.

For instance, the 'Together for Local Transformation Programme' was delivered by the Praia Council and Decentralization Fund in Cabo Verde. It aimed to decentralize municipal services and strengthen civil society's capacity and skills for active participation in local development. In Panama, as part of the European Union-UNESCO programme on advancing evidence-based policies, UNESCO and the Inter-American Development Bank supported the newly established Ministry of Culture in providing training for women cultural entrepreneurs in the creative economy.

Figure 4.6

Proportion of Parties with public authorities that organize or support training and mentoring opportunities in communication, advocacy or fundraising for civil society organizations involved in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Meanwhile, in Denmark, the organization *Kulturelle Samråd* (Cultural Council) supports organizations within the cultural sector through capacity building, training, networking and sharing of good practices. This includes training on the implementation of an online benchmarking tool to support civil society organizations in assessing their social impact. Initiated in Denmark, the programme has now expanded to partner countries in the Nordic and Baltic regions.

In Togo, the organization Culture-Développement received funding through the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals to accelerate the implementation of the Law No. 2016-012 on the Status of the Artist, which had previously been unevenly applied. The initiative trained 117 artist ambassadors on the relevant legal frameworks in regional workshops; they then further disseminated the knowledge gained to a total of 4,680 cultural actors nationwide.

The Quadrennial Periodic Reports also contain examples of strengthening capacity building through networks and cooperation. For instance, in Sweden, *Ideell kulturallians* (Ideal Cultural Alliance) is an umbrella organization for cultural civil society organizations. In collaboration with 21 member organizations, the association works to coordinate responses to common issues within the sector, pursue debate, spread knowledge and influence the public sector and society at large.

In a context of diminishing funding and more restrictive legislation, networking among cultural organizations is emerging as an increasing need, at both national and international levels, as a way to strengthen their collective capacity. For example, participants in the Civic Agora, which was organized in the framework of the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference, emphasized the need for funding models that enable civil society organizations to devote time and capacity to learning and networking as part of their regular activities. The debates also underlined the challenges posed to international networking by restrictive visa policies in developed countries, which prevent peer learning and weaken appreciation for the diversity of cultural expressions.

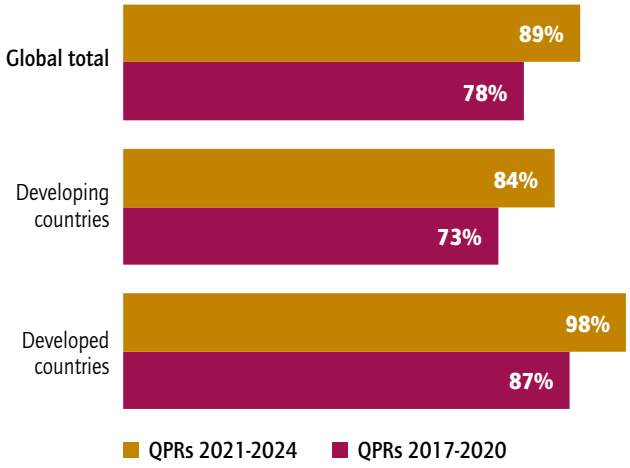
At the fifth edition of the Convention's Civil Society Forum held in June 2025, networking was considered crucial to support civil society engagement; at the same time, the Forum recognized that many organizations from developing countries and marginalized communities still struggle to access such partnership opportunities. In this respect, the Forum recommended the creation of regional and thematic peer learning networks to foster regional and inter-regional collaboration. Therefore, more targeted support for such networks to reinforce sustainable cultural ecosystems and civil society engagement in policy are likely to be needed for the coming years.

Intensified funding challenges

Sustainable funding is key to enabling cultural civil society organizations to operate independently and respond rapidly to new and evolving challenges. The Quadrennial Periodic Report data from the 2021-2024 period show an optimistic picture across Parties to the Convention. At the global level, 89% of Parties report the existence of public funding schemes that support the involvement of civil society organizations in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions. This proportion rose by 11 percentage points since the previous reporting period. This was consistent across both developed (98%) and developing countries (84%).

Figure 4.7

Proportion of Parties with public funding schemes supporting civil society organizations' involvement in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

For instance, the goal of the expanded 2024 'Culture Funds for Citizen Projects' by the National Secretariat of Culture in Paraguay is to promote citizen participation in cultural revitalization and decentralization. The funds have supported over 92 projects led by civil society that span a range of cultural domains, including those strengthening cultural spaces and centres as catalysts of cultural, social and economic development. Similarly, the 'Culture Center+' subsidy programme delivered by the National Centre for Culture in Poland has the goal of better integrating cultural centres in the life of the local community and building the capacity of community-driven cultural activity. Between 2020 and 2023, the programme supported the participatory activities of 270 community centres and the implementation of 1,000 community initiatives.

Likewise, in Tunisia, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs has committed to setting up an annual funding mechanism for cultural associations under which grant applications are examined by a multidisciplinary commission according to eligibility criteria that were revised in 2023 and inspired by the objectives and guiding principles of the 2005 Convention. The Ministry of Culture in Estonia provides a grant programme to support creative freelancers, funded by the state budget and distributed by professional artistic associations. Grants are paid once a year to recognized artistic associations based on their number of members, and can be used to fund creative activities and related training. Creative support through this scheme was vital to support freelancers who lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, even if the number of Parties reporting public funding mechanisms has increased, this does not necessarily imply that the absolute amount of funding available for civil society organizations has grown overall, nor that such mechanisms are adequate to meet their needs. Rather, as data presented in Chapter 1 of this report show, at a global level funding for the cultural and creative sector appears to be declining.

At the fifth edition of the 2005 Convention's Civil Society Forum, civil society representatives also confirmed the escalating difficulty in securing adequate and fair funding, due in particular to a shift toward short-term and one-off project-based financing models. In this respect, a lack of robust data on the economic impact of the cultural sectors, along with the minimal representation of culture in the Sustainable Development Goals, was identified as hampering cultural organizations' ability to advocate for financing and compete with other development sectors for funding.

This image of a degrading funding environment for civil society is also reinforced by a survey of 54 organizations published by EU SEE in March 2025, which showed two-thirds of civil society organizations (67%) directly affected by new funding cuts, with 40% of them losing 25% to 50% of their budgets, forcing them to reduce programmes, cut staff or close operations. Human rights, democracy and gender equality programmes were reported to be facing the most severe disruptions. Approximately 69% of civil society organizations stated that they were actively seeking alternative donors or partnerships due to increasing challenges to existing funding structures.

In this regard, it is important to highlight that data presented in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports may not fully reflect these current realities, at least partially due to the timeframe of the reporting period (2021-2024), which concluded before major disruptions to the global funding landscape in 2025.

In this funding context, civil society organizations are engaging in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the importance of public investment in culture. For instance, the civil society organization Selam has launched the 'Connect for Culture Africa' initiative in collaboration with the African Union and supported by the Swedish Government, with branches in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Nairobi, Kenya. The initiative integrates advocacy efforts at both regional and national levels, fostering a multi-stakeholder network of cultural advocates to raise awareness about how culture can promote inclusive, peaceful and sustainable social and economic development.

Its aim is to strengthen cultural actors' ability to influence and participate in African countries' budget processes, and to increase the allocation of public funding to culture to at least 1% of the national budget in half of all African countries by 2030.

However, even when public financial support for culture is available, accessing such benefits can be another major issue for civil society organizations (CDEA, 2024). For instance, in certain countries, cultural civil society organizations may not be eligible for tax breaks or tax relief, as their activities are not legally recognized as responding to the public interest. Furthermore, some countries have established public funds to support private, for-profit organizations in the cultural and creative sector, which civil society organizations are not authorized to access.

In this respect, funding on an international level has the potential to play a key role, but this landscape too is currently threatened, as many countries cut back on international aid to support civil society or adopt legislation that makes it harder for civil society organizations to receive financing from abroad (Firmin et al., 2025; Pousadela, 2025). These sudden shifts in the availability of international funding often hinder civil society organizations' ability to ensure the sustainability or continuity of their projects in the long term.

Among the limited number of international funding mechanisms that support civil society engagement in the cultural and creative sector, one notable source is the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity, established under Article 18 of the 2005 Convention. Along with other international funding, this UNESCO Fund plays an important role in filling gaps in the financing of civil society's work at the national level, with 68% of funded projects during the period 2017-2024 benefiting non-governmental organizations, for a total amount of over US$4.5 million in funding. An example of one such project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented in Box 4.6.

However, the most recent external evaluation of the Fund pointed to several concerns related to its financial sustainability, including a need for increased contributions from a wider range of donors, given its reliance on a small number of countries for the majority of its funding (UNESCO, 2025a). These difficulties encountered by the Fund are yet another indicator suggesting insufficient public funding for culture at the global level.

Box 4.6 • Obala Art Centar, measuring the impact of the Sarajevo Film Festival

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity supported a comprehensive study of the Sarajevo Film Festival's contribution to social and economic development. Carried out by Obala Art Centar, the study gathered data on the Festival's participation and economic impact, its effects on tourism and promotion of positive social values, as well as returns on public and private investment. In line with advocacy efforts, the main findings of the study were subsequently presented to key public stakeholders.

Based on the knowledge generated, the project contributed to the creation and implementation of a tax incentive for film production in the region. In 2021, the government of the Sarajevo Canton allocated 150,000 euros for a 30% cash rebate on eligible audio-visual production costs, ultimately granting the incentive to several productions. During a 2022 press conference, the study was recognized as a key piece in the process of analysing and changing the city's cultural policy. The project illustrates how targeted international financing can fill funding gaps within national cultural policy cycles and serve as an impetus for further engagement and support mechanisms from local authorities.

Source: UNESCO

Together, these trends point to an increasingly fragmented system of funding at the national and global levels for supporting civil society organizations' key role in protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions. In this context, the fifth edition of the Civil Society Forum presented several key recommendations, including for civil society to pool fundraising resources, develop community grant proposals and leverage private financing, as well as for funders to reduce administrative burdens, update funding criteria and provide access to cultural spaces and technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parties to the Convention

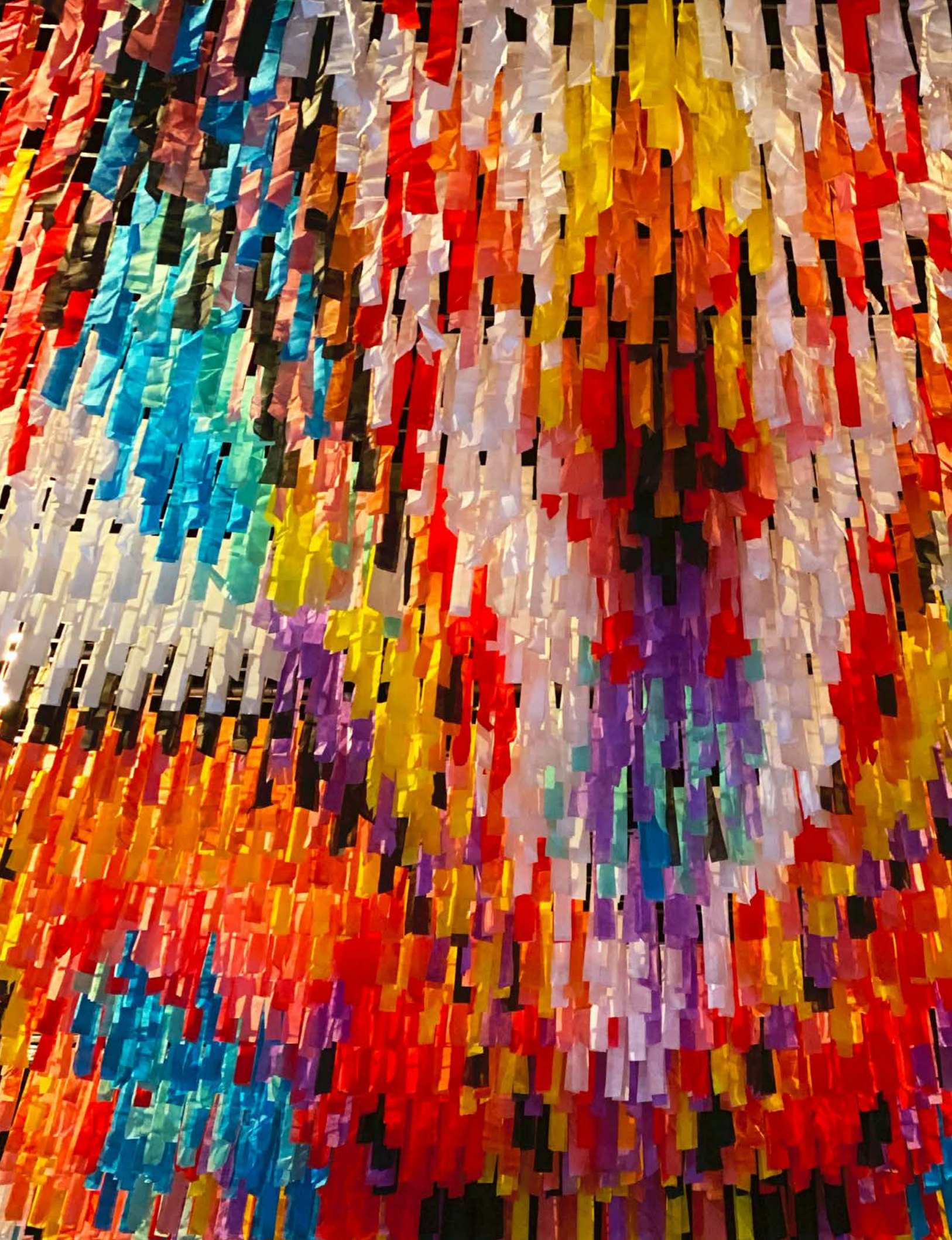
- Provide a strong enabling environment for civil society organizations' crucial role to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions. Implement supportive legislation, adequate capacity-building programmes and sustainable funding opportunities.
- Establish or reinforce structured dialogue mechanisms with civil society organizations to ensure they foster transparent and participatory policy making. Support civil society's direct engagement in the design and implementation of cultural policies.
- Review and mitigate restrictive visa policies and other mobility barriers that hinder peer learning and weaken international networking among civil society organizations. Support their balanced geographical representation at sessions of the Convention's governing bodies by providing financial or in-kind assistance, in line with recommendations from the fifth edition of the 2005 Convention's Civil Society Forum.
- Strengthen civil society participation in policy monitoring by formalizing its regular involvement in future reporting cycles, including through systematic use of the Civil Society Organizations Form and its active engagement in the drafting of Quadrennial Periodic Reports.
- Leverage the mediating role of civil society organizations by adopting policies and measures that support their work with marginalized groups, improve data collection on barriers to cultural participation and encourage partnerships with local governments. Where appropriate, adopt shared or cooperative governance models that place civil society in key leadership roles.
- Formalize cultural and creative associations or professional organizations by establishing clear procedures for their recognition, especially within less formalized cultural domains. Where such organizations already exist, support their effective operation and their ability to advocate for the social and economic rights of their creative communities.
- Establish public funding mechanisms to ensure adequate and fair financing for civil society's work. Funding schemes should be long-term, recognize the value of learning and networking, and use transparent criteria to ensure the continuity of civil society's work.
- Ensure legal recognition of civil society's public-interest contributions to cultural life, and include these organizations in related support measures, such as tax relief and public funds.
- Contribute to the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, to sustain its continued role as one of the few mechanisms at the international level financing the work of civil society in advancing the goals of the 2005 Convention.
- Monitor and improve the operating environment for civil society organizations by regularly assessing challenges related to funding, legal frameworks, skills development and their overall ability to contribute to sustainable governance for culture.

For civil society organizations

- Strengthen cooperation and networking among civil society organizations, at national and international levels, to enhance sustainable resource mobilization, increase resilience in the face of funding cuts and reinforce collective advocacy for civil society's role in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions.
- Develop regional and thematic peer learning networks to foster inter-regional collaboration, especially for organizations from developing countries and marginalized communities that struggle to access partnership opportunities.
- Diversify funding sources, develop new funding strategies and leverage private financing, while pooling limited fundraising resources.
- Advocate for increased public investment in culture by raising awareness of the civic value of civil society organizations and their contributions to community development.
- Assess internal skill needs for organizational development and policy engagement, to inform the design of capacity-building programmes and to strengthen advocacy for enhanced support.
- Participate in the work of the Convention's governing bodies to strengthen the transparency, accountability and inclusivity of global cultural governance.

For UNESCO

- Refine monitoring and reporting frameworks by developing more nuanced indicators. For example, more attention should be given to indicators that concretely monitor whether (and how) civil society organization recommendations are being taken forward in cultural policy-making processes.
- Continue supporting international networking and peer-to-peer exchange among civil society organizations in the cultural and creative sector, including by facilitating their active involvement in the work of the Convention's governing bodies and its Civil Society Forum.
- Strengthen longitudinal monitoring and analysis of the operating environment for civil society, particularly in light of declining funding, regulatory constraints and shrinking civic space, in order to better assess how these factors will continue to affect civil society's capacity to engage in cultural policy making over time.



Goal 2

ACHIEVE A BALANCED FLOW OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES AND INCREASE THE MOBILITY OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS

© Luciana Abait,
*Off the map**

Chapter 5

The shifting borders of cultural mobility

Marie Le Sourd and Rana Yazaji

KEY FINDINGS

- Mobility is about freedom of movement and expression, and it equally concerns artists from all genders, all abilities and all contexts, war and conflict zones included.
- Imbalances in public support for inward and outward mobility, observed in the previous edition, persist. Parties to the Convention remain far more engaged in supporting outward mobility than inward mobility, especially in Western European and North American countries (96% for outward compared to 38% for inward). This disparity is reflected both in public funding allocations and in the number of policies and measures Parties report.
- Visa requirements remain the main structural barrier to the movement of artists and cultural professionals from developing countries, as new and increasingly stringent regulations are being implemented at points of departure, arrival and transit. Cooperation between ministries of the interior, foreign affairs and culture is therefore crucial to streamline visa processes.
- Preferential treatment still remains poorly understood and under-implemented in developed countries. However, a higher proportion of developing countries (56%) report providing public funds to specifically support South-South mobility for artists from other developing countries. To strengthen such measures, developed countries that are Parties to the 2005 Convention should engage more actively and work in closer coordination with civil society organizations.
- Experimental forms of mobility are emerging to address pressing issues such as forced displacement, the climate crisis and structural inequalities. In particular, mobility frameworks supporting at-risk and displaced artists are providing strong, flexible models characterized by open-ended, process-based and modular approaches that emphasize long-term artistic development and professional integration.
- Countries are developing in-border mobility initiatives to enhance the visibility and capacity of less connected or under-represented artists. However, this should not reduce investment in international cultural mobility.
- Bilateral and regional treaties, including international cultural cooperation agreements, have created opportunities for signatory countries to promote cultural exchange among artists and cultural organizations.
- Civil society organizations continue to be active in supporting artistic mobility, advocating to raise awareness among public bodies, providing access to information and resources through Mobility Information Points and developing innovative mobility programmes. However, greater synergies with Parties and funders should be encouraged to avoid duplication of efforts and prevent the reinforcement of inequalities in access, particularly in the context of South-South mobility.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has inspired new ways to reimagine artistic mobility, including greener, digital and hybrid approaches. However, if not contextualized, these models can become additional obstacles for artists and cultural professionals from developing countries or less accessible regions and territories.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Fair cultural mobility ensures equitable access to:

Work | **Funding** | **Resources** | **Training** | **Networking**

PROGRESS

56%

of developing countries fund **South-South mobility**

49.3%

of mobility calls supported individual residencies

Innovative mobility measures

- Digitizing visa processes
- Direct ministerial coordination
- Bilateral/regional cultural cooperation agreements

Civil society leads on:

- Training
- Advocacy
- Access to information through Mobility Information Points

CHALLENGES

96%

of developed countries reported supporting **outward mobility**

Only 38%

support **inward mobility**

Visas

remain the **primary obstacle to cultural mobility**

EMERGING TRENDS

Re-emerging mobility trends post COVID-19

80%

of opportunities **in-person**

Only 4.3%

fully online

Shifting landscape of cultural mobility

- Addressing forced displacement, environment and mental health
- Adapting to hybrid, in-border and regional formats

INTRODUCTION

'We have no choice than to be international.' This statement by Heba Hage-Felder, made during the online discussion on 28 August 2020 'How to Be Together? Conversations on International Exchange and Collaborations in the Performing Arts',[1] illustrates the complexity and multifaceted nature of mobility in the arts and cultural sector, which have become more visible and exacerbated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

Mobility offers a wide range of professional opportunities that are part of the artistic process, such as residencies, presenting work at festivals or markets, networking with peers, learning from other practices and building capacity through specific training. In this context, the Operational Guidelines on Preferential Treatment for Developing Countries (Article 16) of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) continue to provide a relevant source for understanding the concept of mobility.[2] While some artists engage in mobility for professional development, for many, the need for mobility can be driven by necessity. This could be due to various factors, such as economic, political or structural issues; a lack of training or opportunities in the local cultural sector; or, in more extreme cases, forced migration due to political oppression, wars or conflicts.

This chapter anchors its discussions in an evolving and dynamic understanding of cultural mobility patterns. An updated definition of mobility will be introduced that considers how mobility should be understood as a cornerstone of equitable international cooperation in the arts, as it is deeply intertwined with broader systemic issues, including access to resources (financial, digital, etc.), wars and conflicts, gender-based discrimination, structural racism and other forms of inequality.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach, ensuring that cultural mobility policies reflect the realities of artists and cultural professionals worldwide, as well as a holistic lens both in terms of analysis and policy in order to generate balanced cultural mobility flows and avoid reinforcing inequalities.

Against the backdrop of the 2005 Convention, this chapter explores these issues, offering updated insights into policies and practices that can foster more equitable and sustainable mobility in the arts and cultural sector. The overall objective of this chapter is therefore to examine the extent to which the policy framework established by the 2005 Convention has enhanced and expanded transnational mobility for artists and cultural professionals, with a particular focus on developments over the past four years. To this end, the present chapter, based on the Convention's Monitoring Framework, traces developments regarding policies adopted and measures implemented.

Additionally, this chapter addresses the changing realities related to the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, the extent to which current policies, measures and actions by Parties and civil society organizations address these realities, and the types of mechanisms that would be needed to fully endorse today's diverse cultural mobility patterns. Ultimately, the chapter examines the 'shifting borders' of artistic mobility twenty years after the adoption of the 2005 Convention. It demonstrates that cultural mobility in the contemporary world is being reshaped by various factors, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical shifts and conflicts, changing migration policies, economic challenges, digital transformation, environmental considerations and evolving cultural and institutional policies.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE MOBILITY: POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

The policies, measures, operational programmes and funding mechanisms that Parties to the 2005 Convention and civil society have implemented to support artistic mobility provide a useful starting point. Drawing on both primary and secondary data analysis, the section adopts a comparative perspective on inward and outward mobility. This approach enables an understanding of both global and regional levels, helping to identify broader trends and regional specificities, and ultimately informing policy recommendations.

In this context, 'inward mobility' refers to the movement of artists and cultural professionals into a country or region for purposes such as residencies, collaborations, exhibitions or participation in events. It is shaped by policies and conditions that either facilitate or hinder the reception of international artists, including visa regimes, funding schemes and access to information.

Conversely, 'outward mobility' captures the capacity of domestic artists and cultural professionals (nationals of the said country or legally based residents) to engage internationally by travelling abroad. This includes access to opportunities such as touring, study visits, international showcases, or participation in transnational networks.

1. An event organized by Tanz im August, HAU Hebbel am Ufer and Zürcher Theater Spektakel: https://www.theaterspektakel.ch/en/article/how-to-be-together.

2. The 2005 Convention's Operational Guidelines on Preferential Treatment for Developing Countries, Article 3.3.2 (iv) '[T]aking measures to facilitate the mobility of artists, other cultural professionals and practitioners, and, in particular, to favour those from developing countries who need to travel to developed countries for professional reasons. These measures should include, in conformity with the applicable provisions in this respect, for example: simplification of procedures for issue of visas regarding entry, stay and temporary travel; lower cost of visas.'

It is influenced by domestic support structures, such as grants, mobility programmes and training, as well as by external barriers such as entry restrictions, political constraints or lack of international visibility.

A third essential concept introduced by the 2005 Convention is 'preferential treatment'. This concept has important implications not only for mobility patterns but also for the equitable flow of cultural goods and services. As such, it is explored here, as well as in Chapters 6 and 7.

Policies and measures supporting artists' and cultural professionals' mobility

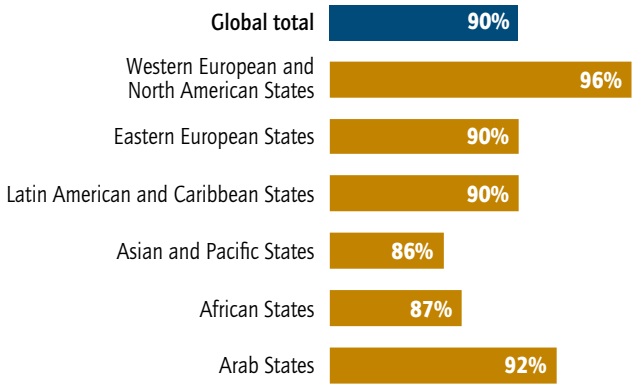
Globally, 90% of Parties to the 2005 Convention report implementing policies and measures to support the outward mobility of artists and cultural professionals, with Western European and North American Parties reporting the highest proportion at 96%, as shown in Figure 5.1. By contrast, support for inward mobility is significantly lower, with only 51% of Parties reporting policies to facilitate the entry of foreign artists and cultural professionals (Figure 5.2). A comparable gap exists in funding, with 84% of Parties reporting public funds supporting outward mobility while only 61% report funding to support inward mobility (Figure 5.3). This disparity underscores a stronger commitment to enabling outward mobility than to fostering reciprocal opportunities for international artists.

Across the different regions, Parties in Western Europe and North America recorded the lowest percentage (38%) for implementing specific visa policies or other cross-border measures to support inward mobility (Figure 5.2). However, Western European and North American countries reported the highest rates of implementing work permit regulations for incoming artists and cultural professionals (63%), which may point to the existence of well-established regulatory frameworks governing artistic labour more broadly. While this may ensure professional recognition and labour rights, it does not necessarily reflect a proactive intention to encourage inward mobility for temporary cross-border purposes. Rather, it highlights a regulatory environment that, while comprehensive, may not be matched by policies explicitly designed to attract or support incoming artists.

Outward mobility policies vary greatly, with some closely linked to cultural diplomacy actions and visibility. Since 2018, the Gambian Government has, for instance, appointed artists as cultural ambassadors, issuing selected artists with diplomatic passports, including artists in official delegations to foreign trade fairs and issuing *notes verbales* to facilitate the issuance of visas for artists.

Figure 5.1

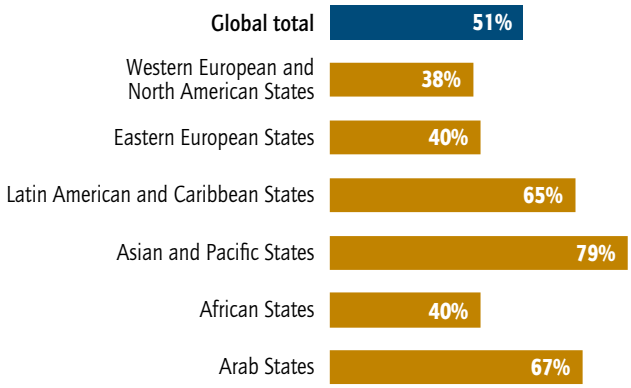
Proportion of Parties reporting policies and measures supporting the outward mobility of artists and cultural professionals, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Figure 5.2

Proportion of Parties reporting specific visa policies or other cross-border measures supporting the inward mobility of foreign artists and cultural professionals, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Box 5.1 • *La Fondation H*: supporting artists' mobility across Africa and beyond

La Fondation H (Foundation H), founded in Antananarivo, Madagascar, in 2017, through the initiative of the entrepreneur and patron Hassanein Hiridjee, has been recognized as a public-interest organization since 2018.

The Foundation runs programmes that support the careers of artists from Africa and its diasporas, facilitate public access to art, and actively contribute to the development and structuring of the artistic scene in the Indian Ocean region. Since 2021, *La Fondation H* has hosted an artist residency in Antananarivo, which has welcomed more than 12 international artists from Comoros, Mauritius, Morocco, Zimbabwe and other countries.

Additionally, its Mizaha programme in Paris has, since 2020, hosted an average of five artists per year from countries in the Global South, including Madagascar, Mali and Mauritius and from their diasporas in France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), for instance.

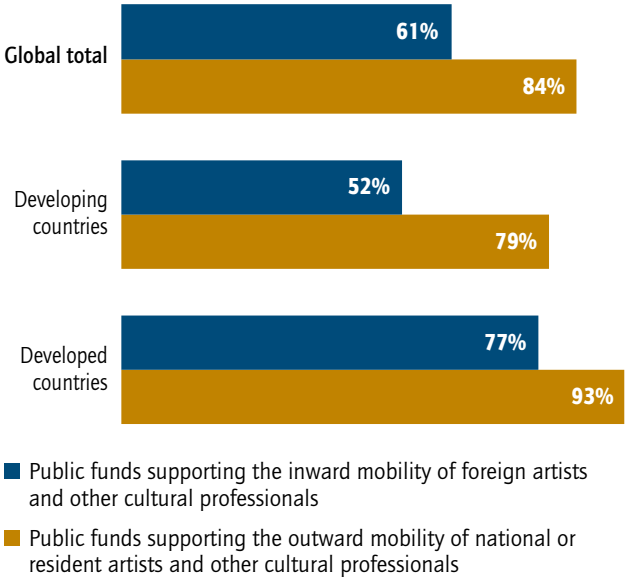
The programmes in both Madagascar and France receive funding from the Foundation, which financed, for instance, participation in the 2025 Biennale of São Paulo. The Foundation invites artists who are between projects or creative phases, as they require time and space to develop new areas of work. Many of the artists supported by the Foundation have no gallery representation, so the networking and meetings with curators offered by the Foundation are extremely important for their careers, as is the curatorial text provided for each artist to present their work.

Given limited public support to facilitate the inward mobility of artists from the Global South, initiatives such as *Fondation H* illustrate how civil society organizations from the region have stepped in to assume a more active role in this regard, including by strengthening South-South mobility which will be further discussed in the chapter.

Source: Interview with Margaux Huille, Director of Fondation H, 2 July 2025

Figure 5.3

Proportion of Parties reporting public funds supporting the inward and outward mobility of cultural professionals, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Visa policies and procedures

Measures towards visa or cross-border facilitation are reported by Parties to the 2005 Convention. However, there are some important discrepancies that could have negative consequences at various levels for the concerned artists and cultural professionals.

It is noteworthy that developed countries tend to adopt a more cautious approach regarding visa policies and other cross-border measures as a result of migration policies that impose high security and strict measures to prevent irregular immigration. For instance, Parties in Western Europe and North America are the least represented among all regions and fall far below the global average (Figure 5.2).

In discussions of international cooperation and mobility in the arts and cultural sector, visa processes are often, if not always, identified as the first key obstacle to the circulation of artists and cultural professionals. These challenges arise not only at points of departure and arrival but also during transit, where visa requirements in third countries cause an additional administrative burden for travelling artists. As a result, negative consequences can be felt at various levels, including lost economic opportunities, diminished professional recognition and visibility, lack of access to networks and markets, and audiences deprived of opportunities to experience diverse cultural expressions.

These consequences affect not only the individuals concerned but also the host organizations that receive them (festivals, residencies, conferences and training programmes). This aspect is illustrated by the challenges reported by non-governmental and international non-governmental organizations during the fifth global consultation on the implementation of the UNESCO 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist, carried out in 2022-2023. For both inward and outward mobility, visas and immigration were identified as the most significant obstacles to supporting the circulation of artists and cultural professionals.

In this regard, one of the most striking cases of (public) financial loss due to visa rejections was reported by the national circus association in Ethiopia:[3] 'In the past four years an estimated loss of US$860,000 with 191 circus professionals not being able to travel for their performances, 44% of them due to visa rejections'.

Another increasingly evident negative consequence of the difficult visa process and the possibility of rejection is its impact on the mental health of artists and cultural professionals themselves. As noted by Krystel Khoury, an independent cultural manager working in the Arab region and Belgium: 'If we have never had a visa rejection in our lives or we never have been through the process of applying for a visa, we can never understand what it means on so many levels. Imagine the logic of rejection, of not being able to go somewhere. Although the planet belongs to everybody in a way, of course, [in practice] it doesn't' (On the Move, 2023c).

Still, Parties appear committed to devising and implementing policy measures to address visa-related challenges. Their measures can be grouped into three main categories:

- (Long-term) conditional visa facilitation at the point of arrival: For instance, New Zealand provides different types and durations of visas depending on sector and type of work in relation to incoming mobility. Other long-term visa regulations also exist, often based on specific conditions such as income level or educational qualifications, including the United Arab Emirates Golden Visa, the Passport Talent in France and the Creative Worker Visa in the United Kingdom.

- Facilitation at the point of departure: Certain countries have introduced systems to facilitate the mobility of their artists and cultural professionals through official databases or registries.

  In Cameroon, artists and culture professionals' mobility is progressively being managed by national and cultural federations. Another example of a registration system is used in Trinidad and Tobago, where individuals and organizations registered with the National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers can use their registration certificate as part of their visa application to attest to their professional status.

  Although supportive in spirit, such systems should not evolve into mechanisms of control or censorship, through which an official authority can decide who is qualified to engage in international mobility. This was a key point of concern made by civil society organizations such as Zone Franche, the International Music Council, AFRICALIA and *Culture et Développement*. While these systems can address important aspects of facilitating mobility, they can also place a considerable burden on developing countries by making their engagement a prerequisite. Several of the proposed measures – such as requiring ministries of culture in developing countries to advocate for artists' visa needs or to establish national databases of recognized artists – risk reinforcing rather than alleviating structural inequalities. Assigning authorities the power to determine who qualifies as an artist introduces risks of exclusion, gatekeeping and the politicization of artistic recognition.

- E-visa facilitation, a (future) in process: The implementation of online visa application systems is widely recognized as a significant step towards simplifying the visa process. With regards to the Schengen visa code and in the context of migration concerns and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a legislative proposal submitted by the European Commission on 27 April 2022 led to a decision by the Council and the European Parliament in June 2023 to digitize the visa procedure, as a way to smooth the process while improving the security of the Schengen space. The online platform is expected to be operational beginning in 2028 (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023), though applicants will still be required to have an appointment at the consulate to record their biometric data.

  While digital platforms may simplify visa procedures, it is important to ensure that they do not pose a new source of administrative burden, increase risks related to personal data protection and the safety of (at-risk) artists, or create additional barriers for those who do not have the necessary digital tools and skills to navigate such platforms.

3. The Ethiopian National Circus is an expanding association that promotes circus art throughout Ethiopia. In the last four years, it has supported 7,750 circus artists working in 52 troupes across eight regions and two city administrations.

Box 5.2 • Innovative measures facilitating visa procedures in Africa

Several countries in Africa have implemented measures to facilitate visa procedures through:

- **Digital visa process for incoming mobility**

In 2023, Burkina Faso introduced the E-Visa Burkina Faso platform, which contributed to inward mobility in the arts and cultural sector. It facilitated, for instance, 7,866 accreditations for international artists, as well as the participation of 20 women professionals from the African film and audiovisual sector, during the 27th and 28th editions of the *Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou* (Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou; FESPACO) in 2021 and 2023; 150 international festivalgoers at the documentary film festival Koudougou Doc from 2021 to 2023; and six foreign artists at the 13th edition of the International Granite Sculpture Symposium of Laongo in 2022.

- **Support through ministerial and intermediary organizations**

In Cameroon, the mobility of artists and cultural professionals is gradually being placed under the remit of national artistic and cultural federations. Financial support is being granted to artists taking part in events abroad under the *Compte d'Affectation Spéciale pour le Soutien à la Politique Culturelle* (Special Allocation Account for Cultural Policy Support). The Ministry of Arts and Culture acts as a liaison between external promoters and national players, offering consular facilitation (such as for the deliverance of passports or visas) for cultural professionals taking part in external events.

- **Bilateral agreements**

Since 2021, a review of the agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Cabo Verde on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas (2021) has led to new provisions that significantly facilitate the mobility of Cabo Verdeans within the territory of the European Union. These include the reduction of fees for processing visa applications; the expansion of categories of people benefiting from multiple-entry visas; the simplification of procedures and documentation to be presented; and the creation of a mechanism that determines the duration of validity of multiple-entry visas.

Source: Burkina Faso QPR, 2024; Cabo Verde QPR, 2024; Cameroon QPR, 2024

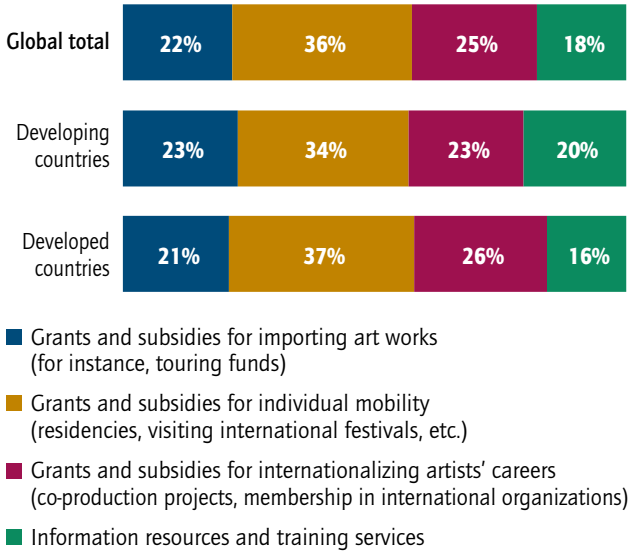
Prioritized types of mobility

Based on analysis of the reported measures, policies, programmes and schemes that support inward and outward mobility, it can be concluded that individual mobility, including participation in residencies or international festivals, is of the greatest global interest (Figures 5.4 and 5.5).

Festivals and fairs, in particular, are commonly reported by developing countries. In Indonesia over the past four years, exemplary civil society initiatives that support the mobility of artists and cultural professionals include Solo International Performing Arts, the Indonesian Dance Festival, Art Jakarta, ARTJOG, the Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival and Indonesian Music Expo. These events also demonstrated resilience by shifting to virtual formats during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support for international festivals and country-focused events became particularly important after the pandemic. In many cases, such initiatives were carried out through existing bilateral agreements. For example, in Viet Nam, a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the British Council led to the United Kingdom-Viet Nam Season 2023 programme, which established partnerships between British and Vietnamese artists through projects such as 'Cities in Sync', a collaboration between the electronic music communities in Hanoi and Sheffield.

Figure 5.4

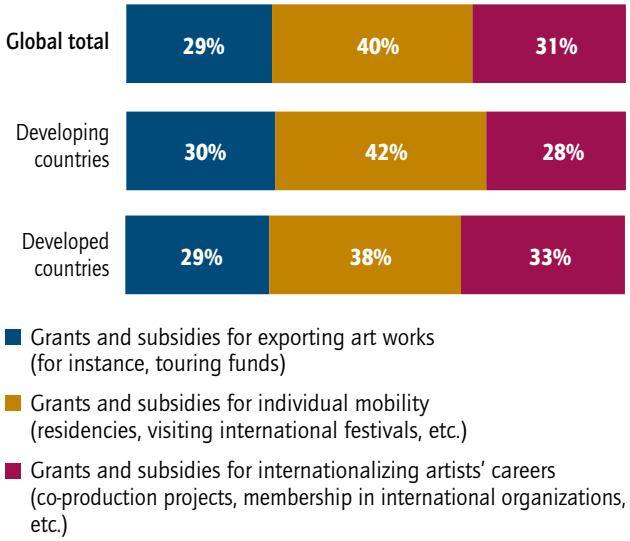
Most frequently reported measures, policies, programmes or schemes that support inward artist mobility, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (1980 Recommendation)

Figure 5.5

Most frequently reported types of grants and subsidies that support outward artist mobility, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (1980 Recommendation)

Data from On the Move's *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2025* confirm that mobility opportunities supporting exclusively individuals (as opposed to collectives, groups or companies) are the most prevalent across all regions. Residencies and artistic disciplines represent the most common formats, accounting for 49.3% of the calls analysed throughout the year 2024. Additionally, the data highlight that, compared to other purposes related to inward and outward mobility, training and capacity-building activities (such as acquiring new artistic skills or enhancing management abilities) stand out as the only category that exhibits higher levels of inward mobility. By contrast, travel grants, residencies and cultural exchange programmes are more prominent in terms of outward mobility support.

Finally, information resources and training services emerge as the least common types of mobility support. This may help explain the high involvement of civil society organizations in these areas.

The consistent but challenged role of civil society organizations

The role of associations, networks and formal or informal organizations continues to be key in the international cultural mobility landscape with regards to the following areas:

a. Access to administrative information and related advocacy action

There is ongoing support and advocacy from independent organizations that provide guidance to the sector on visa procedures and other administrative issues. Pearle*, the European network of employers in the performing arts sector, has published a guide entitled *Visas for Third Country National Artists Travelling to the Schengen Area* (2020), complemented by a new publication addressing the complex patchwork of immigration rules across European Union countries. Similarly, the network Zone Franche commissioned the French Mobility Information Point MobiCulture to update a guide detailing the various steps involved in visa applications (Lukacs, 2022).

Zone Franche also coordinates the *Comité Visas Artistes* (Artists Visas Committee) in France, which, since 2009, has been a unique example of a sector-based entity connected with various ministries (Culture, Home Affairs, and Foreign and European Affairs). The committee helps to tackle visa-related obstacles through advocacy actions, such as issuing statements that identify obstacles to mobility. For example, statements were issued in October 2023 regarding Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and in April 2024 regarding the State of Palestine.

A more recent civil society initiative to raise awareness of the specificities of visa procedures for artists is *The Lexicon on the International Mobility of Artists and Culture Professionals* (Kheriji-Watts, 2024). This document provides targeted training to ministerial and consular staff in Schengen countries. Conceived by On the Move with Pearle*, AFRICALIA, MobiCulture and the support of the French Ministry of Culture, the lexicon is a direct outcome of recommendations from the sector calling for greater awareness among visa-issuing authorities of the specific working conditions of artists and cultural professionals.

The role of Mobility Information Points has also been strengthened through a more visible and unified web platform that includes practical resources and activities.

Box 5.3 • Mobility Information Points

Mobility Information Points are organizations whose main mission is to provide information on administrative matters relating to cultural mobility, such as visas, customs, and taxation and social protection. They provide free, reliable and adapted information to artists and cultural professionals through direct contact via online video and phone calls, email and training sessions.

Mobility Information Points are often cited as a good practice for providing tailored and accessible information to address the administrative complexities of cultural mobility. Their importance was highlighted in the 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report and in the European Parliament resolution of 21 November 2023, which made recommendations to the Commission regarding a European Union framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors (European Parliament).

Since 2022, the number of Mobility Information Points has increased by two, with new members in Austria and Sweden, bringing the total to 11. The network also includes points in Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, the Netherlands (Kingdom of), Portugal, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

All Mobility Information Points are publicly funded, as relevant Quadrennial Periodic Reports attest. They differ in terms of structure: some are standalone organizations (such as an association), while others are part of an existing institution. In Germany, for example, they are the result of a merger between three organizations' services.

Mobility Information Points are part of the On the Move network, which facilitates joint training sessions, knowledge transfer and advocacy actions, while also encouraging the establishment of new information points around the world.

Mobility Information Points are in demand, with an average of 42 free consultations occurring per week for the nine information points analysed in 2024. Guidance regarding visas, residence and work permits is the top request in the consultations provided (35.5%) (On the Move, 2025d).

Source: European Parliament; On the Move, 2025d

b. More agile support to cross-sectoral mobility

Independent organizations have also adapted their mobility support based on the needs of their targeted beneficiaries. Examples include Ettijahat – Independent Culture and the Mekong Cultural Hub, which focuses on curated forms of mobility connected to cross-sectoral topics (such as diversity, climate crisis, etc.). However, particularly since the onset of the pandemic, the funding and support that some independent schemes provide have slowly been phased out, as has been the case with the independent mobility fund Art Moves Africa. This has not only limited funding opportunities but has also reduced networking opportunities and data analysis on cultural mobility trends on the African continent.

Box 5.4 • Ettijahat – Independent Culture: supporting displaced Syrian artists

Active since 2011, Ettijahat has been vital in supporting and promoting Syrian artists in Syria and around the world. The organization has undergone successive revisions to its programmes to ensure responsiveness to political and economic upheavals, as well as to the cultural changes and developments over the last 14 years. In 2024, Ettijahat launched a three-year programme entitled 'Zad: Miles for Connection', designed to support 'a generation of artists who were forced to relocate to Europe, mainly from the Levant and from conflict-affected countries from the Arab Region'. The main aim is to facilitate the visibility of displaced artists within their country of residence and more widely throughout Europe. Through Zad, individual artists as well as collectives are supported financially to showcase their works. The support covers costs for travel, accommodation and daily expenses (including for children), shipping costs for artworks and production materials, and translation services for artworks and live events. In the beginning of 2025, Ettijahat announced the results of the programme's first round. Nine art projects were supported, five of them for individuals and four for collectives.

In its final statement, the selection committee stressed the importance for artists to continue exploring new avenues for building artistic and intellectual relationships that broaden their horizons in Europe. As displaced artists may face challenges in their relocation and precarity that can result in their professional isolation, it is essential to provide them with genuine opportunities for networking and engagement with the artistic communities around them. This also opens a path for them to create critical and innovative artistic influences that could contribute to enriching the European cultural landscape.

c. Information sharing, training and networking

Several information platforms remain highly active thanks to the support of public funding bodies. These include TransArtists, a website dedicated to residency opportunities supported by DutchCulture, and Culture360, a platform of the Asia-Europe Foundation (2017) that regularly updates cultural mobility funding guides for Asian countries. Beyond this access to information, independent platforms like Culture Funding Watch develop capacity-building sessions and workshops to better equip the sector to apply for funding, particularly in the South-West Asian and North African regions and on the African continent. Finally, cultural networks are also developing possibilities for international mobility support. One example is the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts and its Global Connect Programme, supported by the European Union.

The following section will particularly address this question in connection with the shifting borders of cultural mobility and the growing need for stronger connections between Parties and civil society organizations.

BETWEEN CROSSPOINTS AND CHECKPOINTS: THE (SHIFTING?) BORDERS OF MOBILITY

This section critically examines the key conceptual and practical fields that shape contemporary mobility, encompassing measures, policies and operational practices, not only in international mobility but also within the broader cultural and artistic ecosystems, which both enable and constrain movement. The Quadrennial Periodic Reports serve as an essential foundation for this analysis, offering a vast qualitative data source through their narrative insights. By examining these reports and key secondary sources, one can gain a deeper understanding of how Parties and other actors respond to global shifts across multiple levels, ultimately redefining the landscape of cultural mobility. This allows us to consider how these shifting borders of mobility could be better addressed and managed.

For the purposes of this section, the following updated definition of cultural mobility proposed by On the Move in 2019 has been considered: 'Mobility is a central component of the professional trajectory of artists and culture professionals. Involving a temporary cross-border movement, often for educational, capacity-building, networking, or working purposes, it may have tangible or intangible outputs in the short term, and/or be part of a long-term professional development process. Mobility is a conscious process, and those involved in it, whether by directly engaging in it or by supporting it, should take into consideration its cultural, social, political, environmental, ethical and economic implications' (Baltà Portolés et al., 2019).

This definition attempts to encapsulate the various stakeholders and dynamics at play in shaping and supporting cultural mobility. While it takes these various dimensions into account, certain key areas remain insufficiently visible and are inadequately addressed in existing policy responses, as the following sections will show.

Freedom of movement, mobility and displacement

Mobility of artists and cultural professionals refers to temporary and voluntary cross-border movement to participate in residencies, exhibitions, festivals, touring for performances and concerts, exchanges and other forms of collaboration. In this understanding, cultural mobility does not generally encompass situations of forced displacement or asylum seeking. While mobility and forced displacement of at-risk artists are two distinct issues, they intersect through certain shared policy aspects, infrastructures and measures. They can also face interconnected challenges including issues of access, global inequity and the need for more inclusive policies. The Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on at-risk and displaced artists on 16 May 2023, are in this regard a political milestone as they invite European Union Member States to 'consider adapting, where appropriate, regular artistic residencies into emergency residencies, taking into account the needs of at-risk and displaced artists, including those emerging from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine' (Council of the European Union, 2023b).

Between 2021 and 2024, multiple Parties reported initiatives relating to at-risk artists and cultural professionals. Examples include programmes or initiatives specifically targeting Ukrainian artists, such as the Office Ukraine in Austria programme, measures protecting Ukrainian artists at risk or in exile in Poland, and support provided in Finland in 2023 when the Ministry of Education and Culture allocated over half a million euros to 21 Finnish cultural communities for cultural cooperation with Ukrainians. Other programmes are not specifically focused on one country, such as PAUSE and *l'Atelier des artistes en exil* (the Artists in Exile Workshop) in France and the Shifting Places programme in Switzerland.

It is important to underline that in contexts of war, conflict and political instability, discourses around mobility often shift from being associated with *freedom of movement* to being framed in terms of *relocation*, a concept more closely tied to human rights frameworks. This shift reflects not only changes in the working conditions of artists in countries and regions affected by conflict and political or humanitarian instability, but also a broader shift in the global system's relationship with artists from these areas.

The implications of this shift, particularly in relation to human rights frameworks and the support systems needed to protect artists and cultural professionals in emergency contexts, are explored further in Chapter 10 of this report.

Although rare, some initiatives illustrate approaches to mobility opportunities for displaced artists that prioritize long-term artistic development and professional integration, rather than addressing their situation solely through a humanitarian lens. In addition to the Zad: Miles of Connection programme mentioned previously, there is also Rawabet, an open call for performing artists-in-residence organized by MASAHAT and Ettijahat (Transversal Project, 2025). Both organizations were founded and are led by Arab artists and cultural professionals, and both operate from exile. The open call addresses performing artists from the Arab States region who arrived in European territories after 2015, inviting them to, according to the announcement text, 'develop and create works in collaboration with European and non-European counterparts and audiences, in order to create a more diverse cultural scene and combat stereotypes and discrimination'.

South-South mobility

Specific facts and figures on South-South mobility are not always readily available; however, it is noteworthy that among the Parties to the 2005 Convention, developing countries are more likely than developed countries to report public funds specifically supporting the mobility of artists from other developing countries, including through North-South-South and South-South cooperation (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6

Proportion of Parties reporting public funds specifically supporting the mobility of artists and other cultural professionals from or between developing countries, including North-South-South and South-South cooperation, by developing and developed countries

Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

South-South mobility programmes are being implemented or tested by Parties through approaches including:

- Building on experience and partnerships, as illustrated by the Ibero-American cultural cooperation programmes (Iberescena, Ibermúsicas, etc.) and the Transcultura programme.[4]
- Signing bilateral or multilateral agreements that may pave the way for more exchange and mobility support. For example, Colombia adopted a strategy focusing on Africa, which involved the signing of memorandums of understanding to strengthen cultural, political, social, economic and commercial relations with several countries, including Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. Such cultural diplomacy efforts can result in tangible outcomes. In 2023, the Colombian delegation visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the Maloba International Festival of Theatre, Dance and Circus, a cultural exchange event that supported the participation of the Afro-Colombian artistic dance group Sankofa Danzafro. The visit was organized by Colombia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Pan-African Council (Pan-African Council, 2023).

Some recent programmes, coordinated either by governments through external funds or by civil society organizations, address lack of funding, (gender) representation and regional connectivity:

- In 2023, the Indian Ocean Commission, with support from the French Development Agency, launched the AléVini mobility fund as part of a larger programme focused on cultural and creative industries. AléVini connects the arts and cultural sectors of Comoros, La Réunion (France), Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and Seychelles. Running until 2026, the programme places special emphasis on mobility for women artists. It strengthens regional collaboration and contributes to local economic development by supporting cultural ecosystems and promoting inter-island artistic exchange. Programme managers report that 48% of beneficiaries in the first two cohorts were women – a significant achievement that could encourage further participation from this group (Baltà Portolés, 2024).

4. 'Transcultura: Integrating Cuba, the Caribbean and the European Union through Culture and Creativity' is a UNESCO regional cooperation programme implemented between 2020 and 2025 in 17 Caribbean states, with funding from the European Union. The programme fostered cultural mobility and exchange among young cultural professionals within the Caribbean region, and also between the Caribbean and Europe.

- Certain programmes dedicated to South-South mobility also experiment with new forms of mobility. The South-South Arts Fellowship by Living Arts International, connecting cultural sectors across Africa and Asia, advocates for flexible models: open-ended travel grants, process-based approaches, informal exchanges, support for creative professionals (not only artists) and 'curated mobilities' – programmes designed to approach mobility as a thoughtful, relational process that reflects on how guests and hosts relate to one another and how participants engage with cultural differences. These ideas resonate with Orbitals, a curated mobility programme by Mophradat, which brings together four curators or arts researchers from or based in the Arab world. They travel to international locations in the Global South to explore new artistic contexts and share their learning with their communities. Past editions took place in Mexico City (2018), Delhi and Chandigarh (2019), São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (2022), and Dakar (2023).

Beyond these initiatives, South-South mobility continues to face challenges at multiple levels:

- Key funding schemes have been discontinued or paused, particularly those initiated by civil society organizations, such as Art Moves Africa, the Ticket Fund of the Prince Claus Fund, which covers artists' travel costs, and the Mobility First! programme of the Asia-Europe Foundation, which supported connections among artists across Asian countries.
- Some mobility funding schemes focusing on South-South mobility are facing budget limitations, due to the high level of demands. For example, the recently established Caribbean Cultural Fund received 470 applications in its first round but was only able to award 16 grants (Franco, 2024). Many such initiatives have been affected by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting reductions in funding.
- Multilayered structural barriers continue to impede South-South mobility, including insufficient regional connectivity, the high cost of flights and visa-related challenges, for instance those faced by nationals of Indian Ocean islands. Airfares between neighbouring countries are sometimes disproportionately high; for example, Caribbean countries face some of the highest ticket prices in the world (Arnell, 2024).

Finally, there is insufficient support for South-South mobility related to contemporary art practices, and particularly those devised by grassroot initiatives, as attested by the example of the Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (Box 5.5).

Box 5.5 • Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting

The Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM) is a platform and industry gathering dedicated to the performing arts in South-East Asia, organized by and for grassroots practitioners.

It is important to note that most South-East Asian countries operate within ecosystems and working conditions that differ from those in the Global North; that is, they are often characterized by limited or non-existent arts infrastructure and persistent political instability.

The 2025 edition of BIPAM recorded a significant increase in attendance from South-East Asia, as well as from many other countries and regions that had not attended previous editions. This reflects the meeting's role as an international gathering place with a strong focus on South-East Asian performing arts.

BIPAM typically relies on project-based funding from arts and cultural organizations in Thailand. In addition to core partners like the Ministry of Culture and the Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture, it also seeks funds from other government bodies that understand and support its mission, such as the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. The organization seeks further support from international cultural institutes (such as the Japan Foundation) and, on occasion, from corporate partners with an interest in contemporary arts.

In relation to key policy recommendations, one of the biggest barriers holding back BIPAM from advancing a policy benefiting the sector is the limited recognition of the arts at the national level as a means of improving citizens' livelihoods beyond economic considerations. This has led to certain commercialized artforms being prioritized over others. To increase South-South mobility and diplomacy, BIPAM considers that organizations should serve as their own benchmarks and reference points, rather than relying on measures from the Global North.

Source: Interview with Sasapin Siriwanij, Artistic Director of BIPAM, 6 July 2025

Box 5.6 • Caribbean Culture Fund

This project pilots the establishment of a fund that supports the arts of the Caribbean, fostering inclusion, innovation and sustainability. The fund is incubated by *Le centre d'art*, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, with funding from Open Society Foundations and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The fund addresses specific barriers identified in the Caribbean region, including the need for a better understanding of the funding landscape and available collaboration grants, as well as the development of grant-writing skills. It seeks to raise awareness of existing grant opportunities and to support applicants in securing funding.

The second round of calls included collaboration grants within the region, allocating US$250,000 from a total funding envelope of US$400,000. The funded projects explore various topics, including environmental and cultural themes, carnival, performance and traditional arts, as well as themes of gender, diversity, identity, migration, belonging and connection.

'The synergies between the projects motivate us to create more opportunities for Caribbean creatives to come together and collaborate', says Kellie Magnus, Executive Director. 'We're looking forward to continuing to fund more opportunities for collaboration as well as the residences and fellowships that we'll be supporting in Call 3.'

Source: Caribbean Culture Fund, 2025

Carbon footprint and green travels: a new hindrance to cultural mobility?

Issues related to cross-border mobility are also linked to unequal access to resources resulting from geographical circumstances and limited connectivity, including the lack of transportation infrastructure. This matter has come under increased scrutiny, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the lack of context-specific approaches to sustainable mobility could exacerbate existing disparities.

As highlighted in the final publication of the first phase of the European Union-funded programme Halaqat, which explored the relation between Europe and the Arab world, 'While participants recognise the devastating effects of air travels on the environment, they are concerned that their carbon footprint will be used as an excuse to put more hindrances on their already challenged international mobility' (Bozar and Goethe-Institut, 2022).

Particularly since the pandemic, and even though numerous projects addressing the issue have already been developed, the arts and cultural sector has become increasingly engaged in acting more responsibly regarding climate change issues. However, in more privileged contexts, this engagement often focuses narrowly on the carbon footprint of transportation, without adequately considering the specific working contexts and the essential need for mobility and international connections of many artists. Though climate change and environmental sustainability are key topics that arose in calls for cultural mobility, few have translated these priorities into concrete changes in funding frameworks. As noted, '13.8% of calls launched in 2024 were labelled as relating thematically to environment and sustainability, although additional financial support for green forms of travel remain rare' (On the Move, 2025a).

One of the only exceptions since 2023 is the European Union's Culture Moves Europe programme that provides a 'green top up' or higher financial support for artists and cultural professionals who use sustainable means of transportation for their mobility.

It seems therefore necessary to ensure that climate action in the arts does not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities. A holistic approach, aligned with the concept of climate justice as defined by UNESCO, must be taken into consideration: one that addresses the underlying social, political and economic drivers of the climate crisis, ensures a fair allocation of the burdens and impacts of climate change and seeks to amend historical inequities (UNESCO, 2024).

The hybridity of formats and the (non)choice of digital mobility options

Similarly to the question of environmental sustainability, the digital question brings its own set of contradictions if not contextualized. The COVID-19 pandemic brought global mobility to a halt for the first time in decades, creating a significant disruption. As a result, mobility was reconsidered, not only in the wake of the pandemic but also as a response to the ecological crisis and rapid technological development.

While online was the most common format for meetings in 2021 (On the Move, 2022), in-person mobility opportunities have since regained prominence and now represent the majority. In 2024, more than 80% of the 643 analysed paid mobility opportunities were conducted exclusively in person, more than 14% combined physical and online participation (compared to 10.5% in 2023), and only 4.3% were exclusively online (compared with 29.4% in 2021) (On the Move, 2025a).

A common format is to combine a longer online or remote working period with a shorter and more intense schedule of in-person activities. Funds such as Concerts SA in South Africa provide an interesting model of hybridity; the group encourages international cooperation while still supporting live music through its Digital Mobility Fund, created in 2020 during the pandemic.

Hybrid formats also reflect a growing willingness to test new forms of international collaboration. One example is the Four Nations International Fund set up in 2021 by Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International, and Creative Scotland. Covering an average of 25 eligible countries per year, the fund supports projects with an international dimension, including in-person, digital and hybrid activities such as 'exchanges, residencies, partnership development, co-creation and networking, with priority given to applications experimenting with innovative models of international collaboration'.

If hybrid formats can be seen as a way of overcoming challenges of access (including for people with visa issues or disability restrictions) and as a way of limiting environmental impact, they should be, however, regarded as a complementary option, not as a new model imposed for budgetary reasons.

The shift towards digital engagement, while offering certain advantages, can also exacerbate existing disparities by reducing opportunities for artists from developing countries to present their work in person, to connect to new audiences and to develop potential future partnerships. If digital formats become the norm, it may limit their access to international markets, hinder career development and undermine the fair circulation of diverse cultural expressions. In effect, digital substitution risks creating a parallel (online) world accessible primarily to those with sufficient technical infrastructure and capacity, contradicting the 2005 Convention's aim of promoting equitable access and a balanced flow of cultural goods and services.

Depending on the context, these dynamics can create additional impediments to international cultural mobility and have an impact on the well-being and mental health of artists and cultural professionals. It is essential to address these stress factors in relation to the types of obstacles faced (such as visas, lack of funding, or parenting responsibilities) and in connection with the concerned communities of artists and cultural professionals (including at-risk and relocated artists, artists with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ artists and Indigenous artists).

Towards improved integration of societal and transversal issues

The 2005 Convention's Monitoring Framework and the Quadrennial Periodic Reports do not directly address topics that illustrate wider cultural dynamics and intersectoral approaches to cultural mobility, such as those related to well-being and mental health discussed in the previous section. Although limited in number, some of the initiatives identified in the periodic reports describe efforts to adapt to the evolving realities and challenges faced by artists and cultural professionals, particularly with regard to societal, environmental and personal issues.

For instance, the Cultural Exchange Programme of the Ministry of Culture in Brazil can be highlighted as a cross-sectoral approach to supporting mobility. Launched in 2023, its aim is to promote cultural exchange and activities that link cultural production with broader societal themes including health, human rights, science, technology, environment, racial equality, social inclusion, territories and work, among others.

Another example comes from Chile, where an annual call for arts projects to be presented abroad, managed by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2023, is one of the main instruments for advancing the internationalization of cultural and artistic practices. For the 2024 open call, new milestones were incorporated, including awarding five extra points to projects promoting the internationalization of Chilean artists that address gender and environmental themes, to serve as a tie breaker among proposals with equal scores. Regarding gender and parenting issues, a relevant initiative is that of the Swiss foundation Pro Helvetia (Box 5.7).

Box 5.7 • Targeted support for artist-parents

The Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia offers targeted support for artist-parents in research or residency periods. Artists with children under the age of 18 who participate in residencies or research trips organized by the Arts Council may apply for additional financial support of up to US$1,107 per month of travel. This contribution can help finance expenses such as childcare either at the destination or at home, travel costs for children and a caregiver, and extra accommodation costs related to family needs. In 2022, 45 artists with children benefited from this measure. Feedback has been generally positive, with artists valuing the flexibility of financial support adapted to the specific needs of each family.

Source: Switzerland QPR, 2024

The mobility of artists and cultural professionals with disabilities was not addressed directly in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, but some initiatives can be highlighted, such as the hybrid '2x2 Residency creative exchange for disabled artists' in China and the United Kingdom, a pilot initiative of the British Council China. It is also worth highlighting the 'Europe Beyond Access' project, which is co-funded by the European Union and works to provide tailor-made support as well as professional recognition for disabled performing artists and cultural professionals in Europe.

Regional disparities within a country, such as between urban and rural areas or between capital cities and peripheral regions, can create internal barriers to mobility for artists or cultural professionals within their country. These disparities often stem from unequal access to cultural infrastructure and to artistic opportunities outside major urban centres. In some contexts, in-border mobility serves as an essential pathway for artists to access international platforms, especially in geographically dispersed island nations. As such, in-border mobility merits further policy attention as a complementary measure to international mobility frameworks, rather than as a substitute. When understood as paving the way towards international mobility, in-border mobility can be a powerful mechanism for addressing power imbalances and ensuring greater diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, political and cultural realities, aesthetics, and access to networks, resources and platforms in the international mobility ecosystem.

In exploring the shifting borders of mobility, this section proposes an approach to understanding the evolving global characteristics of mobility that accounts for regional and contextual conditions. Reconsidering approaches to mobility in the context of global crises, while avoiding exacerbating inequalities, is essential. In this regard, this section has sought to illustrate the growing emphasis on ethical and sustainable mobility, questioning who moves, under what conditions, for which reasons, and whose voices are amplified in these transnational cultural exchanges. These perspectives highlight mobility not just as a means of artistic circulation, but also as a framework for solidarity and critical engagement with power structures within the arts.

CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to demonstrate that the borders of cultural mobility have shifted in terms of their objectives, patterns and formats. It unpacked current trends with regards to inward and outward mobility, remaining and growing challenges particularly on visas, as well as the consistent role of civil society organizations to tackle inequalities of access. It also attempted to endorse the unending transformation of the sector through balancing a global understanding with local contextualization while adopting a multi-faceted approach to address questions related to forced displacement in the arts and cultural sector; South-South, regional and in-border mobility; environmental sustainability; digital mobility; and the connections of these dimensions to mental health and well-being. If cultural mobility is to remain part of the professional trajectory of artists and cultural professionals, it must also reflect the multifaceted motivations and needs in an era of polycrisis, where wars, conflicts and political instability are increasingly shaping the world. If cultural mobility is to address inequalities in terms of access to funding, resources and contexts, and avoid exacerbating existing barriers, such considerations must be placed at the centre of policy and organizational narratives.

Cultural mobility has ultimately been reshaped by shifts in the professional and conceptual understanding of what artistic and cultural mobility entails. Over the past two decades and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, mobility has evolved from being seen primarily as the physical movement of artists and cultural professionals across borders to a more complex and multidimensional practice and professional trajectory. Today, mobility is increasingly understood as a process of knowledge exchange, co-creation, and network building that extends beyond geographical movement.

Proposal for an updated definition of cultural mobility

'Cultural mobility is a central part of the professional development of artists and cultural professionals of all genders, abilities, socio-political contexts and professional experiences. This involves temporary cross-border movement for educational, capacity-building, networking or working purposes, which can be supported online and/or in person. Cultural mobility can be also understood as a must for artists and cultural professionals due to reasons such as war, politics, the economy or environmental issues in their country of residence.

To answer these multifaceted approaches to mobility, those involved in supporting it, including public and private funding bodies, policy makers and independent organizations, should be more aware of these different situations in order to adapt funding schemes and support mechanisms for mobility. This would ensure that recurring issues such as administrative and funding problems, as well as more recent considerations such as environmental and digital issues, forced mobilities and mental health issues, are taken into account and seen as opportunities to reinvent fairer cultural mobility patterns, based on values such as care, hospitality and solidarity'.

Based on this definition, it is recommended that these efforts should also align with the principles of the 2005 Convention, particularly the commitment to equitable access, diversity of cultural expressions and preferential treatment for artists and cultural professionals from developing countries. Recommendations have therefore been shaped to respond to these multiple dimensions of cultural mobility patterns, objectives and related needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for a shift in policy thinking and action to improve cultural mobility at multiple levels. This will require collectively reimagining cultural mobility practices, while addressing gaps in access as well as the paradoxes and complexities that characterize today's rapidly evolving cultural mobility patterns.

For Parties to the Convention

- Particularly those from developed countries, provide equal support for inward and outward mobility schemes in line with Article 16 on 'Preferential treatment for developing countries', ensuring that all programmes are based on transparent and open application guidelines.
- Particularly those from developed countries, facilitate access to their markets and mobility opportunities, especially by simplifying the visa process for short or temporary stays. Greater complementarity of actions between ministries of culture, interior affairs and foreign affairs should be encouraged.
- Engage more proactively in facilitating the visa process, while avoiding creating new constraints, such as restrictive definitions or lists of 'official' artists, that, even if intended to ease mobility, risk becoming tools of exclusion or censorship. At the same time, efforts should be strengthened to support temporary cross-border mobility through simplified and transparent procedures at points of departure, arrival and transit.
- Ensure the inclusion of civil society organizations in discussions and negotiations related to mobility, alongside public and private sector actors. This enables the development of cross-sectoral solutions that build on existing, proven support models (for example, independent mobility schemes) and information resources (for example, websites, guides and training toolkits) rather than creating new, potentially duplicative initiatives.
- Support civil society initiatives that facilitate access to information on cultural mobility (such as funding opportunities and administrative guidance) in synergy with international organizations, including UNESCO.
- Give greater consideration to the needs of at-risk and displaced artists and cultural professionals, both in emergency contexts and in relation to their long-term professional inclusion when relocated.
- Promote in-border and regional mobility to strengthen local and regional networks, as a complement to, and not a replacement for, cross-border mobility.
- Reinforce South-South mobility flows through adapted and consistent mechanisms, including exchange frameworks, funding opportunities and context-specific artistic platforms that account for geographical, transport-related, economic and cultural conditions in a comprehensive manner.
- Systematically integrate environmental sustainability, digital transformation, mental health and accessibility (including for artists with disabilities, at-risk artists and other vulnerable groups) in operational programmes supporting the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, particularly from developing countries. These dimensions should be embedded throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of mobility funds.
- Address the burdens faced by artists and cultural professionals, particularly those with different abilities, those who are at-risk or displaced, artist-parents, and members of less visible communities, including Indigenous artists.

For civil society organizations

- Proactively participate in policy discussions and negotiations with policy makers and funders at all levels of governance (international, national, regional and local).
- Strive to raise the visibility of initiatives that could be replicated or scaled up with additional funding at the national or cross-border level, including independent mobility funding schemes and organizations providing information on administrative matters, such as Mobility Information Points.
- Be involved in implementing the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Reflection Group on the implementation of Article 16 on 'Preferential treatment for developing countries'. Their involvement is particularly important for improving access to information on funding and administrative procedures, as well as in addressing ethical considerations related to the movement of people from developing to developed countries.

For intergovernmental organizations, including UNESCO

- Update the UNESCO monitoring mechanisms, including the Monitoring Framework and the Quadrennial Periodic Reporting of the 2005 Convention, with indicators that capture the evolving complexities of cultural mobility. This would enable more targeted data collection on mobility flows, policies and programmes adapted to specific contexts that address the needs of artists, including those related to green and digital mobilities, gender equality, accessibility and emergency situations.

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Chapter 6

Tracking cultural goods and services in global trade

André Gouws and Jen Snowball

KEY FINDINGS

- Since 2005, global trade in cultural goods has grown significantly, doubling in value to reach US$254.28 billion in 2023.
- Developing countries are increasing their share of cultural goods exports at a much faster pace than developed countries, growing at an average annual rate of 8.5% compared to 1.8% in developed countries. While China (19%) and India (6%) remain dominant, a wider group of developing economies are contributing to this growth.
- Upper-middle-income developing countries have increased their cultural goods exports and diversified their trade with both developed and developing partners. This has contributed to the geographical diversification of cultural goods trade and helped reduce the share of cultural trade occurring solely between developed countries from 2007 to 2023. By contrast, Least Developed Countries still represent only a very small share of global cultural goods trade.
- Global trade in cultural services has become increasingly significant in the post-COVID era, as many cultural goods dematerialize and move to digital formats. While developed countries still dominate the market, developing countries have strengthened their position, rising from 12% in 2010 to 20% in 2023.
- Developing countries are increasingly investing in e-commerce platforms and digital tools to promote their cultural goods and services, enhancing visibility, export potential and international reach.
- A greater share of Parties to the Convention report implementing export strategies or measures to support trade in cultural goods and services. This trend reflects increasing recognition of the creative economy as a driver of growth and development. For instance, 72% of the Parties reported export strategies related to the visual arts in 2021-2024, up from 48% in the previous period.
- Product development, Intellectual Property and branding represent the highest value-added stages of the value chain and offer strategic opportunities for capacity building and innovation.
- Between 2006 and 2022, US$648 billion was allocated globally to Aid for Trade, yet only a small share of this funding targeted cultural and creative industries. While some countries have reported culture-focused Aid for Trade initiatives and included cultural exports in their national economic development strategies, Aid for Trade remains an underutilized tool for promoting a more balanced flow of cultural goods and services.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

A balanced exchange of cultural goods and services is crucial for fostering:

Cultural diversity

Fairer and more inclusive global trade landscape

Local creative industries and economic development

PROGRESS

US$118 billion → US$254 billion
Global trade in cultural goods has doubled since the Convention's adoption

Upper-middle-income developing countries are the main drivers of more geographically diverse cultural goods markets

46%
of **global cultural goods exports** originate in **developing countries**

48% → 72%
of countries have **visual arts export strategies**, reflecting recognition of the sector's strategic value

CHALLENGES

Only 20%
of **global trade in cultural services** is held by developing countries

Out of US$648 billion
allocated globally to **Aid for Trade**, only a small share targeted cultural industries

Only 0.5%
of **foreign-direct-investment stock** is maintained by developing countries

Only 5%
of the **global market use of Intellectual Property** is held by developing countries, reflecting weak Intellectual Property frameworks and enforcement

EMERGING TRENDS

Cultural goods shift to digital formats, post COVID-19

- Digitization drives growth in **global cultural services trade**
- Developing countries invest in **e-commerce** and **digital tools** to promote cultural exports
- Digital shift poses **risks for environmental sustainability** and **cultural diversity**

Varied approaches to cultural export promotion

- Developed countries more often use **financial incentives** to attract investment and boost export readiness
- Developing countries leverage cultural tourism through **festivals and trade events** to showcase local culture

Effective export strategies require:

- Enabling **trade infrastructure and policies**
- Strong **coordination** between trade bodies, ministries and the private sector
- **Intellectual Property** protections
- **Financial support**

INTRODUCTION

The Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) recognizes the vital role of international trade, foreign direct investment, trade agreements and support measures in enabling a more balanced flow of cultural goods and services[1] across borders. Parties to the 2005 Convention commit to fostering more inclusive and diverse cultural exchanges through a range of measures. These include providing preferential treatment to developing countries for culture in trade agreements and development assistance, as well as in various bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements. Parties also monitor these flows through periodic reports to assess progress towards strengthening the diversity of cultural expressions in the global trade of cultural goods and services.

Over the past two decades, significant changes have reshaped the landscape in which the 2005 Convention operates. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered job losses and reduced investment in the creative sector. The structural deficiencies and vulnerabilities that characterized the sector prior to the crisis have been exacerbated, and the scale of their repercussions has grown substantially as a result of the pandemic. At the same time, the digital transformation of the cultural economy has also gained significant momentum. Nevertheless, recovery efforts revealed the sector's social value and resilience. They also led to a renewed focus on equity, inclusion and sustainable cultural cooperation. This chapter explores the post-pandemic flow of cultural goods and services and its implications for promoting diversity and accessibility in an increasingly interconnected world. For this analysis, cultural goods and services are examined as two distinct trade categories. This approach is aligned with international trade data collection and classification systems, which treat categories of goods and services separately.

Since the Convention's adoption, upper-middle-income developing countries[2] have made some progress by increasing their share of global trade in cultural goods and services and expanding their trading relationships to include both developed and developing partners. Yet global trade in cultural goods and services remains deeply unbalanced. In 2023, developing countries accounted for just over 20% of global trade in cultural services (UNCTAD, 2025a).

This low share highlights persistent structural inequalities in global cultural exchange and shows that the goal of achieving fair and balanced trade in cultural expressions is still far from being realized.

With the dematerialization of cultural goods, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, trade in cultural services has become an increasingly important part of overall trade in cultural goods and services. Reflecting this shift, the Quadrennial Periodic Reports indicate that developing countries are putting in place supportive policies and measures. Despite such good practice examples, developed nations that have better access to technology and infrastructure have a significant advantage in cultural services trade. Although developing countries are making progress in exporting digital cultural services, the hegemony of developed countries impedes the market reach of diverse expressions from emerging markets. This dynamic risks contributing to the homogenization of global cultural production and consumption.

The first part of this chapter examines the growth and diversification of trade in cultural goods and services, including examples of good practices. Since having capacity to produce cultural goods and services requires investment, the next section explores trends in foreign direct investment. This is followed by an analysis of the policies and measures promoting more balanced international trade, including preferential treatment initiatives aimed to improve access for cultural goods and services from developing countries to markets in developed countries.

GAUGING GROWTH AND DIVERSIFICATION OF CULTURAL GOODS TRADE

Over the past two decades, new technologies, rapid digitization and the rise of online platforms have significantly changed the way cultural goods and services are produced, distributed and consumed. Cultural goods are increasingly being 'dematerialized', with physical goods, such as books, CDs and DVDs, being replaced by digital formats like e-books, music streaming and online videos. Services like digital design, virtual or live-streamed cultural events and creation of online cultural content are becoming major drivers of cultural goods and services trade. The lines between cultural goods and services are increasingly blurred.

The analysis below is based on the distinct cultural domains defined by the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics.[3] Relevant domains include: cultural and natural heritage, visual arts and crafts (fine arts, photography),

1. The 2005 Convention states that 'cultural activities, goods and services' refer to those offerings that have a specific attribute, use or purpose, or embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have (Article 4.4).

2. The income levels of countries presented in this chapter are based on gross national income (GNI) per capita, as published by the World Bank in 2022. Income thresholds are based on those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Low-income countries: GNI per capita of less than US$1,135
- Lower-middle-income countries: GNI per capita between US$1,136 and US$4,465
- Upper-middle-income countries: GNI per capita between US$4,466 and US$13,845

According to these thresholds, countries are considered developing countries when their GNI per capita is below US$13,845.

3. An updated version of the 2009 Framework was published in 2025 (UIS, 2025) but was not available in time for inclusion in this chapter.

performance and celebration (festivals, fairs), books, information and press, audio-visual and interactive media (films, television, video games), and design and creative services. The analysis is also informed by administratively generated data from customs and excise authorities (goods) and data from balance of payments systems (services), also presented in the 2009 Framework (UIS, 2009).

Mapping the trade in cultural goods: momentum and market shifts

Since 2005, global trade in cultural goods has grown significantly, doubling in value to reach US$254.28 billion[4] by 2023, as shown in Figure 6.1. Growth has not been uniform: developed countries experienced average annual growth of 1.8%, while developing countries expanded at a significantly faster rate of 8.5%. Between 2019 and 2023, developing countries' share of global cultural exports increased from 42% to 46% (UNSD and World Bank, 2025).

4. UNESCO and United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) use different measurement frameworks for cultural goods trade with disparities in classifications, scope, granularity, methodologies, guidelines and the categorization of activities and products, and therefore have different numbers. The UNCTAD database shows the creative goods exports were valued at US$677 billion in 2023 (UNCTAD, 2025a). Unless otherwise indicated, the measurements refer to the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (UIS, 2009).

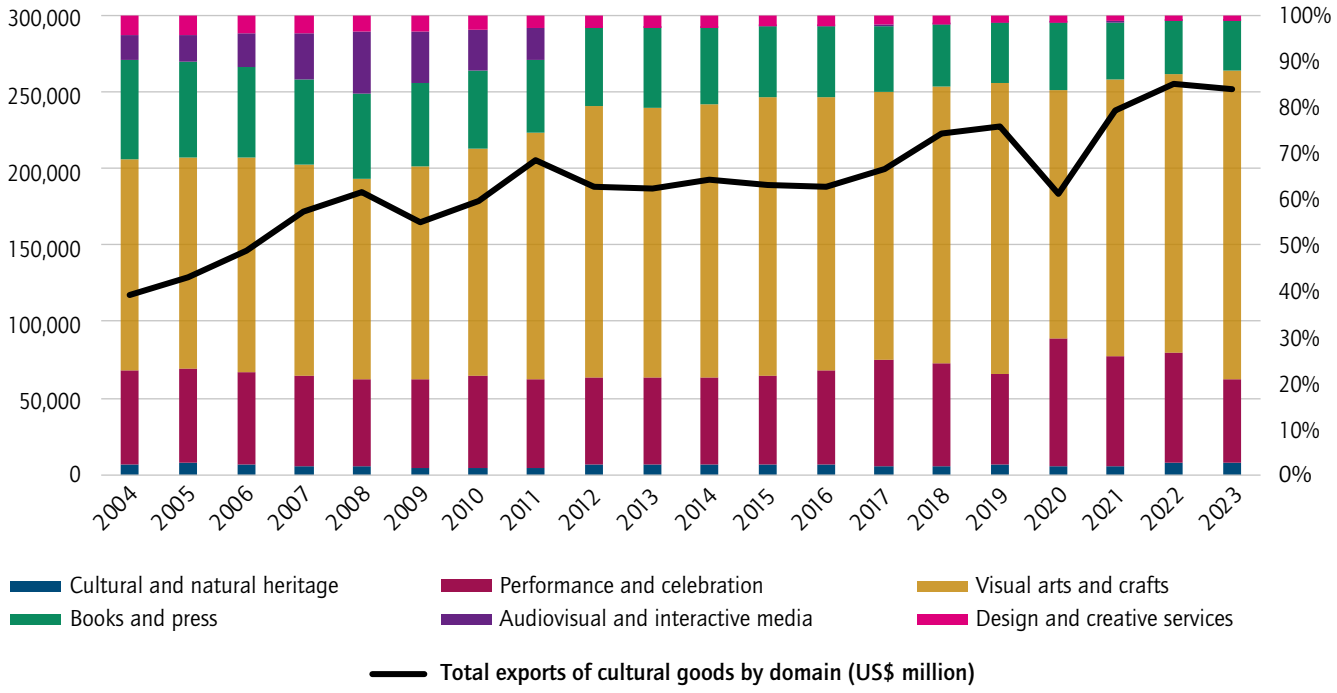
While China and India remain dominant, accounting for 19% and 6% of cultural goods exports respectively in 2023, a broader group of developing countries, including Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, also contributed to this growth.

Though the value of trade declined during the economic downturns of the 2008-2009 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, Figure 6.1 shows that cultural goods trade experienced a rapid rebound in 2010 and 2011 and then again in 2021 and 2022. This can partly be explained by pent-up demand as well as by the sale of stock created during the downturns.

'Visual arts and crafts' remained the most traded cultural domain, particularly for developing countries, where imports surged from US$53 billion in 2004 to US$167 billion in 2023. Other dynamic domains include 'performance and celebration', which peaked in 2022 at over US$60 billion, and 'cultural and natural heritage', where developing countries' exports to developed markets grew at 15% annually. Understandably, trade of goods in 'audiovisual and interactive media' contracted sharply, and goods exported from the 'design and creative services' domain remained stagnant. This is largely due to increasing dematerialization, where physical goods are replaced by virtual or digital formats, such as when streaming services replace DVDs or downloadable design files replace printed materials.

Figure 6.1

Exports of cultural goods by domain (2004-2023), based on UNESCO's 2009 Framework for Cultural Statistics



Source: ITC (2025b) / UIS (2009)

The evolving geography of cultural goods trade: income, inclusion and diversification

During the initial implementation period of the 2005 Convention, international trade was predominantly driven by developed countries, with the majority of exchanges occurring among these countries themselves. Cultural goods imports grew faster for developing than for developed countries. Developing countries' cultural goods imports grew 11.8% from 2004 to 2023. There was exceptional growth from 2020 to 2023 for both developing countries (27.7%) and developed countries (26.4%) (UNSD and World Bank, 2025).

To better understand these trade flows, it is useful to unbundle countries by income group. Figure 6.2 presents a snapshot of trade flows from the country groups shown on the left axis (exporters) to the country groups shown on the right axis (importers) for 2007 and 2023. Country groups are upper-middle-income developing countries; lower-middle-income developing countries including Least Developed Countries;[5] and developed countries (high-income countries).

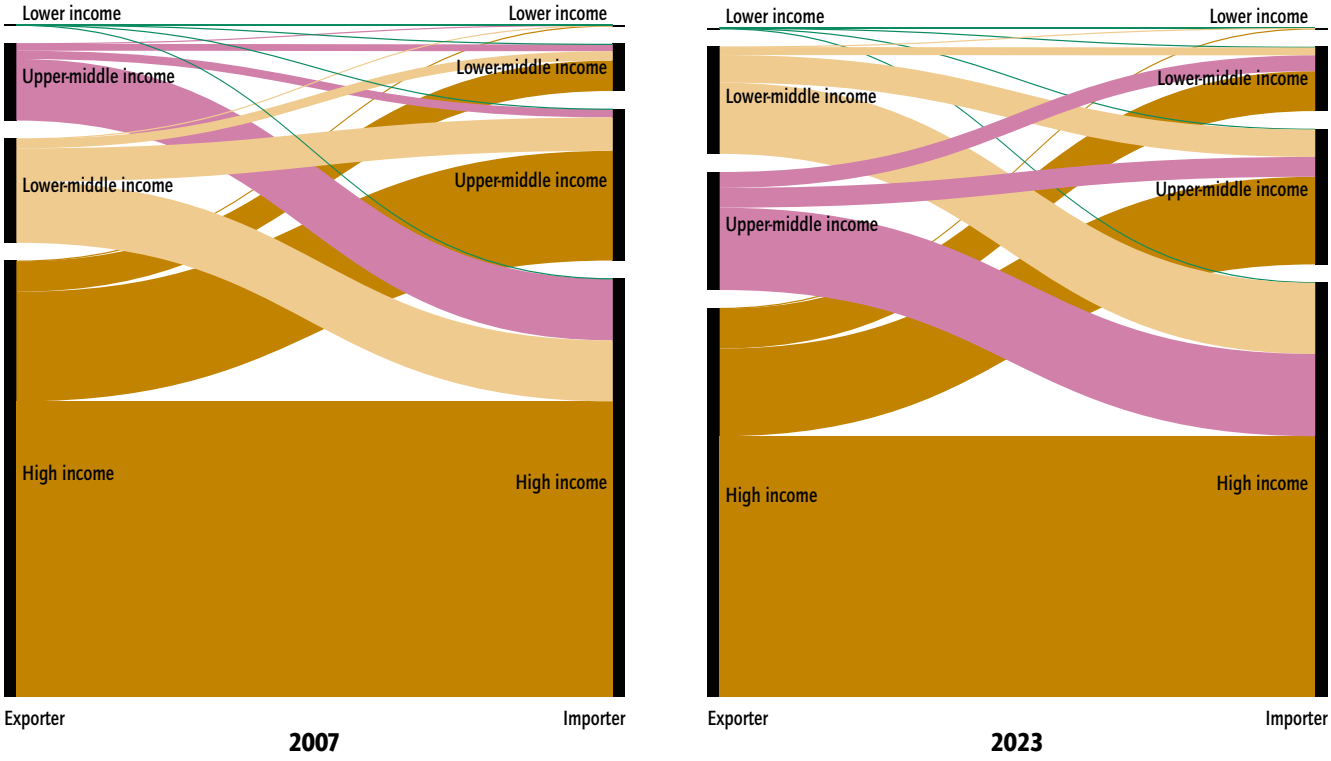
5. Also includes Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing Countries.

Comparing 2007 and 2023 (Figure 6.2), the proportion of cultural goods trade flows from developed to developed countries declined while diversifying to include more upper-middle-income developing country partners. Indeed, the upper-middle-income developing countries have made significant progress, both in increasing their proportion of global cultural goods exports and in diversifying trading partners, who now include more developed countries (particularly those who are Party to the 2005 Convention) as well as other developing countries. The growth of especially upper-middle-income developing countries' cultural goods exports to developed and other developing countries fostered the emergence of a dynamic cultural sector in developing countries.

However, Least Developed Countries (including Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing Countries) still account for only a very small part of cultural goods trade. As advocated in the 2005 Convention's Article 14 on cooperation for development, stronger international support is needed to enable these countries to participate more fully in global cultural goods trade. This support should come from high-capacity countries and requires comprehensive, long-term measures rather than isolated or ad hoc initiatives.

Figure 6.2

Global cultural goods trade flows, by income-level country groups in 2007 and 2023



Source: UNSD and World Bank (2025)

Such measures should be aimed to strengthen capacity, improve market access, expand digital infrastructure and provide financial support. Integrated strategic planning and sustained capacity development are essential to strengthen the global presence of cultural and creative industries from diverse countries.

At the same time, several developing countries have proactively taken steps to strengthen the export readiness of their cultural goods and services. For example, Senegal has invested in capacity development while launching targeted digital music export initiatives that integrate digital platforms. Belize's 2023 Quadrennial Periodic Report highlights efforts to strengthen its cultural industries through policy reform, capacity building and partnerships with the trade and tourism sectors, positioning the Orange Economy[6] as a national development priority. While initiatives led by the Institute of Creative Arts in Belize focus on entrepreneurship, training and intersectoral collaboration, a lack of comprehensive data remains a key challenge. Progress should be carefully monitored and evaluated.

In short, the analysis shows that among the Parties to the 2005 Convention, developing countries have strengthened their position in the global trade of cultural goods; however, this growth has been driven primarily by middle-income developing countries, while Least Developed Countries continue to face significant structural constraints. In 2007, Parties to the Convention accounted for approximately 75.7% of total cultural goods exports and 65.5% of imports. By 2023, their share of cultural goods exports had increased to around 79.5%, and their share of imports rose to 71%, reflecting enhanced overall engagement in the global cultural goods trade ecosystem. This growth suggests increasing alignment with the Convention's objectives of facilitating cultural exchange and improving the participation of developing countries in international cultural markets.

6. The 'orange economy' is a collective term for the cultural and creative industries, highlighting their economic contribution as well as their potential for sustainable development. It originated in Latin American policy discourse and gained global recognition with the publication of an Inter-American Development Bank publication, *The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity* (Buitrago Restrepo and Duque Márquez, 2013).

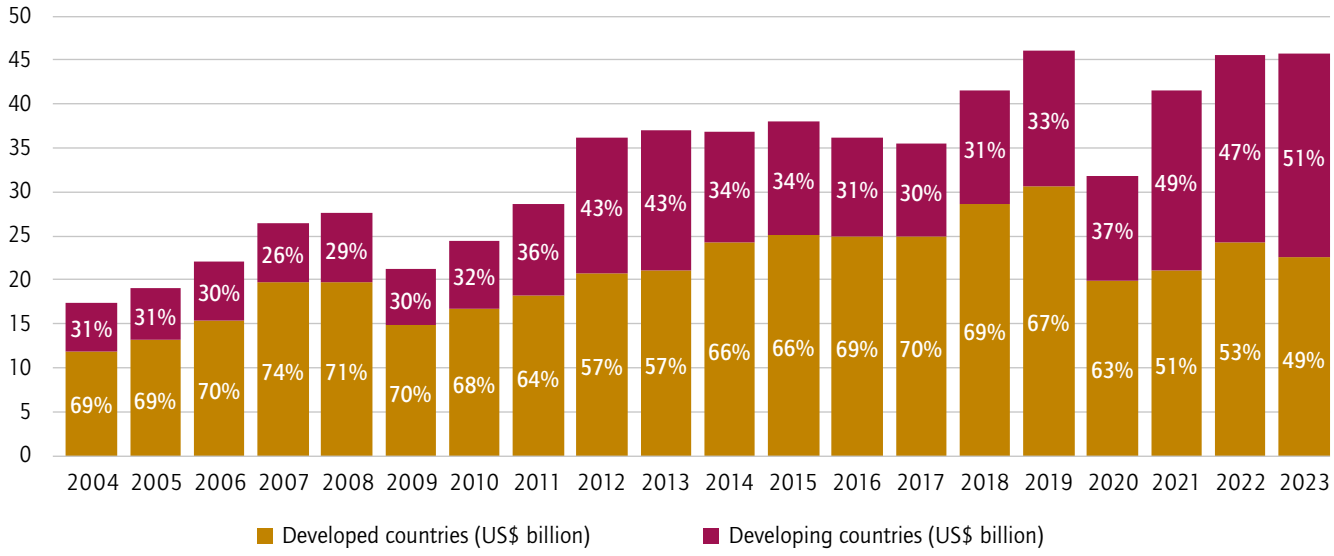
International markets for visual arts

Over the past two decades, the international trade of fine arts has experienced significant shifts influenced by economic trends, geopolitical events and evolving art collector preferences. Economic conditions play an important role in the global art market, with the global financial crisis of 2008 contributing to a temporary contraction, with reduced exports and imports. The COVID-19 pandemic had a similar impact in 2020 (Figure 6.3).

Despite a recent decline in sales globally, the international fine arts market remains large. In 2024, the United States of America was the largest global art market, generating US$4.3 billion in fine arts auction sales. This was followed by China at US$1.9 billion and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at US$1.4 billion (Artnet, 2025).

Figure 6.3

Exports of fine arts, by developing and developed countries (2004-2023)



Source: ITC (2025b)

Developing countries have increased their market share from just under a third of the world market in 2004 to over half in 2023. This growth was largely due to China, who became significant in both exports and imports driven by large investments in auction platforms, art fairs and international exhibitions. The African art market is also gaining increasing recognition. In 2024, Benin, Ethiopia and Tanzania debuted pavilions at the Venice Biennale, showcasing the works of artists like Tesfaye Urgessa and Romuald Hazoumè, highlighting the growing international presence of African art.

Furthermore, several Parties to the 2005 Convention implemented strategies to promote the export of fine arts, reflecting its growing relevance as a form of cultural goods trade. Certain interventions directly stimulate fine arts exports, such as the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism's inclusion of visual arts in its national export strategy; this strategy offers tax incentives and grants to support galleries, museums and participation in international exhibitions. Iceland now has a Visual Arts Policy for 2023-2030 that aims to increase international visibility and export-readiness of fine arts, including trade facilitation through cultural diplomacy and partnerships with embassies.

Other interventions are aimed at reducing administrative costs and promoting market access. Online art marketplaces and digital auctions have facilitated cross-border transactions, making it easier for collectors to acquire works from international artists. For example, Argentina has digitized the mandatory legal notification process for the import and export of artworks, which enables smoother international transactions for artists and galleries. In South Africa, several large fine arts auction houses have implemented live and hybrid online auctions, digital catalogues and timed online auctions to complement their in-person events, reaching international buyers more easily (Shaw, 2023).

REMAPPING CULTURAL SERVICES IN A GLOBAL DIGITAL CONTEXT

In the past quarter-century, advancing technologies have ushered in new business models that are affecting how goods and services, and particularly in the cultural sector, are being produced, distributed and consumed. Globalization, societal developments and a more entrepreneurial-oriented system of public funding are reinforcing changing business models (Loots et al., 2022). These phenomena are also impacting value chains, including in the cultural sector, which are becoming increasingly global.

Streaming culture: digitization, dematerialization and their implications for inclusion, equity and sustainable development

Digital trade is growing faster than 'non-digital' trade (González et al., 2023). The 2022 edition of the UNESCO *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report showed how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend towards the digitization of trade in cultural goods and services. Trade in physical goods in the 'audio-visual and interactive media' and in the 'design and creative services' domains has shifted almost entirely to digital trade. Music once distributed on CDs now streams through digital services; print newspapers are now available as digital editions; and photographs are shared and sold via stock platforms, digital galleries and social media. Digitization has lowered barriers to entry for creators by reducing production and distribution costs, while also opening up new avenues for monetization through global platforms, micro-payments and direct-to-consumer sales.

While technology increasingly allows buyers and sellers to place and receive orders from around the world, the lack of comprehensive and comparable time-series data on digital trade makes it difficult to quantify or even estimate the value of digitally ordered or delivered trade (Magdeleine and Maurer, 2016; IMF et al., 2023). Nevertheless, by using the International Monetary Fund's Extended Balance of Payments Services classifications (IMF, 2009) and estimates from the Balanced Trade in Services (BaTIS) database developed jointly by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Trade Organization (OECD and WTO, 2025), it is possible to infer the direction and size of services trade (OECD and WTO, 2021; OECD, 2023). Overall, BaTIS data indicate that cultural services trade is dominated by developed countries.

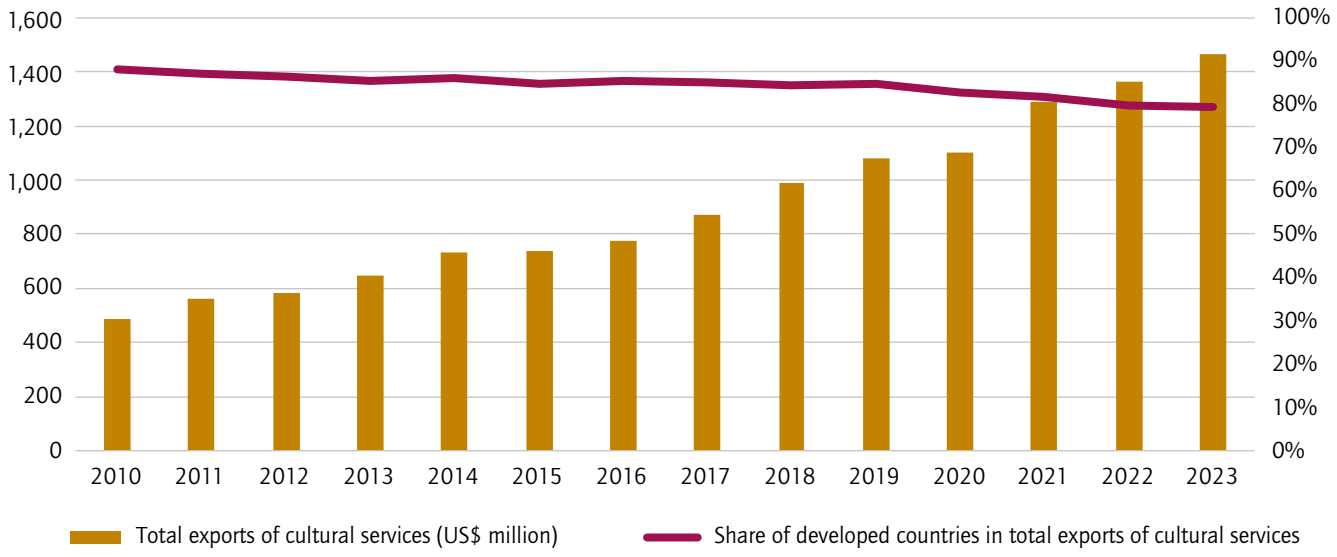
For 'international trade in creative services' (UNCTAD, 2025c),[7] Figure 6.4 shows that, although this category is still dominated by developed countries, who held an 80% share in 2023, the position of developing countries is improving and accounted for 20% of the global total service trade in this category in 2023, up from 12% in 2010.

OECD (2023) data show that, in the 'audio-visual and related services' trade category, developed countries have a distinct advantage, with a market share of 87.1%. Nevertheless, the gap is narrowing: developing countries have increased their trade in this category by 12.1% per year since 2020, while developed countries have grown at 6.4%.

7. The data presented estimate the creative services exports of selected groups of economies. The dataset is therefore 'experimental', as noted in UNCTAD (2025d).

Figure 6.4

Share of personal, cultural and recreational services trade exports, by developed countries (2010-2023)



Source: UNCTAD (2025c)

However, developing countries generally perform poorly in the 'use of Intellectual Property' services trade category, which includes payments for the use of copyrights, trademarks, patents and licensing fees related to cultural content such as music, films, books, software and broadcasting rights. It also covers royalties and licensing income generated through cross-border access to Intellectual Property, including digital streaming and distribution. In this category, developing countries hold less than 5% of the global market and have an annual growth rate of only 6.1%.

This shift towards dematerialization, especially through digitized cultural goods and services trade, has both positive and negative implications for environmentally sustainable development and cultural diversification.

On the positive side, digital trade reduces reliance on physical production and transportation of goods, decreasing carbon emissions associated with these activities, linking to Sustainable Development Goal 12 to enable more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Digital products can also broaden access to diverse cultural expressions, enabling creators from under-represented regions to reach global audiences, fostering cultural diversity and addressing Sustainable Development Goal 10 on reducing inequalities.

However, as further discussed in Chapter 8 on culture and sustainable development, the energy-intensive operations of data centres and digital networks which power online platforms, increase electricity consumption, contributing to carbon emissions and climate change (Goldman Sachs, 2024; IEA, 2025). Moreover, emerging creatives, especially in developing regions, face unfair compensation and exploitation on some platforms that now dominate the market, undermining economic sustainability (Sustainable Development Goal 8) and equitable development (Desrochers, 2024). Inequalities may also arise from the 'digital divide', which refers to the lack of infrastructure, skills and affordability in many developing countries that hinders creators from participating in digital cultural services trade (UNCTAD, 2024b). It is therefore imperative to strengthen international cooperation for capacity building and trade development, ensuring that under-represented countries are equipped with the necessary infrastructure, human capital and enabling policy frameworks to participate more fully in digital cultural services trade.

Changing regional shares in trade in audio-visual and related services

The 'audio-visual and related services' (AVRS) sector is one of the domains in which cultural goods trade has declined dramatically as markets have shifted from material goods to dematerialized digital products. Although services data for this category are not yet available for all countries, recent years appear to show interesting regional shifts in exports. The dominance of America (mainly North America) remains, with this region accounting for 47.09% of the value of global AVRS exports in 2022 (Table 6.1).

BOX 6.1 • The rise of Nigeria's creative economy

From 1980 until 1986, the Nigerian economy experienced a severe recession. Film production ceased, the music recording industry declined and cinemas closed. Ironically, this created space for the emergence of a new form of creative economy, such as the films produced by 'Nollywood'. The Nollywood business model was based on short production times, low budgets, and distribution via VHS tapes, sold informally in local markets. The emergence of digital technology subsequently opened up possibilities for much wider content distribution building on and expanding a 'paradigm shift towards entrepreneurial self-assertion in global cultural economies' (Faidi, 2024).

Nollywood produces an average of 2,500 films per year and is the second-largest global film producer (by volume). In 2023, the film and music-recording sectors contributed US$1.4 billion to Nigeria's gross domestic product (International Trade Administration, 2025). To compete internationally, however, the industry has had to professionalize and formalize, a shift that has been driven by trained creative professionals and funding through initiatives such as the Central Bank of Nigeria's Creative Industry Financing Initiative, established in 2018. Institutions such as the Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON) have also played an important role in industry development. COSON is a collective management organization that is authorized to license public use of musical works and sound recordings in Nigeria and collect royalties on behalf of copyright owners, ensuring that musicians and producers are remunerated for the use of their works. COSON is also engaged in public awareness campaigns, capacity building for rights holders, and enforcement activities including litigation and lobbying for stronger Intellectual Property enforcement.

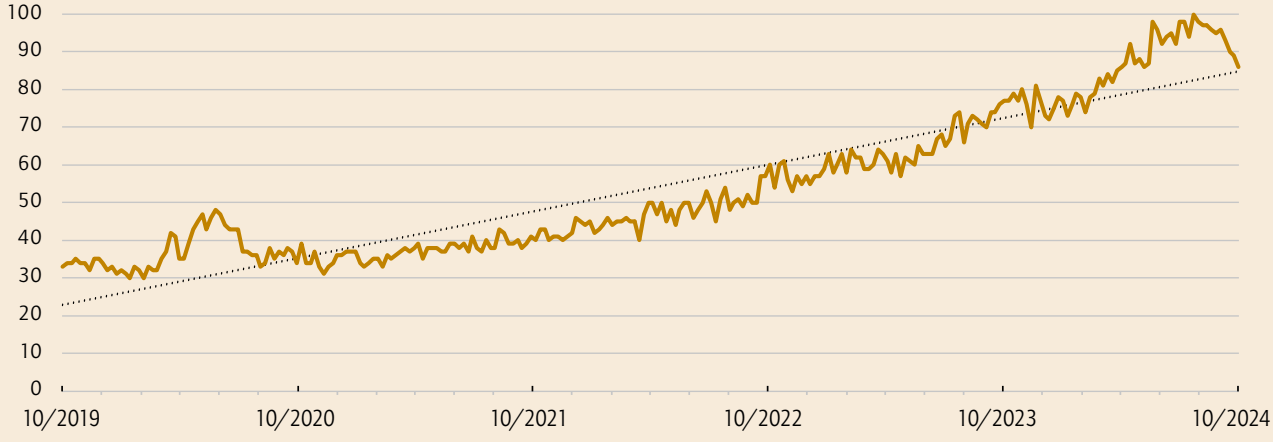
Nigerian exports are still dominated by primary products, such as mineral fuels and oils, but the creative economy is increasingly recognized as a future growth path that is more environmentally sustainable than fossil fuel extraction and mining. It is also likely that official international trade data underestimate the reach of Nollywood. Tools such as Google Trends, which capture informal distribution through platforms like YouTube where content can be accessed without subscription, show a significant increase in search interest for 'Nollywood' between 2019 and 2024 (Figure 6.5), which is sustained in the post-COVID period. While most YouTube searches for Nollywood come from Nigeria, they are closely followed by a variety of other African countries (including Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone – a combined market of more than 50 million people). Australia, Canada, India and the United States also show some penetration, suggesting potential for future formal trade in these countries.

However, while international platforms can help creators reach larger audiences, they also tend to capture a significant share of the value, meaning that less revenue reaches local creatives. To fully realize the financial potential of Nigeria's creative output, stronger production infrastructure and a sustained, well-structured system of support and legislation for the creative industries are essential.

Source: Faidi, 2024; International Trade Administration, 2025

Figure 6.5

YouTube searches for Nollywood movies worldwide (2019-2024)



Source: Google Trends

However, Asia's share of AVRS exports has risen dramatically (from 6.28% in 2018 to 20.70% in 2022, even without including data from China), and they had the fastest annual average growth rate between 2018 and 2022 (33.6%). African countries still account for a very small proportion of global AVRS exports, but the region's annual average growth rate between 2013 and 2017 was 22.09%, slowing to 3.16% between 2018 and 2022. Europe's share of AVRS exports fell from 39.16% in 2018 to 29.73% in 2022, also reflected in a fall in average annual growth rate from 26.52% between 2008 and 2012, to -7.45% between 2018 and 2022.

Table 6.1

Regional shares of audio-visual and related services exports in 2018 and 2022

	2018 (%)	**2022** (%)
Africa	1.07	1.26
America	51.75	47.09
Asia*	6.28	20.70
Europe	39.16	29.73
Oceania	1.74	1.22

*Excluding China

Source: ITC (2025b) / Authors' own analysis

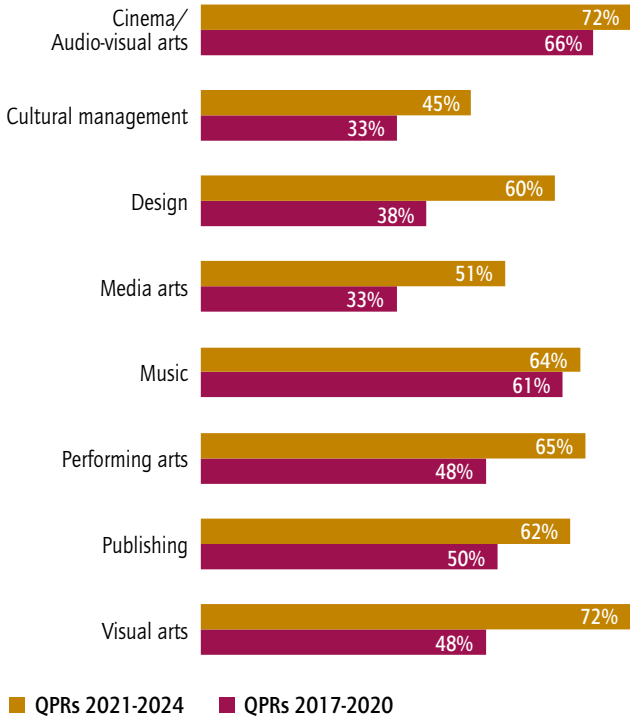
POLICIES AND MEASURES PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES

Export strategies

There has been an across-the-board increase in the percentage of Parties to the 2005 Convention who have put in place strategies or measures to support the distribution of cultural goods and services by domain between the 2017-2020 reporting period and the 2021-2024 period (Figure 6.6). Visual arts and film are the domains with the most Parties reporting export strategies, followed by performing arts and music. The pattern demonstrates many countries' growing recognition that cultural goods and services trade is an important component of growth and development, in addition to its value in cultural diplomacy and building intercultural understanding. As demonstrated by the Republic of Korea's example in Box 6.2, export strategies are most effective when they adopt an integrated approach, ensuring a high level of coordination between trade bodies and government ministries, comprehensive financial support mechanisms and measures to strengthen Intellectual Property protection.

Figure 6.6

Proportion of Parties reporting export strategies or measures to support the distribution of cultural goods and services, by cultural domain



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Parties to the 2005 Convention also report initiatives to develop e-commerce platforms that support the export potential of their cultural goods and services. For example, Armenia has implemented a 'unified automated system of e-culture' aimed at digitizing cultural expressions and making them accessible. This initiative supports the development of cultural goods and services for e-commerce platforms, enhancing visibility and export potential. The 'Brazil Games' initiative is an e-commerce-based programme promoting Brazilian video game exports. The programme provides visibility for Brazilian video game developers and studios by supporting their participation in major international game industry events and trade shows and accessing investment opportunities. Through the Brazil Games programme, eligible companies can also access the Export Qualification Program of the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency which supports companies in exporting their games or operating internationally (Brazilian Game Developers Association, 2025).

BOX 6.2 • The rise of K-culture: copyright and the export of cultural content

The 'Korean wave' or *Hallyu* refers to the phenomenal global success of the Republic of Korea's cultural and creative content industries, despite the language and cultural differences between the Republic of Korea and their international consumers. Recent examples of their success include the Oscar-winning film *Parasite* (2020) and the series *Squid Game* (2021-2025) released on Netflix. Music known as K-pop is also exported with great success to international markets, fuelled by online platforms and social media fan communities.

In 2022, the Republic of Korea's content-based industry exports, including film, music, broadcasting and gaming, were worth US$13.2 billion, surpassing that of other key export sectors such as secondary batteries and electric vehicles (Korea JoongAng Daily, 2024). Copyright exports grew at an average annual rate of 28% per year between 2010 and 2018, changing Korea's trade balance in this area from a deficit to a surplus from 2013 onwards (UNCTAD, 2024a).

A recent report, *K-content goes global: how government support and copyright policy fuelled the Republic of Korea's creative economy*, details the ways in which the Republic of Korea has designed and implemented a highly coordinated strategy to support the production and export of cultural content. The strategy has involved a high level of coordination between government departments, comprehensive financial support mechanisms and strong protection of copyright.

The Republic of Korea was strategic in putting in place copyright reforms before the establishment of trade agreements with the European Union and the United States, which were important for promoting cultural exports and protecting Korean content. The most recent Quadrennial Periodic Report describes the publication of an *Export Guide on Book Copyright* by the Republic of Korea Copyright Commission. The guide assists Korean copyright holders with knowledge about copyright licensing procedures, market entry strategies and case studies of successful exports. It is intended to support rights holders, publishers and authors in expanding their presence in global markets, particularly in translation and rights sales.

At the same time, copyright legislation is only effective if it is updated to take into account changes in the digital environment and can be enforced without great burden to creatives (Peukert and Windisch, 2025). The Republic of Korea authorized copyright management organizations, put in place a copyright authentication service and provided standardized copyright contracts with statutory damages to be paid in cases of copyright infringements. These measures shifted much of the burden of enforcement from creatives to those accused of copyright infringement and have proved a powerful way of growing exports.

Source: Republic of Korea QPR, 2022; Korea JoongAng Daily, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024a; Peukert and Windisch, 2025

Moving up the value chain

Declining transport costs and changes in technology have led to global supply chains becoming increasingly geographically fragmented. Components of goods may be produced and assembled in several different countries before they are sold to the final user. The 'smile curve' theory (Shih, 1996; Mudambi, 2008) examines the stages of production at which the most value is added. It suggests that the most value is added at the initial and final stages of the production process. Early stages involve product development and innovation (generating Intellectual Property), the middle stages involve assembly or production (sometimes outsourced to developing countries), and final stages involve branding and marketing. A recent study (Yanıkkaya et al., 2023) of 34 sectors in 40 countries confirms this pattern, which also applies to cultural and creative industries with intangible assets (innovation, Intellectual Property and branding) generating up to twice as much value as tangible capital (UNCTAD, 2022).

In this context, efforts to foster a more balanced and inclusive international environment may be supported by enabling developing countries to further valorize the Intellectual Property embedded in their cultural goods and services, including through the development of culturally grounded branding. Measures reported by several Parties to the 2005 Convention show this trend. For example, Ghana has implemented the 'Made-in-Ghana' policy, which aims to add value to and market its cultural goods and services both regionally and internationally. Such country-of-origin branding initiatives can serve as a seal of quality (in the case of Ghana its 'Made in Ghana' label is trademark protected and reserved only for products that meet an established criteria), while also promoting the specific cultural qualities or characteristics associated with their place of origin.

Another potential area for export growth is the African fashion and design sector. Rather than reinforcing Africa's role as only a market for goods produced in the Global North, or as a site of low-value clothing production for developed country brands, fashion designers on the continent have been developing their own brands. Sub-Saharan Africa's fashion market was valued at US$31 billion in 2020, and while this indicates significant domestic demand, the region continues to face a substantial trade deficit of approximately US$7.6 billion in these sectors, largely due to the export of raw fibres and heavy reliance on imported finished goods (UNESCO, 2023). Nonetheless, the sector holds strong potential for value addition and export growth through local processing, improved infrastructure and strategic brand development. African fashion brands are also gaining visibility and influence through high-profile fashion weeks held in 32 countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa.

Ethiopia's African Fashion Week, for example, aims to elevate the country's cultural and creative industries and promote the international visibility of African fashion by providing a global platform for designers, artisans and fashion entrepreneurs. Through runway shows, exhibitions and trade-focused events, it facilitates market access and trade promotion for local fashion products, especially traditional textiles and contemporary design innovations. The event serves as a trade catalyst, attracting international buyers, fostering business-to-business linkages and enhancing the competitiveness of the Ethiopian fashion industry in global markets.

BOX 6.3 • Creative Jordan: leveraging public-private partnerships

The cultural and creative industries in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan represent a diverse and strategically significant sector, including design services, architecture, film, publishing, software development and artisanal crafts. These industries employ over 25,000 people, which is 3% of the national workforce, and are characterized by low barriers to entry, as well as growing integration with digital technologies. Nevertheless, the sector faces challenges, including fragmented support structures and limited access to international markets, due to weak Intellectual Property protection and testing facilities. Despite these constraints, the sector is prioritized in Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision for its potential to drive innovation, job creation and cultural branding (GIZ, 2024).

Creative Jordan is a public-private initiative that aims to strengthen the international positioning of the Jordanian fashion and design sectors by supporting cultural entrepreneurs in accessing international markets. Public partners include the Ministry of Culture, Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation and the Jordanian Association for Arts and Crafts; private sector partners include major trade centres and other private sector stakeholders.

This initiative provides technical training and mentorship to young designers in areas such as garment production, branding and export documentation. It supports the participation of Jordanian producers in international trade fairs and fashion exhibitions and in providing exposure to foreign buyers, thereby linking the domestic fashion ecosystem to global value chains (Jordan Strategy Forum, 2022).

By increasing cultural exports and raising the international profile of Jordanian fashion, Creative Jordan demonstrates how targeted cultural policy that involves both public and private sector stakeholders can successfully promote cultural exports and strengthen local industries.

Source: Jordan QPR, 2024; GIZ, 2024; Jordan Strategy Forum, 2022

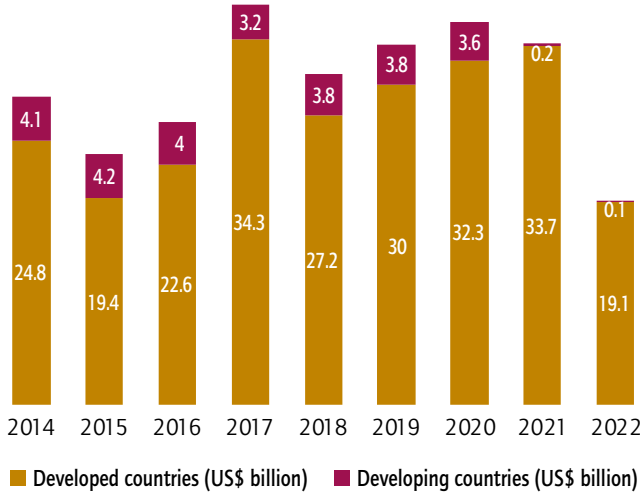
FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

Foreign direct investment (FDI) can be an important source of capital, especially for developing countries. Research has also shown that investment by foreign firms can transfer skills to the host country, increasing innovation, productivity and employment. However, these positive impacts are more likely where host firms have enough absorptive capacity (human capital and technology) to benefit from such spillovers. FDI can also be exploitative, with the potential to crowd out domestic investment and with foreign firms repatriating profits generated in the host country (Fazio et al., 2024).

Although there is currently little research or data relating specifically to FDI in the cultural sector, there is information on the stock of FDI in the arts, recreation and entertainment sector,[8] as reported by the Investment Map database (ITC, 2025a).[9] While FDI flows measure new investments, FDI stock shows the accumulated level of foreign investment, which is a more comprehensive picture of foreign capital embedded in an economy over time. Analysis of the Investment Map data reveals a significant imbalance in FDI stock between developed and developing countries from 2014 to 2022 (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7

Inward foreign-direct-investment stock in the arts, recreation and entertainment category, by developing and developed countries (2014-2022)



Source: ITC (2025a)

8. This sector, according to Investment Map, includes arts creation and performing arts activities; library, archives, museum and other cultural activities; gambling and betting activities; sports activities; and amusement and recreation activities.

9. FDI data often faces challenges such as inconsistent reporting standards, gaps in coverage and delays in updates. For developing countries, these issues are compounded by limited statistical infrastructure, leading to potential underestimation of FDI stock.

In developed countries, FDI stock started at US$24.8 billion in 2014, peaked at US$34.3 billion in 2017, and then declined sharply to US$19.1 billion by 2022. In contrast, developing countries maintained a much smaller FDI stock, beginning at US$4.1 billion in 2014 and then plummeting to US$0.1 billion in 2022. These figures highlight the outsized role of developed economies in this sector, consistently accounting for 85-99% of total FDI stock, while developing countries' share dwindled from 14.2% in 2014 to just 0.5% in 2022.

The disparity in FDI stock underscores broader economic dynamics. Developed countries, with their established markets, infrastructure and investor confidence, attract significantly more investment in cultural and entertainment industries, which often require substantial capital and stable returns. The sharp decline in 2022 for both groups may reflect global economic challenges, such as post-pandemic recovery or shifting investor priorities, though developed nations retained a robust base. Developing countries, however, faced a near collapse in FDI stock, particularly after 2020, suggesting heightened vulnerability to external shocks and a lack of sustained investment interest. Annual growth rates further illustrate this instability: while developed countries saw periods of positive growth (for example, 16.4% in 2016), developing countries experienced frequent and severe declines (for example, -20.7% in 2017 and -95.5% in 2021).

However, there is also some evidence that FDI in the sector can be stimulated by interest in cultural content. For example, a study on the growth of the Republic of Korea's investment in Indonesia's cultural content industry (Drianda et al., 2023) shows that inward FDI from Korea to Indonesia has shifted from a historical focus on heavy industry and manufacturing to include sectors such as broadcasting, television, film and music. The rising popularity of Korean film, television, music and other cultural content in Indonesia is associated with rising inward FDI from Korean companies who are interested in accessing Indonesian markets. Other factors, such as bilateral cooperation agreements relating to the creative economy, have also facilitated joint ventures and new investments in the sector.

In 2022, Bulgaria implemented a reimbursement scheme for foreign productions in the audio-visual sector to attract foreign film production, which is a form of FDI inflow. The scheme provides a cash rebate of up to 25% of eligible costs incurred in Bulgaria. It is managed by the National Film Center and aims to increase the country's competitiveness as a destination for international film and television productions. The measure supports cultural and economic development and enhances Bulgaria's profile in the global audio-visual market.

TRADE PROMOTION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT MEASURES

Strengthening export capacity in the cultural sector is central to growing and diversifying cultural trade. Reports from Parties highlight how developing countries, often with support from developed countries, are enhancing their ability to trade cultural goods and services. These efforts largely focus on improving internal systems, including both physical and digital trade infrastructure. For instance, an example of a physical infrastructure upgrade can be seen in the Gambia, which reports receiving support through the African Continental Free Trade Area to improve port facilities to facilitate export trade, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises including those in the cultural and creative industries. An example of digital infrastructure development is the initiative by Niue under the PACER Plus programme[10] to develop digital platforms for cultural products and provide e-commerce coaching to small businesses, including online galleries, craft portals and artist exchange programmes.

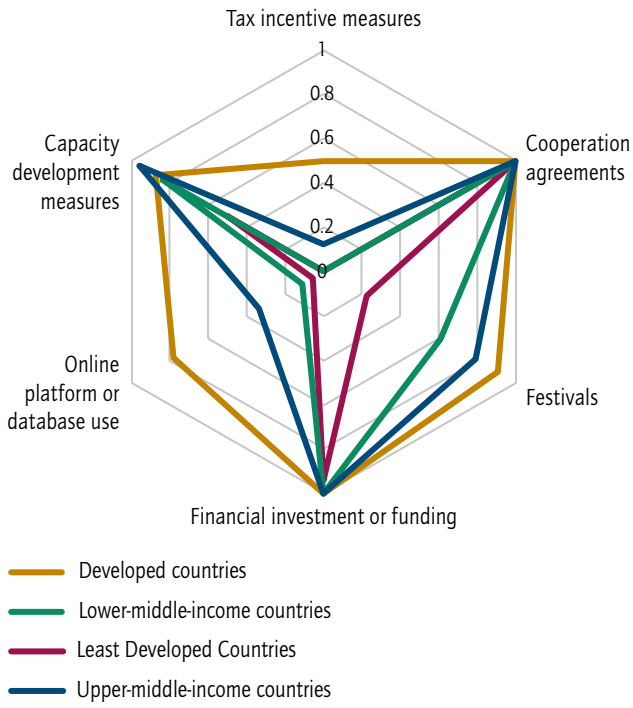
The radar chart in Figure 6.8 presents a comparative index of the frequency with which six types of trade-related cultural measures appeared in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, disaggregated by country income group. Each axis of the chart represents one of these categories, with values normalized from 0 to 1 based on the relative frequency of mentions in the reports. While almost all Parties reported some form of trade promotion and capacity development measures, supported by financial investment or funding, and cooperation agreements, progress in some areas is strongly differentiated by level of development. Developed countries were far more likely to have provided tax incentive measures for cultural exports than developing countries, and to have put in place online platforms and databases to support international cultural goods and services trade. In contrast, Least Developed Countries and lower-middle-income countries report these measures far less frequently than other groups.

Organizing festivals and trade events is a common strategy among developing countries to promote cultural exports; these events also act as important drivers of cultural tourism. By leveraging cultural assets such as cultural venues, festivals, arts and heritage to attract international visitors, countries can generate considerable value from cultural tourism as an export in its own right. Strengthening linkages between the creative and tourism sectors could provide a strategic approach for a country to boost its cultural exports on the international stage.

10. PACER Plus is a regional trade development agreement designed to support Pacific Island countries to participate in and benefit from regional and global trade. Ten countries are Parties to the agreement: Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Figure 6.8

Trade promotion and capacity development measures reported by Parties, by income-level country groups



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention) / Authors' own analysis

Examples from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports illustrate how festivals, cultural markets and trade shows are used to promote a country's cultural exports and attract cultural tourism. For instance, Jordan's Karama Human Rights Film Festival and East Africa's JAMAFEST offer platforms for cultural exchange, market access and tourism promotion. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire's Abidjan African Arts and Performance Market, a biennial performing arts event backed by the Economic Community of West African States, facilitates the export of performing arts by attracting international programmers and audiences while offering training and capacity building for artists, especially youth, across West Africa. Although less widespread, some developing countries are advancing digital trade promotion. The Digital Senegal 2025 strategy exemplifies this shift, supporting online platforms like Marodi TV, which has gained international distribution partnerships and plays a key role in the region's digital creative economy.

BOX 6.4 • Romania's cultural trade ecosystem: engagement with European Union mechanisms and global networks

Romania has a wide array of cultural and creative products that combine traditional heritage with contemporary innovation. Key sectors include crafts, music, cinema, fashion, publishing and video game development. Romania also produces modern creative goods and services in areas such as publishing and translation, architecture and design, and is a regional hub for video game development (RGDA, 2023).

Romania offers an example of a connected ecosystem to support cultural exports by systematically linking national initiatives with international opportunities. Through coordinated action among the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and intermediary institutions such as the Romanian Creative Europe Desk and other Romanian cultural institutes, Romania has established an infrastructure that supports artists and cultural professionals to engage in international trade of cultural goods and services in a sustained and strategic manner.

In addition, Romania's cultural institutes, operating under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are embedded in the European Union National Institutes for Culture network. These institutes extend Romania's cultural presence internationally and serve as nodes of global engagement. The system is further reinforced by support for participation in international fairs and festivals, where Romanian creators receive travel grants, translation subsidies and promotional assistance to present their work in global international cultural markets.

These mutually reinforcing layers of support (national support, European Union funding access, international presence and artist services) constitute a connected system that is effectively promoting the export of cultural products.

Source: Romania QPR, 2024; RGDA, 2023

Facilitating trade through preferential treatment

Article 16 of the 2005 Convention is binding for Parties to the Convention and calls on developed countries to grant preferential treatment to developing countries, particularly in the areas of trade in cultural goods and services. Such measures aim to facilitate cultural exchange and market access and intersect with other dimensions of international cultural cooperation, including the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, as explored in Chapter 5, and provisions embedded in bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements, examined in Chapter 7. These measures need to be non-reciprocal and benefit developing countries' production of cultural goods and services, as well as their creative professionals.

Analysis of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports reveals measures aligned with this obligation, including tariff exemptions and trade agreements enabling duty-free cultural exports. A notable example is the CARIFORUM-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in 2008, which references the 2005 Convention and facilitates EU-Caribbean collaboration through mobility, co-productions and capacity building. Although exports of cultural goods and services remain modest, over the years the Agreement has spurred European Union-funded initiatives such as Creative Caribbean, and institutional efforts like Jamaica's JAMPRO and Trinidad and Tobago's CreativeTT.

Broader programmes include the DEENTAL initiative, launched in 2017 by the *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée* (National Centre of Cinema) in France and expanded in 2020 through the DEENTAL-ACP programme, as a mechanism to strengthen international film co-production with countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. With financial support from the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, it improves the access to audio-visual works from these regions by facilitating their entry into European markets and their eligibility for European funding. The programme operates through two complementary funding streams: an automatic support mechanism known as the DEENTAL bonus, which rewards productions from these regions that already benefit from local or regional public funding, and a selective co-production fund called the IMAGE fund, which encourages partnerships with European producers. By bridging financing gaps and facilitating cross-regional collaboration, DEENTAL-ACP enhances the visibility, distribution potential and economic viability of cultural productions from developing countries, while also reinforcing local creative ecosystems and fostering long-term industry development.

Canada's Fund for Young Francophone Creatives supports emerging artists from sub-Saharan Africa and Haiti through residencies, professional development and mobility, without requiring reciprocity – meeting the Convention's definition of preferential treatment.

However, not all measures reported as preferential treatment by Parties in their Quadrennial Periodic Reports meet the requirements. This may be due to a lack of knowledge and understanding among Parties of preferential treatment in the strict sense of the Convention's Article 16. Some developing countries report engaging in reciprocal agreements with other developing countries. For example, under India's Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement, Mauritius and India exchanged market access in cultural services. Nigeria reported receiving scholarships and training support from partners like China and the Republic of Korea. While not strictly qualifying as preferential treatment under Article 16, such initiatives still foster cultural diversity and South-South cooperation.

Leveraging Aid for Trade

Aid for Trade,[11] a form of official development assistance, supports developing countries and Least Developed Countries in building trade capacity and infrastructure. Aid for Trade provides additional support so that countries can benefit from trade liberalization. It is aligned with both the 2005 Convention and Sustainable Development Goal 8 and its target 8.B, which specifically refers to Aid for Trade and calls on support for developing countries, especially Least Developed Countries, so they can build trade-related infrastructure, institutions and capacities, and benefit from global trade and economic integration.

While specific data on cultural sector funding are limited, the OECD and the World Trade Organization (2024) show that US$648 billion was allocated globally to Aid for Trade from 2006 to 2022. Few of the resulting projects targeted the cultural and creative industries. However, some countries reported prioritizing this area: Jamaica and Mali, for instance, include exports of cultural goods and services in their national economic development strategies. Parties to the Convention reported examples of culture-focused Aid for Trade, but this seems to be a somewhat underutilized instrument in the promotion of more balanced trade in cultural goods and services.

The Netherlands (Kingdom of the) reported, for example, the Cultural Participation Fund, which supports training workshops, business incubation for creative enterprises and grant mechanisms to support market-ready creative product programmes in the Caribbean and in several African countries.

Canada's Expert Deployment Mechanism provides trade-related technical assistance to countries such as Colombia, Paraguay and Viet Nam. Support includes legal guidance on trade agreement negotiation and small and medium-sized enterprise export readiness in the creative sector. The programme facilitates short-term deployments of Canadian experts to provide technical advice on cultural and creative industries within broader trade development programmes.

The OECD-World Trade Organization Aid for Trade monitoring report (2024) shows that both donor countries and recipients regard Aid for Trade as having the most impact in trade-facilitation measures, followed by trade policy and regulation. Notably, 81% of partner countries identified the expansion of the digital economy, which includes e-commerce, as a strategic priority in their national development planning. Additionally, 84% emphasized the continued need for Aid for Trade support to strengthen cross-sectoral e-commerce capacity. Given the increase in the trade of digital cultural goods and services, Aid for Trade could be used more extensively as a strategy to achieve more balanced trade in the future.

11. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/aid4trade_e.htm; https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/aid-for-trade.html.

CONCLUSION

Over the 20 years since the adoption of the 2005 Convention, trade in cultural goods and services has evolved. Although developed countries continue to dominate global markets, there has been some evidence of progress. Global trade is gradually diversifying, with a growing number of developing countries participating in the exchange of cultural goods and services, consistent with the aims of Article 1(c) of the Convention. However, persistent structural imbalances remain: in 2023, developing countries accounted for 20% of global trade in cultural services, underscoring how far the goal of balanced cultural exchange is from being achieved.

These patterns have been influenced by multiple factors, including the economic growth of trading partners, shifts in trade policy, international agreements and regulation, as well as the expansion of digital technologies. Digitalization, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed cultural trade. While this creates new opportunities, the technological advantage of developed countries continues to reinforce asymmetries in digital cultural services, limiting the global reach of diverse cultural expressions from emerging markets.

Trade flows, which were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, have recovered strongly. An analysis of trade data from 2007 to 2023 shows that upper-middle-income developing countries have expanded their share of global cultural goods trade, which aligns with the objectives of the 2005 Convention. However, lower-middle-income countries and Least Developed Countries (especially Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing Countries) remain under-represented, underscoring the need for targeted and comprehensive capacity building and market access support. This observation confirms that progress is uneven and that structural barriers persist. It is imperative to recognize the significance of enhancing the involvement of all developing countries in order to achieve a truly balanced and inclusive global trade system. This is not only a matter of economic policy but also a crucial aspect of safeguarding and diversifying cultural goods and services.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) patterns further reflect these disparities: developed economies accounted for 85-99% of global FDI stock in the arts, recreation and entertainment sector between 2014 and 2022, while developing countries experienced a near collapse after 2020.

Global trade in cultural services has become increasingly important in the post-COVID era as many cultural goods have moved to digital formats (UNCTAD, 2024b). While developing countries are increasingly investing in e-commerce platforms and systems to help promote cultural goods and services exports, their participation in digital trade continues to be hampered by persistent digital divides, unfair remuneration for emerging creators and high demands linked to data infrastructures. Strengthening the promotion and regulation of digital cultural services trade as well as leveraging Intellectual Property to move up the value chain are important strategies for protecting cultural diversity and promoting more balanced trade flows.

Encouragingly, a much higher percentage of Parties to the Convention reported having export strategies or measures in place to support trade in cultural goods and services during 2021-2024 than in 2017-2020. However, developing countries need to invoke the 2005 Convention more frequently when negotiating bilateral and multinational trade agreements, especially considering the increasing importance of digital services trade.

A key part of tracking the flow of cultural goods and services will be the improvement of data collection, and progress is being made in this area. Internationally comparable data are important and are governed by the United Nations' System of National Accounts. Building on this, the *Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade* (IMF et al., 2023) differentiates between four modes of digital trade, including digitally ordered and digitally delivered trade. The framework introduced by the *Handbook* will allow for much better measurement of many aspects of cultural goods and services trade, like music and film streaming, online games, digital art and illustration services, as well as physical cultural goods like books, crafts or fashion sold via e-commerce. UNCTAD's informal working group on data for services trade and development policies has also led to the creation of a web portal to serve as a knowledge-sharing hub on trade in services. Currently under development, this portal will provide policy makers and technical experts with data for policy making, as well as a repository showcasing innovative use of existing data, which will make future analysis of cultural services trade more informative and accurate. Most recently, the revised UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (UIS, 2025) introduces updated definitions and classifications for cultural goods and services, allowing for more accurate alignment with international trade and customs data. It enhances the ability to track cross-border flows by incorporating digital cultural products and improving the distinction between cultural and non-cultural components in trade statistics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For governments and public bodies

- Implement comprehensive export strategies that strengthen coordination among trade bodies, government ministries and the private sector; expand financial support mechanisms; improve trade infrastructure; reinforce Intellectual Property protection; and build the capacities of artists and cultural entrepreneurs to be competitive in international markets. These strategies should be fully integrated across institutions and tailored in particular to the needs of Least Developed Countries.
- Developed and developing countries should invoke Article 16 of the 2005 Convention more frequently when negotiating bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, especially given the increasing importance of digital services trade. Developed countries, in particular, are encouraged to grant preferential treatment to facilitate market access for cultural goods and services from developing countries and to support cultural cooperation through co-production agreements, knowledge sharing and capacity-building efforts that improve export readiness. Preferential treatment under Article 16 should be non-reciprocal and include measures such as tariff exemptions and simplified trade procedures.
- To achieve more inclusive and diversified global trade of cultural goods and services, the export capacity and readiness of Least Developed Countries should be strengthened through support for capacity development, market access and trade facilitation across both supply and demand dimensions. This support should be long-term and well-coordinated, with emphasis on improving digital infrastructure and comprehensive policies.
- To improve their trade position and competitiveness in global markets, developing countries' cultural and creative industries need to move up the value chain by creating distinctive cultural goods and services, supported by Intellectual Property protection and strategic country or regional branding initiatives.
- Developing countries should increase investment in trade infrastructure and place greater emphasis on promoting and regulating the trade of digital cultural services.
- Developing countries should consider attracting foreign direct investment in the cultural and creative sectors, ensuring complementary measures to strengthen local absorptive capacity, including human capital development and technology transfer.
- Developed countries should strengthen their Aid for Trade programmes for cultural and creative industries and e-commerce, and focus on helping Least Developed Countries build their cultural export capacity and trade infrastructure. Aid for Trade should more strongly prioritize digital trade capacity, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 8.B.

For governments and international organizations

- Promote international cooperation to support balanced and diversified trade in cultural goods and services. This includes helping under-represented countries build infrastructure, human capital and enabling policy frameworks. Cooperation should aim at reducing the digital divide and ensure inclusion in digital cultural services trade.
- Develop strategic partnerships with international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, United Nations Trade and Development and the World Intellectual Property Organization, as well as the private sector. These partnerships can pool together valuable expertise for developing comprehensive trade strategies and strengthening national trade capacities.
- Improve information systems that track and evaluate the international exchange of cultural goods and services and collect measurable and comprehensive data, including official development assistance and foreign direct investment data. Parties to the Convention are encouraged to use the revised UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics for data collection, to support reliable monitoring.
- Strengthen the export readiness of the creative sector by providing capacity building and e-commerce training. These programmes should equip artists and cultural entrepreneurs with skills to increase the marketability, visibility and competitiveness of their creative goods and services on the international market. Countries should also promote country-of-origin branding and leverage Intellectual Property to add value.
- Support South-South cooperation through, for example, reciprocal trade agreements, scholarships, training and the sharing of market access opportunities.
- Strengthen intersectoral linkages between the creative and tourism sectors via festivals, book fairs, cultural markets and trade shows.

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Chapter 7

Reinforcing the Convention's influence in international fora

Véronique Guèvremont

KEY FINDINGS

- The analysis of the implementation of the 2005 Convention during the 2021-2024 period confirms the Convention's continued impact on traditional areas of cultural trade and highlights emerging challenges linked to AI and digital governance.
- Only 3% of the 269 trade agreements concluded since the Convention's adoption explicitly reference it, suggesting limited awareness among Parties and weak coordination between ministries of culture and trade.
- Between 2021 and 2024, 22 trade or economic partnership agreements involving at least one Party to the Convention were concluded. Cultural provisions remain consistent with previous trends but introduce no new approaches despite recent developments in the digital environment.
- Of these 22 agreements, 13 include a chapter setting out commitments on digital trade and three introduce new types of commitments specifically addressing Artificial Intelligence.
- Between 2021 and 2024, six of the 50 Bilateral Investment Treaties – involving nine Parties to the Convention – include at least one cultural clause aligned with the Convention's objectives. Although this figure represents an increase over previous years from 5% to 12%, the overall share remains low, indicating that few Parties consider the Convention's principles when negotiating such treaties. This may limit their ability to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.
- While Parties to the Convention are actively engaged in international AI fora through strategies, working groups and regulatory initiatives, the practical implementation of Article 21 on 'International consultation and coordination' remains limited. Major AI frameworks, including the OECD AI Principles and the Global Digital Compact, largely overlook cultural diversity, even though AI both relies on and shapes cultural expressions. A notable exception is the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act, which explicitly links transparency obligations to copyright protection and thereby integrates cultural considerations into AI regulation.
- International fora and several recent legal instruments recognize the 2005 Convention as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive development, particularly in the context of a post-2030 development agenda. Article 21 is also recognized for helping integrate the Convention's principles into trade, investment, Intellectual Property, telecommunications and human rights frameworks.
- The Quadrennial Periodic Reports show that Article 16 remains insufficiently understood and implemented, with developed countries deploying only limited efforts to ensure compliance with their commitment.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

When engaging in digital trade negotiations and AI cooperation frameworks:

Reaffirm the Convention's core objectives

- recognize the dual nature of cultural goods and services
- promote balanced cultural exchanges

Respect each Party's sovereign right to adopt and implement cultural policies

Include cultural diversity as an explicit objective

PROGRESS

Countries incorporate references to the Convention in multilateral/regional/bilateral legal instruments, in various fields of cultural cooperation, trade, Intellectual Property, sustainable development and human rights

2,544 cultural clauses relevant to the Convention have been included in **194 bilateral and regional trade agreements** since the Convention's adoption

CHALLENGES

Only 3% of **trade agreements** have **explicitly referenced the Convention** since its adoption, signalling **weak coordination between ministries** of culture and trade

Only 12% of **Bilateral Investment Treaties** include cultural clauses aligned with the Convention's objectives, up from 5% previously

Preferential treatment remains insufficiently understood and implemented by developed countries

EMERGING TRENDS

AI and the digital environment are key issues among **trade agreements** and **cooperation frameworks**:

Of 22 agreements, **13** include a chapter on **digital trade**
3 introduce new commitments specifically related to **AI**

However, **culture remains absent from major AI frameworks** even though AI shapes and depends on cultural expressions

INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) is the only binding international legal instrument entirely dedicated to the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. At the same time, it forms part of a wider network of international legal instruments whose provisions can, directly or indirectly, shape the evolution of cultural expressions by ensuring their diversity is protected and promoted. For instance, its Article 21 'International consultation and coordination' calls on the Parties to promote its objectives and principles in other international fora. By engaging in this way, countries can reinforce dialogue through partnerships, engage in innovative forms of cooperation and contribute to making cultural diversity a guiding value in global governance.

Between 2005 and 2024, the implementation of Article 21 resulted in the incorporation of explicit references to the 2005 Convention – or to its objectives and principles – in the text of hundreds of multilateral, regional and bilateral legal instruments. These references have appeared in fields as varied as trade, investment, Intellectual Property, telecommunications, sustainable development and human rights, not to mention agreements aimed at supporting cultural cooperation at all levels and in all regions of the world. In some trade agreements, these references have also supported the implementation of Article 16 'Preferential treatment for developing countries'. The Convention has therefore continuously contributed to establishing the diversity of cultural expressions as a widely embraced value in the globalized world.

However, recent developments, particularly in the regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), pose new challenges for the promotion of the 2005 Convention's principles. While some AI-related texts discussed in cultural fora address the impact of AI on cultural and creative industries, most international instruments in this area fail to consider its implications for cultural expressions. This reflects a limited implementation of Article 21 in many fora currently shaping AI governance.

Similar concerns arise in the commercial sphere. While new agreements continue to be negotiated by the Parties and commitments on digital trade are multiplying, explicit references to the 2005 Convention – or to its objectives and principles – remain scarce. More importantly, the Parties have not demonstrated a clear willingness to use these trade agreements as instruments for implementing Article 16, which applies to the commercial sphere, including in the digital environment. These observations highlight the need to reaffirm two of the Convention's fundamental objectives: 1) to recognize the specific nature of cultural goods and services, and 2) to achieve wider and more balanced cultural exchanges. These goals require a modulation of trade commitments so that Parties can preserve their sovereign right to maintain and adopt measures supporting the diversity of cultural expressions within their territories and at the international level.

The challenges identified in this chapter underline the importance of interministerial coordination to promote the Convention's objectives whenever international rules may affect cultural expressions. This coordination is essential both to ensure policy consistency and to prevent unintended negative impacts on the cultural ecosystem from decisions taken in other sectors, such as trade or digital policies. This reflects the very intent of Article 21 of the 2005 Convention – and to some extent its Article 16 as well – which both impose an obligation of coherence on the Parties. This need for interministerial coordination was addressed in 2024 by the two expert groups mandated by the Convention's governing bodies to formulate recommendations: the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment and the Intergovernmental Reflection Group on the implementation of Article 16 on 'Preferential treatment for developing countries'. Some of the recommendations put forward by these two groups will therefore be discussed in this chapter.

A CERTAIN CONTINUITY IN THE CULTURAL CLAUSES INCORPORATED INTO TRADE AGREEMENTS

Between 2021 and 2024, 22 trade agreements involving at least one Party to the Convention were concluded (Table 7.1). This section examines these clauses, which reflect a certain continuity with previous documented periods.

Most of the Parties bound by these trade agreements have indeed continued to promote the objectives and principles of the Convention by incorporating cultural clauses that reflect their intention to preserve their right to intervene in this sector. The legal techniques used to achieve this have remained largely unchanged. As documented in previous editions of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report, Parties continue to rely on general cultural exceptions or exemptions, as well as on reservations and limitations to specific commitments, to preserve their sovereign right to adopt and implement policies that protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

BOX 7.1 • Main cultural clauses incorporated into trade agreements by Parties

In order to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory, Parties may resort to policies aimed at supporting their cultural and creative industries, cultural goods and services, or artists and other cultural professionals. However, the right to implement such policies may be restricted by their trade agreements, in particular their commitment to non-discrimination.* In such cases, it may be necessary to incorporate cultural clauses whose effect would be to enable the implementation of cultural policies that support national or local cultural expressions (support that could be considered a form of 'discrimination'). The 2005 Convention contextualizes the use of these clauses and why cultural goods and services should be treated differently within trade agreements by recognizing the dual nature, both economic and cultural, of cultural goods and services as well as their distinctive nature as vehicles of identity, values and meaning.

The main cultural clauses used by the Parties are

- **Explicit references to the 2005 Convention or to its objectives and principles:** these references are included in the preamble to the trade agreement, or in certain specific chapters, and may influence the interpretation of the provisions of the trade agreement. Cultural diversity may also be explicitly mentioned as a legitimate public policy objective under provisions on the right to regulate.
- **Cultural exemption or cultural exception clauses:** general cultural exceptions or exemptions offer a wide protection of the sovereign right of countries to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions by preventing all commercial commitments from being applied to cultural goods and services; specific exceptions or exemptions may apply only to certain categories of commitments; recourse to these clauses may be unconditional or subject to compliance with certain conditions.
- **Reservations:** this is a clause whereby a Party modifies the application of certain trade commitments with regard to certain cultural goods and/or services. The reservation may also be aimed at maintaining certain cultural policies in force or protecting a Party's right to use certain of these policies in the future.
- **Positive lists of commitments:** this technique is used by Parties to commit to the progressive liberalization of their markets; it allows them to abstain from making commitments in sectors of their choice – which may include the cultural sector – or to attach various types of limitations to their commitments.
- **Cultural cooperation commitments:** some trade agreements contain cultural cooperation commitments that reflect the objectives and principles of the Convention; in a few agreements, these commitments are set out in a Protocol on Cultural Cooperation (PCC) annexed to the trade agreement (for example, the Economic Partnership Agreement between the CARIFORUM States and the European Community, to which a PCC is annexed).

For more details on these various categories of clauses, see Chapter 7 of the 2015 edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report.

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* In free trade agreements, non-discrimination is a fundamental principle that requires each Party to refrain from treating the goods, services or enterprises of another Party less favourably than its own or those of any third Party. This principle is embodied in two core rules: the 'National Treatment' and the 'Most-Favoured-Nation Treatment'.

The period from 2021 to 2024 confirms continuity in the Parties' practices, with no particularly innovative cultural clauses emerging in the trade agreements concluded during this time. As in previous years, general cultural exceptions or exemptions have remained a technique used by very few Parties, mainly Canada and New Zealand. The European Union, for its part, has continued to exclude the audio-visual sector from its commitments concerning trade in services, investments and digital trade – an exclusion that is essential for the implementation of policies promoting cultural goods and services produced within the European Union. The European Union's Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which coordinates national legislation on audio-visual media, promotes the production and distribution of European works, including on digital platforms. In order for this legislation to be enforceable, the European Union has tailored its trade commitments and introduced cultural clauses that preserve the sovereign right of its Member States to intervene in this field. Finally, only two trade agreements signed during this period make explicit reference to the 2005 Convention: the New Zealand-United Kingdom and the European Union-New Zealand Free Trade Agreements.

Over the 20 years of implementation (2005-2024), explicit references to the 2005 Convention in trade agreements have remained limited. This practice is mainly observed in agreements concluded by the European Union and, since Brexit, by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom). In total, 20 such references appear in nine bilateral or regional agreements, and in some cases in their annexed Protocols on Cultural Cooperation, linking 51 Parties.[1] With only 3% of the 269 agreements concluded since 2005 containing an explicit reference, this proportion remains very low. This may reflect weak coordination between ministries of culture and trade, or more broadly, a lack of awareness among Parties of the importance of including an explicit reference to the 2005 Convention in trade negotiations.

This finding must nonetheless be put into perspective, as the objectives and principles of the 2005 Convention may be reflected – albeit implicitly – in many other types of cultural clauses incorporated into bilateral and regional agreements. In fact, of the 269 bilateral and regional trade agreements adopted between 2005 and 2024, 194 agreements contain in total 2,544 cultural clauses relevant to the objectives and principles of the Convention.

1. Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), New Zealand, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom.

BOX 7.2 • The recognition of the specific nature of culture in trade agreements

Of these 2,544 cultural clauses included in the 194 bilateral and regional agreements between 2005 and 2024, 202 are cultural exceptions or exemptions designed to exclude various categories of cultural goods and services from the scope of the agreement (for example, all cultural industries or services belonging to the audio-visual sector, or even specifically identified cultural goods and services).

In order to limit the scope of their trade commitments and protect their sovereign right to adopt cultural policies, the Parties also formulate hundreds of reservations. One hundred eight agreements contain over 1,200 reservations related to various types of cultural policies. Among these are 108 reservations allowing national content quotas to be maintained in the audio-visual sector. In the 2022 Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, for example, Australia reserves its right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to transmission quotas for local content, on free-to-air commercial television broadcasting services, radio broadcasting services, or other audio-visual services transmitted electronically, in order to make Australian audio-visual content reasonably available to Australian consumers.

There are also 100 reservations protecting the right of countries to adopt and implement measures relating to audio-visual co-production. For example, in the 2022 New Zealand-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement, New Zealand reserves its right to adopt or maintain preferential co-production arrangements for film and television productions. In this reservation, New Zealand adds that official co-production status, which may be granted to a co-production produced under preferential co-production arrangements, confers national treatment on works covered by such arrangements.

Source: UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Université Laval

Table 7.1 • Bilateral and regional trade agreements involving at least one Party to the Convention during the period 2021-2024

	Trade agreements 2021-2024	Date of signature	Parties	Explicit reference to the Convention	General cultural exception/exemption	Digital trade chapter	Specific references under the digital trade chapter						
							Non-discrimination	Data flow	Source code	Data location facilities	Artificial Intelligence	Digital inclusion	Cultural exception
1	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between the Rep. of India and the Rep. of Mauritius	22/02 2021	India Mauritius	✘	✘	✘							
2	Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Rep. of Albania	05/02 2021	Albania United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✘	✘	✘							
3	Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Rep. of Serbia	16/04 2021	Serbia United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✘	✘	✘							
4	Free Trade Agreement between Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Kingdom of Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	08/07 2021	Iceland Liechtenstein Norway United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✘	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔
5	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Government of the Rep. of Korea	26/10 2021	Cambodia Rep. of Korea	✘	✘	✘							
6	Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Australia	16/12 2021	Australia United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✘	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔
7	Digital Economy Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Rep. of Singapore	25/02 2022	Singapore United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✘	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
8	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between the Government of the Rep. of India and the Government of the United Arab Emirates	18/02 2022	India United Arab Emirates	✘	✘	✔		✔					
9	Free Trade Agreement between New Zealand and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	28/02 2022	New Zealand United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
10	Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement	02/04 2022	Australia India	✘	✘	✘							

11	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Rep. of China and the Government of the Rep. of Nicaragua	31/08 2023	China Nicaragua	✘	✘	✔							
12	European Union-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement	09/07 2023	European Union New Zealand	✔	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔
13	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the State of Israel and the Government of the Rep. of Korea	12/05 2021	Israel Rep. of Korea	✘	✘	✔	✔						
14	Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (modernization of the 2016 agreement)	22/09 2023	Canada Ukraine	✘	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔			
15	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Rep. of China and the Government of the Rep. of Ecuador	10/05 2023	China Ecuador	✘	✘	✔							
16	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of The People's Rep. of China and the Government of the Rep. of Serbia	17/10 2023	China Serbia	✘	✘	✘							
17	Free Trade Agreement between the EFTA States and the Rep. of Moldova	27/06 2023	Iceland Liechtenstein Norway Rep. of Moldova Switzerland	✘	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔
18	European Union-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement	18/12 2023	European Union Kenya	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement between the EFTA States and the Rep. of India	10/03 2024	Iceland India Liechtenstein Norway Switzerland	✘	✘	✘							
20	Viet Nam-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement	28/10 2024	Vietnam United Arab Emirates	✘	✘	✔		✔					
21	Australia-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement	06/11 2024	Australia United Arab Emirates	✘	✘	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	
22	European Union-Mercosur Association Agreement	06/12 2024	Argentina Brazil European Union Paraguay Uruguay	✘	✔	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

✔ indicates that the corresponding section was included in the agreement.

✘ indicates that the corresponding section was not included in the agreement.

N/A indicates that the concerned text is not available and therefore could not be analysed.

CLAUSES ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ALGORITHMS

Between 2021 and 2024, 13 out of 22 concluded trade agreements include a chapter on digital trade (Table 7.1). Only one of these 13 agreements contains a non-discrimination commitment applicable to digital products, namely the Israel-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement. The other 12 agreements do not contain such a clause; it is crucial for the Parties not to agree to be bound by a non-discrimination commitment if they wish, for example, to implement measures to promote the visibility or discoverability of national and local content in the digital environment. Indeed, the absence of such a clause grants the Parties broader regulatory space in the adoption of cultural policies applicable to the digital environment. By comparison, a third of the agreements adopted from 2017 to 2020 containing a chapter on digital trade include a non-discrimination commitment (UNESCO, 2022). Countries have therefore seemed more cautious or reluctant to commit to this type of commitment in recent years.

Another noteworthy element is the inclusion of a cultural exception in the digital trade chapter of several agreements, either general in scope or more specifically targeting certain sectors. Of the 13 agreements concluded during the covered period, six include such an exception. For example, the 'Digital Trade' chapter of the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement excludes audio-visual services (Article 14.2.2(a)). The same is true of the European Union-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (Article 12.1.2(a)), which in addition contains a provision reaffirming 'each Party's right to regulate within their territories to achieve legitimate policy objectives, such as [...] the promotion and protection of cultural diversity' (Article 12.3).

As mentioned in the 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, it is also imperative to closely examine the commitments related to cross-border data flows, access to source code and data location. While such commitments may have a positive impact on the cultural exchanges between Parties and facilitate access to a wide range of cultural expressions from different regions of the world, they may also – depending on their specific wording in trade agreements – have the effect of restricting the Parties' ability to implement certain cultural policies applicable online, for instance to monitor the discoverability requirement fixed in national policies or regulations.

BOX 7.3 • Understanding Parties' commitments for digital trade

Cross-border data flows refer to the movement of digital information across national borders, for example when a music streaming platform stores user data or delivers cultural content from servers located in another country.

Source code refers to the human-readable instructions that determine how a computer program operates. Source code may cover algorithms, including recommendation systems that influence which films, songs or books are suggested to users on cultural content platforms. Access to source code can be applied as a condition for market access.

Data location refers to measures that compel companies to conduct certain digital-related activities within a country's borders, such as storing, processing or managing data locally. Such measures may include requirements for data servers to be located within the country, requirements for local content, government procurement preferences, and technology standards that favour local digital companies.

Some Parties appear to be exercising caution in this regard, seeking to preserve their right to pursue legitimate public policy objectives – which certainly include the protection of cultural diversity – despite accepting trade commitments. The European Union-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (Article 12.11.2) provides a relevant example: the provision on access to source code specifies that nothing shall prevent authorities from accessing source code for regulatory, enforcement or judicial purposes, or from protecting Intellectual Property rights. This illustrates how Parties can include provisions in their trade agreements that preserve their right to access source code in justified cases. For instance, policy requiring platforms to promote national content through recommendation algorithms may entail access to some information related to the source to verify compliance.

Finally, three agreements concluded during the reporting period include new commitments specifically related to AI. While they do not directly address the diversity of cultural expressions, they touch on closely related issues. Three illustrative provisions are presented below.

Digital Economy Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Singapore (2022)

Article 8.61-R

3. The Parties shall endeavour, where appropriate, to cooperate on matters related to AI [...]. Such cooperation may include: [...] (b) cooperating on issues [...] such as **ethical use**, **human diversity** and **unintended biases**, industry-led technical standards and **algorithmic transparency**; (c) promoting collaboration between each Party's governmental and nongovernmental entities across research, academia, and industry, in relation to: [...] (iv) **responsible use and adoption of AI technologies**; and (d) **participating actively in international fora**, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence [...].

Free Trade Agreement between New Zealand and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2022)

Article 15.19

3. Each Party shall endeavour to develop governance and policy frameworks for the trusted, safe, and **responsible use of emerging technologies**. To this end, in developing those frameworks, the Parties recognise the importance of: (a) taking into account the **principles and guidelines of relevant international bodies**, such as the OECD and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence; [...].

4. The Parties shall cooperate, as appropriate, on matters related to digital innovation and emerging technologies with respect to trade. This may include: [...] (b) cooperating on developments relating to emerging technologies, **including ethical use**, industry-led standards, and **algorithmic transparency**, to address issues such as **unintended biases** and **exacerbation of existing divides**, by **ensuring human diversity** is recognised in the development of technologies; and (c) **participating actively in international fora**.

Australia-United Arab Emirates Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (2024)

Article 12.24

2. The Parties also recognise the importance of developing governance and regulatory frameworks for the trusted, safe and **responsible use of AI** technologies to realise the benefits of AI and mitigate risks. [...]

3. To this end, the Parties shall endeavour to: (a) collaborate on and promote the development and adoption of frameworks that support the trusted, safe, and **responsible use of AI technologies** ('AI Governance Frameworks'), through **relevant regional and international fora**; and (b) take into consideration **internationally recognised standards, principles or guidelines** when developing such AI Governance Frameworks.

These AI-related commitments are relatively non-binding and are primarily aimed to encourage cooperation between the Parties. While they emphasize the responsible use of AI, two of the three provisions also mention ethics, human diversity, unintended bias and algorithmic transparency, areas that open the door to cultural considerations. However, while such an opening is a positive step, it is insufficient to entirely address the relevance, or even the necessity, for the Parties to the 2005 Convention to explicitly introduce the preservation of the diversity of cultural expressions as an objective of the desired cooperation in the field of AI.

A final important aspect of these commitments is their reference to regional and international fora working on AI standards and principles. These references could help align digital trade commitments with broader frameworks for the responsible use of AI, including the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which addresses issues relevant to the diversity of cultural expressions. It is therefore up to the Parties to ensure that cooperation on AI also integrates cultural imperatives, such as respect for Intellectual Property and the safeguarding of human creativity, concerns also reflected in the recommendations of the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment.

THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION JOINT STATEMENT INITIATIVE ON ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AND ITS POTENTIAL TO STIMULATE CULTURAL EXCHANGES

As the Convention celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2025 and as its Parties work towards achieving its objectives in the digital environment, it may be worthwhile to take stock of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Work Programme on Electronic Commerce. Launched in 1998, the programme evolved at a variable pace over the course of its first two decades without any palpable effect at the multilateral level. Yet, a parallel Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce revived in 2017 the efforts to move towards an agreement in the area of digital trade. In this context, a new and crucial stage was reached on 26 July 2024 with the conclusion of the Agreement on Electronic Commerce.

The 2024 Communication on the Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce that led to this agreement (WTO, 2024) underscores the role of global electronic commerce and the opportunities it creates for inclusive trade and development.

Although not yet adopted, the agreement marks a first step towards new plurilateral rules on digital trade under the WTO umbrella, with future negotiations expected on more sensitive issues, such as those around data. The current text nonetheless warrants examination, particularly in light of the 2017 Operational Guidelines on the implementation of the 2005 Convention in the digital environment.

The 2024 Agreement on Electronic Commerce focuses on digital trade facilitation, trust, transparency, cooperation and development. One of the most restrictive provisions, found in Article 11.3, prohibits customs duties on electronic transmissions, thereby reducing the uncertainty linked to the moratorium on duties – a commitment by states not to impose them – which until now had to be renewed every two years. Other commitments – on electronic signatures, contracts, payments, interoperability, consumer protection, data privacy and cybersecurity – could have positive effects on the exchange of cultural goods and services in the digital environment. For instance, secure electronic transaction can help small cultural enterprises – such as independent music labels or publishers – confidently sell their products across borders.

The agreement also promotes international cooperation to bridge the digital divide and foster an inclusive digital economy, aligning with the 2005 Convention's Operational Guidelines. It also calls on the Parties to support developing countries in accessing digital ecosystems and infrastructure. Its implementation could thus help advance the Convention's objectives in the digital environment.

The Parties to the Convention will nevertheless need to remain vigilant and closely follow the next stages of the negotiations on digital trade at the WTO, since the future adoption of a non-discrimination clause applicable to electronic commerce, as well as commitments related to data flows, source code, recommendation algorithms, or even AI could impact their right to implement certain cultural policies in the digital environment. The Parties will therefore benefit from promoting the 'complementarity and coherency' of their commitments in the areas of culture and trade (paragraph 19.1 of the 2005 Convention's Operational Guidelines), which could be done through consultations, as suggested in Article 21 of the 2005 Convention.

CULTURAL CLAUSES IN BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATIES

With regard to the Bilateral Investment Treaties concluded between 2021 and 2024, the database of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) lists 50 agreements (Table 7.2) involving at least one Party to the 2005 Convention, for a total of 37 Parties involved. However, of these 50 Bilateral Investment Treaties, only six treaties, involving nine Parties to the Convention, contain at least one cultural clause that reflects its objectives and principles. The proportion of Bilateral Investment Treaties containing a relevant cultural clause during the period covered therefore stands at 12%, a higher proportion than the 5% observed in the previous edition of the *Re|Shaping* report.

Of the six relevant Bilateral Investment Treaties, five treaties – involving seven Parties to the Convention (Colombia, Georgia, Hungary, Indonesia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkmenistan) – contain a provision allowing signatories to reaffirm their right to regulate investment in their territory to achieve legitimate public policy objectives, such as the protection and promotion of diverse cultural expressions. One of these five treaties also contains an additional cultural clause that explicitly excludes from the concept of expropriation measures relating to the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (Article 6.5 of the Agreement between Georgia and Hungary).

The sixth Bilateral Investment Treaty containing a relevant cultural clause in light of the objectives and principles of the 2005 Convention is a treaty between Australia and the United Arab Emirates in which Australia reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to the creative arts and other cultural and creative industries, including audio-visual services, entertainment services and libraries, as well as broadcasting (Annex VII – Schedule of Australia). This reservation also applies to the digital environment.

It is clear from this analysis that a very small proportion of Parties to the 2005 Convention take into account its objectives and principles when they negotiate a Bilateral Investment Treaty. These agreements could restrict their sovereign right to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory, for example through regulatory measures aimed at preserving media diversity – such as preventing the acquisition of national cultural industries by large foreign conglomerates – or promoting the creation, production and dissemination of national content. Parties should exercise increased vigilance in this area in the coming years.

Table 7.2 • Bilateral Investment Treaties involving at least one Party to the Convention during the period 2021-2024

	Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)	Date of signature
1	Bahrain* - Korea, Republic of, BIT (2024)	26/12/2024
2	China - Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of, BIT (2024)	15/11/2024
3	Congo - Türkiye BIT (2024)	13/11/2024
4	Australia - United Arab Emirates BIT (2024)	06/11/2024
5	Egypt - Saudi Arabia BIT (2024)	15/10/2024
6	India - Uzbekistan BIT (2024)	27/09/2024
7	Ghana - Trinidad and Tobago BIT (2024)	24/09/2024
8	Bahrain* - Hungary BIT (2024)	04/09/2024
9	Georgia - Hungary BIT (2024)	19/07/2024
10	China - Tajikistan BIT (2024)	05/07/2024
11	Tajikistan - Türkiye BIT (2024)	28/05/2024
12	Kazakhstan* - Kyrgyzstan* BIT (2024)	24/04/2024
13	Iraq - Türkiye BIT (2024)	22/04/2024
14	Cuba - Türkiye BIT (2024)	13/03/2024
15	Bahrain* - Hong Kong, China SAR, BIT (2024)	03/03/2024
16	India - United Arab Emirates BIT (2024)	13/02/2024
17	Belarus - Equatorial Guinea BIT (2023)	09/12/2023
18	Angola - China BIT (2023)	06/12/2023
19	Barbados - United Arab Emirates BIT (2023)	04/12/2023
20	Hong Kong, China SAR - Türkiye BIT (2023)	31/10/2023
21	Korea, Republic of - Serbia BIT (2023)	08/09/2023
22	Brazil - Sao Tome and Principe BIT (2023)	27/08/2023
23	Angola - Japan* BIT (2023)	09/08/2023
24	Türkiye - Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of, BIT (2023)	21/07/2023
25	Türkiye - United Arab Emirates BIT (2023)	19/07/2023
26	Hungary - Turkmenistan BIT (2023)	09/06/2023
27	Cabo Verde - Morocco BIT (2023)	09/05/2023
28	Colombia - Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of, BIT (2023)	03/02/2023
29	Belarus - Zimbabwe BIT (2023)	31/01/2023
30	Kazakhstan* - Qatar BIT (2022)	12/10/2022
31	Hungary - San Marino BIT (2022)	21/09/2022
32	Serbia - Türkiye BIT (2022)	07/09/2022
33	Georgia - Qatar BIT (2022)	21/06/2022
34	Philippines - United Arab Emirates BIT (2022)	09/06/2022
35	Indonesia - Switzerland BIT (2022)	24/05/2022
36	Türkiye - Uruguay BIT (2022)	23/04/2022
37	Angola - Cabo Verde BIT (2022)	14/03/2022
38	Mozambique - United Arab Emirates BIT (2022)	07/02/2022
39	Hungary - Oman BIT (2022)	02/02/2022
40	Côte d'Ivoire - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	24/11/2021
41	Jersey* - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	09/11/2021
42	Iraq - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	18/10/2021
43	Democratic Republic of the Congo - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	12/10/2021
44	Colombia - Spain BIT (2021)	16/09/2021
45	Democratic Republic of the Congo - Turkey BIT (2021)	07/09/2021
46	Angola - Turkey BIT (2021)	27/07/2021
47	Hungary - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	15/07/2021
48	Democratic Republic of the Congo - Rwanda BIT (2021)	26/06/2021
49	North Macedonia - United Arab Emirates BIT (2021)	22/02/2021
50	Georgia - Japan* BIT (2021)	29/01/2021

* Indicates that the country (or territory) is not Party to the 2005 Convention

REFERENCES TO THE 2005 CONVENTION IN OTHER AGREEMENTS, DECLARATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

This section examines the legal instruments that address subjects other than trade and investment, considering not only the texts that explicitly refer to the Convention, but also those that incorporate its objectives and principles.

In this area, references to the 2005 Convention – or to its objectives and principles – have continued to multiply over the past four years. These references not only enhance the visibility of the Convention, but also contribute to the mutual reinforcement of actions undertaken by UNESCO and international bodies in areas such as cultural diversity, cultural and creative industries, the status of artists, cultural rights, and the role of culture in development processes.

Some legal texts highlight the growing attention that governments devote to the 2005 Convention when they engage in discussion within other international fora. This is particularly the case of the Resolution on the promotion of the enjoyment of the cultural rights of everyone and respect for cultural diversity, adopted by the Human Rights Council on 3 April 2023 (HRC, 2023). Other instruments go further, encouraging other countries to ratify the 2005 Convention. This is the case, for example, of the Salvador da Bahia Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture of 8 November 2024, which calls for the ratification and effective implementation of the Convention. References to the 2005 Convention are also intended to encourage countries to step up their actions in accordance with this treaty, as reflected in the Villers-Cotterêt Declaration of 5 October 2024 and the *Résolution sur la promotion et l'usage du français au sein de l'espace francophone* (Resolution on the Promotion and Use of the French Language within the Francophone Space) of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie) of 8 July 2023. In addition to the incorporation of explicit references to the 2005 Convention in legal instruments, mutual reinforcement is also achieved through the introduction of references to it in strategies, action plans, work programmes or other texts, such as those listed in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 • References to the Convention in strategies, action plans and other international texts (selected examples)

Body	Year	Title
African Union, 43rd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council (Nairobi, Kenya)	2023	Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries
Council of the European Union	2023	Council Conclusions on At-Risk and Displaced Artists
XXVIII Cumbre Iberoamericana de Jefas y Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno (28th Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government)	2023	III Ibero-American Cooperation Quadrennial Action Plan 2023-2026
International Labour Organization and UNESCO	2023	Methodological Guide for the Participatory Development of a Law on the Status of the Artist
International Labour Organization	2023	Promoting Decent Work in the African Cultural and Creative Economy
Council of the European Union	2022	Council Resolution on the European Union Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 (2022/C 466/01)
Pacific Community	2022	Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022-2032: The Pacific Culture Decade Towards Sustainable Cultural Development
Secretaría General Iberoamericana (Ibero-American General Secretariat)	2022	*Estrategia Iberoamericana de Cultura y Desarrollo Sostenible* (Ibero-American Strategy for Culture and Sustainable Development)
European Parliament and Council of the European Union	2021	Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013

References to the 2005 Convention are also included in legal instruments that recognize the link between culture and sustainable development, or that advocate for the recognition of this link. The resolutions on culture and sustainable development of the United Nations General Assembly of 19 December 2023 (UNGA, 2023) and 17 December 2021 (UNGA, 2021) rely in particular on the 2005 Convention to reaffirm the role of culture as a driver of sustainable development. In some cases, the instruments call for the recognition of culture in the post-2030 sustainable development agenda. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration of 2023, the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration of 2022, and the Declaration of the Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the G-77 and China 'Culture for Sustainable Development' of 2023 are three examples of legal instruments that call for this recognition, drawing on the relevant UNESCO legal instruments. The #Culture2030Goal campaign – which involves Arterial Network, Culture Action Europe, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, International Music Council, and United Cities and Local Governments – also refers to the 2005 Convention.

Assuming its leading role, UNESCO has taken every opportunity to advocate for the recognition of culture as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive development, particularly in the context of ongoing negotiations for the post-2030 international development agenda.

The Outcome Document of the World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025, together with the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, offers additional anchorage for Parties and other stakeholders to advocate for the full integration of culture into building peaceful societies and sustainable development. Alongside this edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, the *Global Report on Cultural Policies, Culture: the Missing SDG*, launched at the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference, also reinforces the sense of urgency and plays a crucial role in supporting this effort.

Lastly, references to the 2005 Convention appear in several instruments addressing cultural or linguistic diversity in the digital environment. The 2023 G20 Culture Ministers' Declaration (G20, 2023) calls for adapting cultural policies and legal frameworks to encompass digital technologies, drawing on the Convention and its relevant Operational Guidelines. The Djerba Declaration, adopted at the 18th Francophonie Summit, also refers to the 2005 Convention to encourage collaboration between the actors of the Francophonie and those of the digital world. Other references – either to the Convention or more generally to relevant UNESCO legal instruments – are found in the 2022 United Nations General Assembly resolution on multilingualism (UNGA, 2022); the 2022 conclusion of the Council of the European Union on reinforcing intercultural exchanges through the mobility of artists and cultural and creative professionals, and through multilingualism in the digital era (Council of the European Union, 2022); and the 2021 G20 Rome Declaration of Ministers of Culture.

However, focusing solely on texts that refer to the 2005 Convention, or to its objectives and principles, offers only a partial view of the normative landscape that must be examined to assess the international influence of the Convention. A critical analysis of its influence must also consider agreements, declarations, recommendations and resolutions that remain silent on the Convention, even when they address issues relevant to the diversity of cultural expressions. This is especially true of recent normative instruments on AI, or more generally on digital technologies, adopted over the past four years.

LITTLE CONSIDERATION OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INITIATIVES

A growing number of international organizations – including the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Intellectual Property Organization, UNCTAD, the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the G7, the G20, the G-77, the International Telecommunication Union, and the International Labour Organization – are addressing AI through strategies, working groups and legal instruments regulating its development and use. Since Parties to the Convention also participate in these fora and have shown interest in the impact of AI on cultural and creative industries (notably through the mandate given to the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment), the implementation of Article 21 should lead them to actively promote the objectives and principles of the 2005 Convention in these other fora. However, examination of the relevant instruments raises some concerning observations in this regard.

The Global Digital Compact, annexed to the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, is an example of the limited implementation of Article 21. While it mentions linguistic and cultural diversity (for instance, Articles 8(g) and 59), it overlooks the need to protect the diversity of cultural expressions. This omission is striking given that cultural content is key training 'material' for Generative AI (GenAI). Copyright issues, central to fair remuneration, are barely touched upon (for instance, Article 39(c)).

Another example concerns the OECD AI Principles, initially adopted in 2019 and revised in May 2024. The principles contain no mention of cultural diversity or cultural expressions. Only the principle of 'Respect for the rule of law, human rights and democratic values, including fairness and privacy' refers to 'diversity' as one of the values to be respected (Article IV.1.2.a). As for the principle of 'Transparency and explainability', which is fundamental to the protection of copyright, it does not address Intellectual Property issues (Article IV.1.3.iii).

It is at the level of the European Union that the most explicit link is established between the regulation of AI systems, the principle of transparency and respect for copyright. The European Union's AI Act (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2024) imposes a transparency obligation on providers of AI models, requiring them in particular to 'put in place a policy to comply with Union law on copyright and related rights' (Article 53.1(c)) and to 'draw up and make publicly available a sufficiently detailed summary about the content used for training of the general-purpose AI model' (Article 53.1(d)). This transparency obligation therefore explicitly applies to content protected by copyright. Above all, it 'should also lead to addressing the issue of the representativeness of data (training bias that can, among other things, generate and amplify discrimination) and that of the diversity of cultural expressions' (Bensamoun, 2024).

In comparison with the European Union AI Act, the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law may appear less ambitious, partly because it makes no explicit reference to cultural diversity and copyright. Nevertheless, it sets out a general obligation of 'protection of human rights' (Article 4), which include cultural rights, and in particular the right 'to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production' (Article 15.1(c), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). The Framework Convention also promotes principles such as transparency, which could benefit cultural expressions, for instance through the identification of AI-generated content (Article 8). However, it does not directly address issues specific to the diversity of cultural expressions.

These examples should alert Parties: AI regulatory frameworks are advancing without adequately taking into account the need to protect the diversity of cultural expressions or recognizing the specific nature of cultural goods and services. Yet, such protection and recognition are essential to ensure that emerging principles and obligations support human creativity and cultural diversity. This highlights the urgency of raising awareness among the Parties, as underlined in the recommendations of the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment.

SHOULD ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STANDARDS BE DEVELOPED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR?

This question is central to the future implementation of the 2005 Convention. The Reflection Group addressed it in its Recommendation 1, calling for the adoption of an Additional Protocol to the Convention 'to enrich and complement the standards for protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment through the adoption of a new legally binding instrument' (UNESCO, 2024). While the ten other recommendations formulated by the Group were adopted at the tenth session of the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention in June 2025, the decision on Recommendation 1 was deferred to the eleventh session of the Conference of Parties in 2027, to allow Parties to further assess the advisability of adopting such a protocol and to consider alternative legal options. If such a protocol were developed within UNESCO, it could fill the legal gap left by current AI frameworks, which generally remain silent on issues of the diversity of cultural expressions and copyright, despite the foundational role of cultural expressions in training GenAI systems.

The adoption of an Additional Protocol – or any other initiative aimed at improving the implementation of the 2005 Convention in the digital environment – should not, however, exempt the Parties to the Convention from implementing Article 21 in all fora where the regulation of AI is being discussed. To this end, the Reflection Group also recommended the creation of a consultation and dialogue framework to discuss the challenges posed by digital technologies and AI (Recommendation 4), and urged UNESCO to reinforce its action on AI and culture through enhanced cooperation with relevant international organizations and active participation in key global fora (Recommendation 11).

The Paris Artificial Intelligence Action Summit, held in February 2025, illustrates how the diversity of cultural expressions can be overlooked in AI fora. While its goal was to promote 'an international AI governance structure [...] that combines the many challenges linked to this technology' (Élysée, 2025a), the final Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet (Élysée, 2025b) makes no mention of cultural diversity and omits respect for Intellectual Property rights among its five priorities. The G7 Leaders' Statement on AI for Prosperity is more explicit about Intellectual Property rights and acknowledges the 'impact of AI for the cultural and creative sectors'. Yet, it contains no specific commitment in this regard. The time has come for the Parties to the 2005 Convention to act, with civil society mobilization playing a key role in advancing this agenda. The implementation of the Fair Culture Charter, launched in September 2024, could be a way to encourage such mobilization.

BOX 7.4 • The Fair Culture Charter: a good practice for considering the relationship between culture, artists and AI

The Fair Culture Charter was adopted by an international consortium of partners at the end of a global participatory co-design process coordinated by the German Commission for UNESCO. The Charter sets out eight principles intended to promote a sustainable, fair and respectful environment for artists, creatives and other cultural workers. Principle 6, 'Digital equity and ethics', deals with AI and the diversity of cultural expressions. According to this principle: 'The use of digital technologies in cultural and creative industries should always be designed to enrich the diversity of cultural expressions and to enhance human creativity, not replace it. This applies to all stages from creation, production, post-production all the way to dissemination of content and access. It particularly applies to development and application of AI systems, be it generative AI or the application of AI in (post-) production, curation, discoverability and algorithmic distribution'. Principle 6 also contains an explicit reference to the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. It further calls for the use of digital technologies, including AI, to be aligned with human rights and based on transparency, accountability and explainability, as well as on the protection of Intellectual Property rights and fair remuneration.

Source: German Commission for UNESCO, 2024

REFERENCES TO THE CONVENTION IN CASE-LAW BROUGHT BEFORE INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL OR BILATERAL ADJUDICATION

Since its adoption in 2005, the Convention has also been used to defend cultural policies challenged before various international adjudication mechanisms that resolve disputes and interpret applicable laws, and the previous editions of the *Re|Shaping* report have presented some of the most relevant cases. During the 2021-2024 period, however, very few new cases explicitly referring to the 2005 Convention were recorded.

It is difficult to explain why this is the case. Could it be that cultural policies have been less contested, and if so, might this be seen as a positive impact of the Convention? Or is it because the Parties involved did not automatically rely on the Convention?

The second hypothesis applies specifically to the European context, in particular to cases related to state aid in the cultural sector examined by the European Commission. The Commission's role is to ensure that such aid does not distort competition in the internal market and is compatible with objectives of common interest, such as the promotion of culture (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 107.3(d)). A significant number of state aid cases related to the cultural sector have been brought before the European Commission since 2021, but the contested aid has generally not been defended by relying on the 2005 Convention. Several cases testify to this, including the examination of aid concerning a Croatian book publishing programme (State Aid SA.102488 Croatia), an audio-visual tax credit in France (State Aid SA.63595 France), aid for local weekly newspapers in Denmark (State Aid SA.63029 Denmark) and the establishment of a selective aid fund for video game creation (SA.60845 France). In only one case – State Aid SA.109768 (Malta, June 2024) – did the European Commission explicitly refer to the 2005 Convention. It deemed the measure compatible with the principles of the internal market, noting that it reflects cultural diversity in line with the values of freedom of expression, creativity and democratic citizenship set out in the Convention.

Neither in international economic law nor within regional or bilateral trade-dispute-settlement mechanisms has any cultural policy been challenged. However, some are being challenged at the national level, which could subsequently lead to complaints being filed before bilateral, regional or multilateral bodies. For example, in 2024, legal action was initiated by Netflix and Disney, challenging the Audio-Visual Media Services decree of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation before the Belgian Constitutional Court. In this case, Belgian cultural organizations invoked the 2005 Convention to defend the cultural objective of the measure and the sovereign right of states to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions. This dispute could lead to a referral to the Court of Justice of the European Union, raising the question of whether the Court will take the Convention into consideration.

Parties facing similar disputes – whether at the national level or within dispute-settlement mechanisms established under international agreements, such as free trade agreements – should invoke the 2005 Convention to defend the contested measures. As stated in Article 20 of the Convention, 'when interpreting and applying the other treaties to which they are parties or when entering into other international obligations, Parties shall take into account the relevant provisions of this Convention'.

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In the 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, analysis of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports led to the conclusion that Article 16 on preferential treatment remained a provision that was poorly implemented by the Parties to the Convention. Four years later, the situation has changed little. These reports show that confusion continues to surround the concept of preferential treatment and the nature of the commitment arising from Article 16, the implementation of which requires concrete action on the part of developed countries, namely the deployment of measures that meet five conditions. Chapter 5 of this report further examines the implementation of Article 16 in relation to the mobility of artists, while Chapter 6 addresses its implications for the trade of cultural goods and services, both highlighting persistent gaps in Parties' understanding and application.

The implementation of Article 16 has thus been identified as a priority by the 2005 Convention's governing bodies, and significant initiatives have been deployed over the past two years. In particular, UNESCO organized eight online training sessions between October 2023 and May 2024, which were attended by 140 participants from 75 Parties to the Convention. Moreover, at the request of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, an Intergovernmental Reflection Group on the implementation of Article 16 was established, which presented its recommendations in 2024.

BOX 7.5 • The five conditions a measure must meet in order to qualify as preferential treatment under Article 16 of the Convention:

1. be offered by a developed country;
2. benefit one or more developing countries;
3. facilitate cultural exchanges;
4. relate to cultural goods or services, or benefit artists or other cultural professionals or practitioners, from these developing countries;
5. not require reciprocity.

'Cultural exchange' refers to cross-border movement. In light of the objectives of the 2005 Convention, in particular the goal of achieving more balanced cultural exchanges, cross-border movement here refers to the circulation both of cultural goods and services and of artists, cultural professionals, and cultural practitioners from developing countries to developed countries.

BOX 7.6 • Five recommendations to improve the implementation of Article 16

The work carried out by the Intergovernmental Reflection Group, made up of 18 experts appointed by UNESCO's six electoral groups, led to the formulation of five recommendations aimed at: improving monitoring and information collection on the implementation of Article 16 (Recommendation 1), centralizing and making information more easily accessible (Recommendation 2), strengthening the capacities of the Parties through educational tools and technical assistance (Recommendation 3), promoting good practices (Recommendation 4), and strengthening interministerial coordination and international collaboration (Recommendation 5). These recommendations were adopted by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions at its 18th session in February 2025. A plan for the implementation of these recommendations was also adopted by the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention at its tenth session in June 2025.

For the time being, it must be noted that the reports submitted from 2021 to 2024 offer few relevant examples of measures that meet the five conditions under the provision of Article 16 (some of which are presented in Chapter 6). This attests to the scale of the challenges that still need to be addressed to facilitate cultural exchange and market access for developing countries, challenges that are closely tied to the global protection and promotion of diverse cultural expressions.

Some of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports mention co-production agreements concluded by the Parties, such as the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Republic of France on Cinematographic and Audio-Visual Co-Production, or the Audiovisual Co-Production Agreement between the Flemish Community and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Such measures may contribute to the implementation of Article 16, for example by providing funding opportunities to producers from developing countries and by facilitating the access of co-produced works to markets in developed countries.

However, it should also be noted that some developing countries that are Parties to the 2005 Convention have presented in their periodic reports co-production agreements concluded with other developing countries (for more, see Chapter 6). Examples include agreements between South Africa and Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria, and Gambia and Senegal. Although this cooperation between developing countries is encouraged by the 2005 Convention's Operational Guidelines on Article 16, it does not constitute a form of preferential treatment covered by this commitment.

Significant progress also remains to be made in granting preferential treatment through free trade agreements between developed and developing countries that are Parties to the 2005 Convention. In particular, further efforts are expected regarding the granting of preferential treatment to stimulate balanced cultural trade in the digital environment. For example, measures to increase the discoverability of cultural expressions from developing countries could constitute a form of preferential treatment and could be incorporated into the digital trade chapter of a free trade agreement.

BOX 7.7 • Financial support for cultural events involving international artists: a good practice implementing Article 16

Creative Australia (formerly Australia Council) offers financial support to festivals, exhibitions and other cultural events that invite international artists to Australia. Between 2018 and 2021, the Australia Council's International Leadership Program supported some 40 international participants from nine countries in the Indo-Pacific region (China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa and Viet Nam) as part of a 12-month professional development programme that involves engaging with Australian artists, organizations and arts workers. For the artists and other cultural practitioners who participated, this initiative contributed to strengthening their leadership while enabling them to develop their networks.

Participants across the range of the Leadership Programs form an alumni network made up of over 300 national and international leaders, including those from the Indo-Pacific who participated in the International Leadership Program supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade between 2018 and 2023. Although the programme is no longer offered in this format, Creative Australia continues to run leadership initiatives such as the Creative Leadership Program 2024-2025.

Source: Australia QPR, 2021; Creative Australia

It would therefore be desirable for the Parties to step up their efforts – not only at UNESCO, but also in other fora – to further the implementation of Article 16, particularly through trade agreements. Articles 16 and 21 complement each other in this respect, reminding the Parties to the 2005 Convention of their commitment to promote the objectives and principles of the Convention in these other fora. A relevant example is the Salvador da Bahia Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture, adopted on 8 November 2024. In this declaration, the states emphasize the importance of enhancing the exchange of cultural goods and services and improving the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, taking into account the 2005 Convention and its Article 16. UNESCO supported this initiative as a privileged partner in the multilateral discussions leading to the declaration and welcomed the G20 commitment, in line with its own recommendations, to strengthen investment in cultural policies. In contrast, the Samoa Agreement signed on 15 November 2023, by the European Union and the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, does not explicitly rely on Article 16. However, '[t]he Parties shall promote sustainable development through strengthened cultural exchanges, the promotion of co-productions, joint cultural and creative initiatives, and enhanced mobility of cultural and creative professionals' (Article 22.2). And most importantly, the agreement mentions that the Parties 'shall support the circulation of works of art in full observance of established international conventions' (EU and OACPS, 2023).

Finally, it should be noted that good practices for implementing Article 16 can also be encouraged by initiatives led by developing countries. In this regard, mention should be made of the Assessment of the Legislative Framework for Cultural and Creative Industries carried out in 2024 by the Indian Ocean Commission. In this document, the Commission emphasizes that Article 16 is not widely implemented in trade agreements and other international instruments, and calls on member countries to make greater use of this clause. The Assessment also includes a series of recommendations, one of which is to 'organize tailored training for trade officials, focusing on the commercial aspect of preferential treatment for cultural goods and services, in the context of Article 16 of the Convention', with the support of UNESCO. Such a proactive approach on the part of developing countries that are Parties to the 2005 Convention can only have positive effects on the implementation of Article 16 in the coming years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parties to the Convention

- Ensure that every new legal instrument – whether in cultural cooperation, trade, investment, Intellectual Property, telecommunications, sustainable development or human rights – explicitly references the 2005 Convention wherever relevant.
- Institutionalize interministerial coordination mechanisms between culture, trade, and other relevant ministries to ensure policy coherence and consistent implementation of the Convention's objectives, as foreseen in Articles 21 ('International consultation and coordination') and 16 ('Preferential treatment for developing countries'). Such coordination should promote complementarity and coherence between cultural and trade commitments through systematic consultation during the preparation and negotiation of international legal instruments, such as trade agreements and Bilateral Investment Treaties, so that cultural considerations are integrated while safeguarding each Party's sovereign right to maintain and adopt policies and measures for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.
- Ensure that digital trade commitments in bilateral and regional agreements remain consistent with the Convention's principles. This may require the incorporation of cultural exception or exemption clauses, the renunciation of non-discrimination commitments, and the introduction of references to the diversity of cultural expressions, including in cooperation provisions related to AI.
- At the negotiation stage, thoroughly review digital trade provisions – particularly those related to cross-border data flows, access to source code and data location – to safeguard regulatory space for policies applicable to the digital environment, including measures that promote the discoverability of local and national content.
- Closely monitor the ongoing negotiations on electronic commerce at the World Trade Organization to ensure that new commitments regarding non-discrimination, data flows, source code, recommendation algorithms and AI fully respect each Party's sovereign right to adopt and implement cultural policies in the digital environment. In parallel, reaffirm the Convention's core objectives – recognizing the dual nature of cultural goods and services, and promoting balanced cultural exchanges – when engaging in digital trade negotiations that may affect cultural diversity.
- Given the impact of AI on the diversity of cultural expressions, implement Article 21 and promote the Convention's objectives and principles in fora developing AI governance frameworks. Parties should also take into account the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.
- Include cultural diversity as an explicit objective in AI cooperation frameworks and ensure that international standards uphold Intellectual Property rights and protect human creativity, in line with UNESCO standards.
- In any legal or trade disputes touching on cultural policies, invoke Article 20 of the Convention so that its principles are duly considered when interpreting or applying other international obligations.
- Developed countries should intensify efforts, both within UNESCO and other fora, to implement Article 16 by providing effective preferential treatment to cultural goods and services, as well as to artists and cultural professionals, from developing countries. For instance, measures promoting the discoverability of cultural expressions from developing countries could be included in cooperation frameworks or trade agreements, including for digital trade.

For Parties to the Convention and UNESCO

- Explore the feasibility of developing an Additional Protocol to the Convention to strengthen the protection and promotion of cultural diversity in the digital environment, especially in response to the growing use of AI in the cultural and creative sector.
- Establish structured dialogue and cooperation frameworks between Parties and UNESCO to address emerging challenges linked to AI and digital technologies and to facilitate the exchange of information, good practices and capacity building.
- Strengthen monitoring systems, capacity-building initiatives and the sharing of good practices to ensure that preferential treatment mechanisms are clearly understood and effectively implemented.

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

© Shinji Turner-Yamamoto, *Global Tree Project: HANGING GARDEN*, 2010*

Goal 3

INTEGRATE CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

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Chapter 8

Mind the gap: culture and sustainable development

Leandro Valiati

KEY FINDINGS

- Nearly all Parties (93%) have involved public cultural bodies and agencies responsible for culture in national development and sustainable development planning in 2021-2024. This share represents a significant increase from 76% in 2017-2020. The most significant increases occurred in Western Europe and North America (from 68% to 100%) and Africa (from 65% to 97%).

- Cultural and creative industries are gaining recognition as drivers of sustainable development. A large majority of Parties (85%) identify the sector as strategic within national development plans (NDPs) and national sustainable development plans (NSDPs), up from 63% in the previous reporting cycle. Progress has been particularly strong in developing countries, while developed countries have also reported notable gains (74%).

- While 77% of Parties now reference culture in their NDPs and NSDPs, only 56% set specific cultural goals – up from 44% in the last reporting period. The increase in setting specific goals has been largely driven by developing countries (from 40% to 59%). However, monitoring remains limited: only 25% of the measures integrating culture into sustainable development frameworks have been evaluated, limiting accountability and learning.

- Reported expectations regarding culture's contribution to cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes have decreased. Cultural outcomes fell from 65% to 39%, and environmental outcomes from 17% to 11%. This trend suggests that although culture is mentioned in NDPs and NSDPs, its transformative potential – particularly in relation to climate action – could be more fully realized.

- Despite evidence that cultural and creative industries can advance environmental sustainability, few development plans explicitly link culture to climate goals. Carbon footprint measurement in the sector is minimal, and no global dataset on the sector's environmental impact exists. Exploratory analysis suggests that the cultural and creative industries generated approximately 1,028 million tonnes of CO_2 in 2022 – comparable to emissions from land-use change (1,145 million tonnes) but far below those from transport (7,941 million tonnes).

- Culture-led regeneration initiatives continue to expand at the local level. A growing share of Parties (85%, up from 73%) report culture-based regeneration initiatives at the regional, urban or rural level, highlighting local authorities as strategic partners. Growth has been strongest in the Arab States (up 36 percentage points) and Eastern Europe (up 25 points), both reaching 100%, while Western Europe and North America recorded a slight decline of 5 percentage points.

- Significant disparities persist in access to cultural infrastructure. Data on 28,000 geo-coded cultural facilities in 244 cities across 105 countries reveal inequalities between developed and developing countries. Access to cultural facilities remains particularly limited in low-income areas.

- Policies promoting cultural participation rose to 87%, up from 81%, reflecting recognition of culture's role in social cohesion. While developed countries continue to lead (93%), developing countries are closing the gap (rising from 76% to 84%). Reported measures highlight efforts to foster inclusion, particularly for youth, older adults and migrants.

- Integration of culture into development cooperation strategies is increasing, but funding remains limited. The share of Parties integrating culture into development cooperation rose to 58%, up from 49%, driven by developed countries (up 21 percentage points). The strongest regional increases occurred in Eastern Europe (from 14% to 41%) and Africa (from 39% to 62%). Despite this progress, overall funding remains modest: in 2022, only US$231 million (0.15%) of Country Programmable Aid went to culture and recreation.

- The International Fund for Cultural Diversity, a multi-donor fund, is strategically positioned to support sustainable development initiatives aligned with national and global priorities. However, available resources continue to fall short of demand.

- International and regional development banks, particularly in Africa, are emerging as key investors in creative economies, signalling new opportunities for scaling cultural impact.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Culture is a key driver of sustainable development

Fostering social cohesion and community engagement

Spurring innovation and diversifying economic growth

Driving urban and rural revitalization efforts

Promoting awareness and behavioural change on climate change

PROGRESS

Increasing recognition of culture as a **driver of sustainable development**

- **76% → 93%** Countries involve cultural agencies in **sustainable development planning**
- **63% → 85%** Countries identify the sector as strategic in **NDPs and NSDPs**

87% of countries have policies promoting **cultural participation**, reflecting culture's role in **social cohesion**

58% of countries integrate culture into **international development cooperation strategies**

CHALLENGES

Commitments on culture in development have not always translated into **concrete action**:

- While 77% of countries reference culture in their NDPs, only **56%** **set specific cultural goals**
- Few development plans **explicitly link** culture to **climate goals**
- Only **25%** of measures integrating culture in sustainable development frameworks have been **evaluated**, limiting accountability and learning

Disparities persist in access to cultural infrastructure, most notably in **low-income areas**

Carbon footprint measurement of cultural and creative industries is **minimal**

Funding for culture in **international development cooperation** is insufficient – only **0.15%** of **Country Programmable Aid** went to culture and recreation in 2022

Lowered expectations for outcomes from integrating culture

65% → 39% Countries expect culture to drive **cultural outcomes**

17% → 11% Countries expect culture to drive **environmental outcomes**

EMERGING TRENDS

Culture-led regeneration initiatives continue to expand at the **local level** – **85%** of countries report initiatives at **regional, urban or rural level**

International and regional development banks, particularly in Africa, are playing a growing role as **investors** in creative economies

INTRODUCTION

For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize economic growth, cultural vitality, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies. It marks a paradigm shift toward a more holistic approach, away from purely economic calculations based on indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Sustainable development was first defined in 1987 as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987), a definition that continues to be valid as the underpinning for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the ways to achieve this aspiration have since evolved within major multilateral frameworks and initiatives to also integrate other aspects fundamental to human development. These include the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention), whose Article 13 urges Parties to integrate culture in their development policies at all levels, while Article 14 calls for international cooperation for sustainable development and poverty reduction, especially in relation to the specific needs of developing countries, in order to foster the emergence of a dynamic cultural sector. More broadly, the SDGs, adopted in 2015, acknowledge the interconnected nature of sustainable development and include some cultural dimensions.

Yet, despite having significantly shaped the global agenda, even these multidimensional efforts to monitor sustainable development do not fully capture the intersections between culture and sustainable development. In this context, UNESCO has played a pivotal role in ensuring that culture is systematically integrated within United Nations discussions and other social and economic policy fora. The Organization has consistently advocated for culture across key international processes, shaping major outcomes and promoting its inclusion in adopted documents and commitments – notably the Pact for the Future adopted in 2024 – thereby reinforcing culture's role as a driver of sustainable development. Through strategic initiatives – such as the Group of Friends on Culture, partnerships with the G20, G7, and 29th and 30th Conferences of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29 and COP30), technical contributions to the Fourth United Nations Conference on Financing for Development (2025), as well as support for regional strategies in the Pacific and Caribbean – UNESCO has reinforced culture as a driver of sustainable development. Contributions to the United Nations Secretary-General's 2025 Report on Culture and Sustainable Development (UNGA, 2025), alongside ongoing inter-agency work on cultural rights, further demonstrate the Organization's comprehensive engagement. These efforts highlight the multifaceted ways culture underpins sustainable development, from shaping values and aspirations and nurturing traditional knowledge, to fostering creativity for more sustainable futures (COST and University of Jyväskylä, 2015; Duxbury et al., 2017; Hawkes, 2001; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). At the same time, tensions persist within the cultural and creative sectors, as cultural policies often prioritize economic impact over broader cultural value in sustainable societies.

This chapter builds on the multidimensional value of culture for sustainability. At its core is the recognition that arts and culture are levers of social cohesion, fostering integration and a sense of belonging, and that artistic and creative practices nurture critical thinking and imagination – each essential for tackling complex sustainability challenges. The chapter also acknowledges that both the nature of the creative sector itself and its contributions to sustainable development vary widely between regions, shaped by national contexts, diverse cultural policy practices and development priorities.

Based on Quadrennial Periodic Reports data from 2021 to 2024, four key questions are explored: How is culture integrated into national development plans and national sustainable development plans? What outcomes are expected from integrating culture and creativity into these frameworks? How do cultural and creative sectors contribute to environmental sustainability? And finally, how are creativity and cultural expressions recognized within international cooperation for sustainable development? When addressing these questions, one aspect stands out: while cultural and creative industries have gained ground in development plans and strategies, a stark disconnect exists between narrative and action. The potential is undeniable – but turning words into deeds will require visionary and sustained effort.

CULTURE: A TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Culture's strategic role in sustainable development planning

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries have worked to align their national plans with the SDGs. The results, however, are sobering: only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one-third has stalled or even regressed (UN, 2024).

While these trends are deeply worrying, progress is still being made. National development plans (NDPs) and national sustainable development plans (NSDPs) serve as strategic frameworks that guide governments in setting medium- and long-term development objectives. From a cultural perspective, a positive development is that cultural bodies have been increasingly involved in national sustainable development planning, giving culture a more prominent role. Between the 2017-2020 and the 2021-2024 Quadrennial Periodic Reporting cycles, a growing number of Parties reported that public cultural bodies and agencies responsible for culture were engaged in the design and implementation of NDPs or NSDPs (Figure 8.1).

In the previous reporting period, this involvement accounted for about three-quarters of all Parties (76%). By 2021-2024, nearly all Parties reported such participation (93%), with only minor differences between developed countries (98%) and developing countries (93%). From a regional perspective, the most significant increases occurred in Western European and North American States (from 68% to 100%), and across African States (from 65% to 97%).

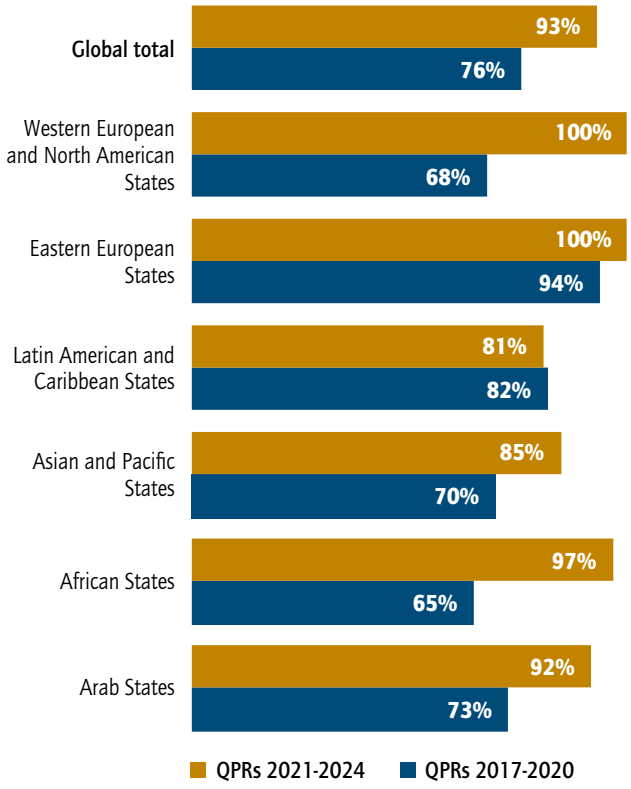
Consequently, culture (94%) and, more specifically, cultural and creative industries (85%) are reported as having been recognized for their strategic role in NDPs and NSDPs (Figure 8.2) – a significant increase compared to the previous 2017-2020 reporting period. This growth is largely driven by the stronger recognition of the cultural and creative industries in NDPs and NSDPs, which rose from 63% to 85%.

A closer examination of the recognition of cultural and creative industries in NDPs and NSDPs, reveals a notable shift among developed countries. Whereas they previously reported the least attention to cultural and creative industries (47%), they now report a substantial increase, reaching 81% in their Quadrennial Periodic Reports.

Overall, this trend suggests that both developing and developed countries increasingly acknowledge the value of contemporary creativity for sustainable development. Developing countries continue to report slightly higher levels of integration, with a difference of six percentage points. This pattern is consistent with previous reporting cycles, in which developing countries led efforts to integrate culture – and particularly cultural and creative industries – into development planning. While the gap remains small, it may indicate a more holistic approach to sustainable development among developing countries, persisting across reporting periods.

Figure 8.1

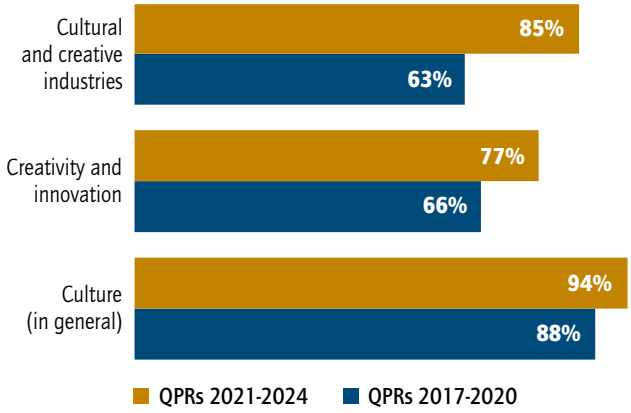
Proportion of Parties where public cultural bodies and agencies responsible for culture or creative industries are involved in the design and implementation of national development plans or national sustainable development plans, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Figure 8.2

Proportion of Parties that recognize cultural and creative industries in national development plans or national sustainable development plans



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

At the regional level, it is also worth noting that 100% of Parties in Arab States and 93% of those in Africa recognize the cultural and creative industries in their NDPs and NSDPs. In the Arab States, particularly within the Gulf States, there is currently sustained large-scale investment in both cultural infrastructure and the growth of creative industries. It is therefore no surprise that the Arab States region is most strongly associating 'creativity and innovation' with their NDPs and NSDPs, with 92% of Parties doing so.

The measures reported through the Quadrennial Periodic Reports underscore the central role of cultural and creative industries and innovation in the Arab region. For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi's Culture and Creative Industries Strategy (2020-2024) seeks to strengthen Abu Dhabi's position as a globally recognized centre of creative talent and a leading regional producer and exporter of creative and cultural content. It also seeks to position the cultural and creative industries as a critical contributor to liveability and vitality in the community, as well as to economic development and diversification, including job creation. The United Arab Emirates' broader 2031 Vision also links the cultural and creative industries to its ambition to foster innovation. Similarly, Kuwait's National Development Plan (2020-2025), themed around private sector development as an engine for economic expansion, positions the creative economy as a means to diversify growth. A key initiative is the proposed Kuwait Film Fund, signalling the country's view that media production can drive job creation, spur innovation and promote Kuwaiti arts and culture.

The Africa region also stands out for its strong emphasis on cultural and creative industries, reflected in the measures reported through the Quadrennial Periodic Reports. These measures highlight a significant focus on creative entrepreneurship and on formalizing and structuring the creative economy, as illustrated by the example from South Africa (Box 8.1). Ghana's National Medium-term Development Policy Framework (2022-2025) includes creative arts development as a key objective for economic development. Strategies include enforcing regulatory frameworks for the creative arts industry; strengthening the National Creative Arts Council; promoting public-private partnerships in the development of the creative arts industry; promoting partnerships and participation in global arts events and businesses; and strengthening institutional coordination. Kenya's Vision 2030 establishes culture as a national development pillar, linking identity, cohesion and tourism potential. The country's Fourth Medium Term Plan (2023-2027) includes 'the digital superhighway and creative economy' as a pillar.

Box 8.1 • South Africa: platforms, pipelines and live circuits for creative economy development

The public and private sectors in South Africa have developed a series of measures and platforms to support the cultural and creative industries. These include investments in development labs and residencies, support for venue networks and touring circuits to reach townships and secondary cities, and efforts to strengthen creative practice rights, Intellectual Property literacy and management skills.

One example is the cultural events investment programme of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture within the Mzansi Golden Economy initiative. The cultural events workstream supports large- and small-scale local, regional and national events that promote arts, culture and heritage and that contribute to local economic development, job creation and audience development.

Another example is Concerts SA, a joint South African-Norwegian live music development project involving the Southern African Music Rights Organisation and currently managed by IKS Cultural Consulting. By working with musicians, promoters, venue owners and audiences, and providing support to the sector through research and skills development for music professionals, the project aims to build a vibrant and viable live music circuit. Since 2012, it has focused on developing touring circuits in three provinces and connections with urban centres across the wider Southern African region. In 2014 it established a Mobility Fund, followed in 2020 by a Digital Mobility Fund in response to the challenges faced by the live music scene due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: South Africa QPR, 2022, 2024

From commitment to action: the remaining gap

For this report, a structured analysis of policy documents was conducted on a sample of 109 NDPs and NSDPs, of which 79 were newly identified from the 2021-2024 period and 30 remained valid from the analysis of the previous edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report. This in-depth content analysis revealed a more nuanced picture. The findings indicate a slight global decline in the proportion of countries referencing culture within their NDPs and NSDPs: from 80% in 2017-2020 to 77% in 2021-2024, primarily driven by a decrease among developed countries referencing culture in these documents.

However, a growing share of countries (56%) now includes specific cultural goals within the NDPs and NSDPs, up from 44% during the 2017-2020 reporting cycle. This notable increase has been driven almost entirely by developing countries, where the proportion rose by 19 percentage points (from 40% to 59%), compared to a modest three-point increase among developed countries (from 47% to 50%).

Yet, if 94% of Parties report that culture is recognized in their NDPs and NSDPs (Figure 8.2) and 77% explicitly refer to culture within their plans, only 56% include specific cultural goals. This indicates that a gap persists between general commitments and the translation of those commitments into concrete actions to actually embed culture into NDPs and NSDPs as a driver for sustainable development.

However, this gap is narrowing. In 2017-2020, the difference globally between the proportion of countries that only mentioned culture versus those that also included specific goals within NDPs and NSDPs was 38 percentage points. By 2021-2024, this formerly wide gap had narrowed to 21 percentage points. Again, developing countries have driven most of this progress – which may be due to a more strategic positioning of culture within national policy.

Monitoring and evaluation of culture-related outcomes

Contrary to the high level of participation of cultural bodies in development planning and the integration of culture within NDPs and NSDPs (Figures 8.1 and 8.2), the monitoring and evaluation of culture-related outcomes in these development plans is a minority pursuit. Out of 533 measures reported by Parties to the 2005 Convention to integrate culture into sustainable development frameworks, only 25% have been subject to monitoring and evaluation processes.

Monitoring and evaluation are key to assessing the progress of delivery and identifying what works, as well as providing a comprehensive assessment of outcomes and impacts. Parties have adopted a variety of approaches to this, sometimes supported by indicators and measurement frameworks. For example, the United Arab Emirates SDG Data Hub is a platform designed to monitor and track the nation's progress toward achieving the SDGs. Its main features include data collection and analysis from various sectors including culture and creative industries. Additionally, it has helped pinpoint gaps in progress, prompting targeted actions in areas that are falling behind.

Mexico reported creating the first key indicators for the culture sector through the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and the Ministry of Culture. Measurement of the cultural sector's economic impact was previously limited to the Cultural Satellite Account of Mexico. However, recognizing the need for more comprehensive data, efforts were made to gather additional information. This expanded dataset will allow greater utilization of statistical tools and instruments, enabling a deeper understanding of culture's role and its significance in the country's economic and social contributions.

Through the Colombia-Uruguay South-South Cooperation programme, Uruguay partnered with Colombia to create and adapt a Culture Satellite Account. This strengthened Uruguay's ability to monitor and measure the economic contribution of its creative industries – such as their impact on GDP and employment – over the long term. By developing new statistical methodologies and facilitating expert exchanges, the initiative established a solid foundation for evaluating sector outcomes and informing evidence-based policy.

To fill the gap of cultural indicators in the 17 SDGs, Estonia has introduced an 18th goal dedicated to 'the viability of the cultural space', which directs the Estonia 2035 action plan and other sustainable development frameworks. Estonia monitors its progress toward this goal via the Cultural Participation Survey, the most recent of which, conducted in 2024, indicated a return to pre-pandemic levels of 'general' cultural participation.

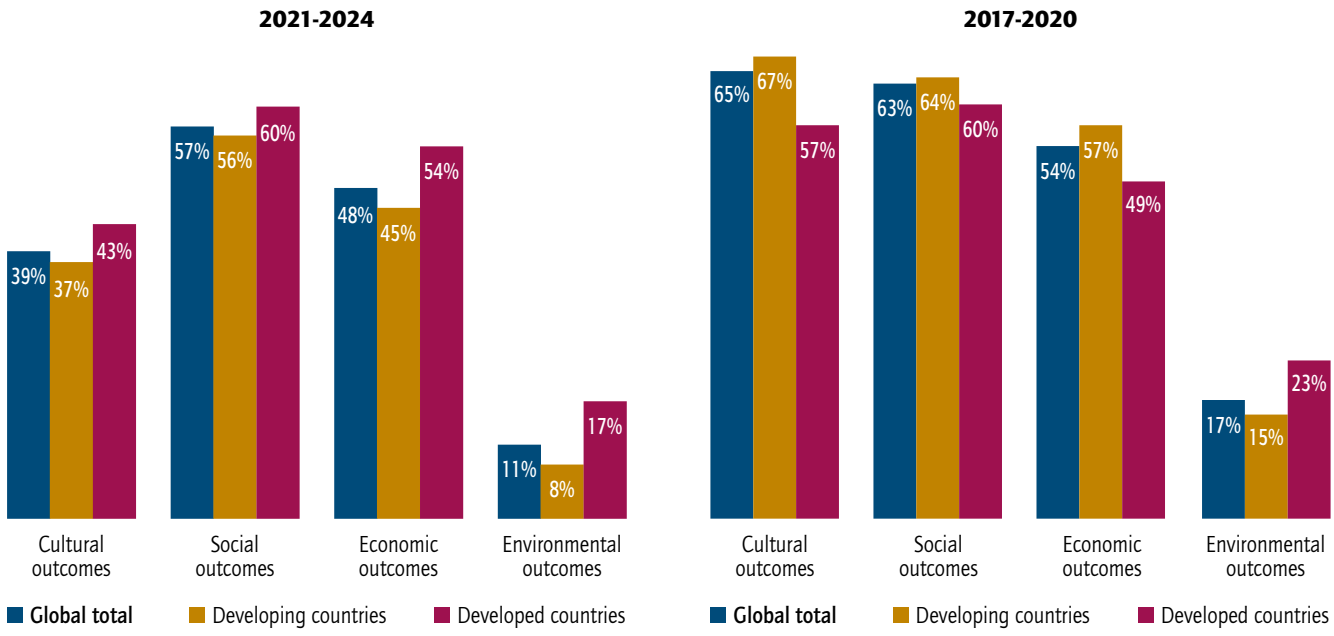
OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATING CULTURE IN NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Lowered expectations for outcomes

Another key trend linked to culture and sustainable development lies in how development plans articulate priority outcomes associated with culture. This trend is examined through an additional layer of analysis on a sample of NDPs and NSDPs (Figure 8.3). The analysis shows a global decrease between the 2017-2020 and 2021-2024 reporting cycles in the number of countries that have NDPs and NSDPs that explicitly incorporate culture to achieve specific cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes. This decline is observed across both developed and developing countries, with one notable exception: developed countries show an increase from 49% to 54% in references to culture as a driver of economic outcomes.

Figure 8.3

Percentage of countries using culture to achieve cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes, by developing and developed countries



Source: BOP Consulting (2025)

The document analysis shows that cultural outcomes, which had been the most prevalent outcomes intended to be achieved by including culture within NDPs and NSDPs during the 2017-2020 period, experienced the most significant decrease by 2021-2024. This resulted in only 39% of countries intending to generate cultural outcomes in 2021-2024, compared with 65% in the previous reporting period. As a result, cultural outcomes fell below both social and economic outcomes in the frequency with which they are mentioned. This conclusion may reflect the emphasis of post-pandemic strategies on social and economic recovery. However, given that social and economic outcomes have also declined, the sharper drop in cultural outcomes may signal a significant deprioritization of the creative sector in sustainable planning – a trend that could have long-term repercussions for other policy areas. In addition, renewed efforts to accelerate progress on the SDGs – amid growing awareness of limited progress – have not favoured culture, given its relatively modest presence in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Box 8.2 • Spain: cultural rights as a pillar of sustainable development

Spain introduced a Cultural Rights Plan in July 2025 following a participatory development process. The Plan represents a firm commitment to a new approach to cultural policies: an approach that places culture as a fundamental human right and a common good, inseparable from well-being, democracy and social justice. It is based on a commitment to cultural democracy and confidence in the transformative potential of culture to address challenges such as the ecological crisis, the redistribution of resources, democratic health and the active defence of fundamental rights. The Plan has two key objectives: organizing and promoting actions that strengthen the exercise of cultural rights in the short term, and building a medium- and long-term strategy that consolidates a coherent and lasting national system of cultural rights. This Plan builds on the legacy of Barcelona's Cultural Rights Plan introduced in 2021.

Source: Ministerio de Cultura, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental outcomes were already the least represented in development plans during the previous reporting cycle, and their inclusion has declined even further (Figure 8.3). In 2017-2020, only 17% of countries incorporated culture within their NDPs and NSDPs to advance environmental outcomes; by 2021-2024, this figure dropped to just 11%. This trend underscores the acute need for stronger advocacy on cultural-environmental linkages, which will be explored in this section.

In the previous edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, the climate challenge was examined from two perspectives. The first focused on the growing recognition of culture's untapped transformative potential for climate action, while the second emphasized that the cultural and creative sectors themselves contribute to climate change, highlighting the need to reduce their environmental impact. This chapter applies the same perspectives, aiming to capture progress through Quadrennial Periodic Report measures while adding new pieces to the puzzle using the latest available data.

Culture for climate adaptation and resilience

In 2022, the final declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 recognized culture as a global public good, affirming its intrinsic value to enable and drive sustainable development. The understanding that culture can play a pivotal role in disaster risk reduction and management, as well as in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies that reduce vulnerability and build resilience, has grown even stronger. Diverse cultural expressions are increasingly acknowledged for their ability to mobilize shared values and support behavioural change and societal transformation, which are essential for the future. As Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said at COP29 in Baku, in addition to reducing global emissions, 'arts and culture play a critical role in inspiring people to imagine and realize a low carbon, just and climate-resilient future' (UNFCCC, 2025).

Cultural and creative industries have been most closely associated with raising public awareness of climate change, particularly through storytelling, promoting civic engagement with ecological themes and fostering alternative pathways to address climate change (UNESCO, 2025a). UNESCO has taken a leading role in advancing the culture-climate nexus through a series of strategic actions, including normative frameworks, capacity building, technical assistance, knowledge production and advocacy. In March 2025, a Reflection Meeting on Culture and Climate Action was convened, bringing together 26 high-level experts and representatives of international organizations working at this intersection. The discussions and conclusions of this meeting are captured in the thematic paper *Culture and Climate Action: From Margins to Mainstream*, which calls on governments and international partners to recognize and harness the strategic power of culture as an integral dimension of the global response to climate change (UNESCO, 2025b). The Outcome Document of the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference in Barcelona reinforces this call, emphasizing the need to mobilize the transformative capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, industries and institutions to inspire and empower societies for meaningful climate action (UNESCO, 2025c).

Several countries are developing and implementing policy frameworks and support packages to help the cultural and creative sector respond to the climate crisis – both by reducing the sector's ecological footprint through incentives and funding schemes, and by enabling its active contribution to adaptation efforts. Ireland, for example, has introduced a National Policy Framework on Culture, Creativity and Climate Policy, and added a Creative Climate Action and Sustainability pillar to its Creative Ireland programme to drive climate awareness through arts and culture – an all-of-government initiative based in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media. Austria, recognizing the arts and culture sector's growing concern about ecological change and the need for environmental action – as well as the limited financial capacity of cultural institutions to drive transformation toward climate neutrality – allocated 15 million euros from the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility (within NextGenerationEU) to fund green investments in the cultural sector. In 2022 and 2023, this funding supported around 125 projects, such as installing photovoltaic systems, upgrading heating systems, constructing green roofs and facades, and adopting energy-efficient lighting.

Some countries are leveraging culture to amplify local and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives on environmental sustainability, alongside other cross-cutting policy priorities. The National Directorate of Diversity and Community Culture within the Ministry of Culture of Argentina organized the Sustainable Culture, Environment and Good Living Programme from 2020 to 2023 to strengthen social ties within the community and support the exchange of creative responses to ecological and well-being issues, with activities in several provinces and communities. In August 2023, the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in partnership with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Saudi National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, held a forum exploring the intersection of culture and the environment.

The discussions highlighted, among other themes, sustainable approaches to support the transition toward green culture and heritage through creative industries.

There are also instances of international cooperation and exchange that harness culture to address environmental sustainability, as illustrated by the example in Box 8.3.

Box 8.3 • International cooperation: Group of Friends for Culture-Based Climate Action

At the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP28), hosted by the United Arab Emirates in 2023, ministers of culture and government representatives from over 30 countries convened for the first High-Level Dialogue on Culture-Based Climate Action. They adopted a joint Declaration (GFCBCA, 2023) and launched the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action, the first international coalition of United Nations Member States of its kind, established under the joint leadership of the United Arab Emirates and Brazil. Co-chaired by the ministries of culture of the United Arab Emirates and Brazil, with UNESCO as Lead Knowledge Partner, this coalition of over 45 Member States (as of September 2025) and 25 international and civil society organizations seeks to advocate for and advance culture as a key driver of climate policy. The Group continues to grow its membership and strengthen alliances to advance knowledge sharing and support the inclusion of culture in national climate plans and strategies, thus contributing to advocating for a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Work Plan on Culture.

This global momentum was further strengthened at the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference, which served as a high-level political platform for culture and climate action through a dedicated ministerial meeting. On this occasion, the Group of Friends adopted the Barcelona Declaration (GFCBCA, 2025) and launched UNESCO's thematic paper *Culture and Climate Action: From Margins to Mainstream* (UNESCO, 2025b), which emphasizes that, beyond the UNFCCC process, the integration of culture into other global environmental fora remains largely insufficient. Building on these developments, at COP30, the Group of Friends proposed a plan to accelerate the inclusion of culture into National Adaptation Plans, as part of the COP30 Action Agenda. If adopted, this plan will be implemented from 2026 onward with UNESCO's support, translating political commitments into concrete, country-level action.

Source: United Arab Emirates QPR, 2024; GFCBCA, 2023, 2025; UNESCO, 2025b

However, despite the increasing urgency of environmental challenges, significant policy gaps persist. Climate considerations remain weakly integrated into cultural policy frameworks, and the cultural and creative sectors are nearly absent from national climate strategies – particularly National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions. To date, the culture-climate nexus has been addressed primarily through the lens of cultural heritage, with only a recent and emerging focus on culture and creative industries (UNESCO, 2025b).

Toward sustainable cultural and creative industries

The integration of climate objectives within cultural policy frameworks is gradually gaining importance, though it remains underutilized (UNESCO, 2025b). One of the reasons is that the environmental impact of the cultural and creative industries is often underestimated. There is no sector-wide approach to capturing data that cover the full scope of the carbon emissions or waste production of the cultural sector, and hence no global dataset. Measuring carbon emissions or waste systematically is still comparatively rare, and when it is undertaken, most assessments measure only Scope 1 emissions, with few capturing data for Scopes 2 or 3.[1] This gap can be attributed to barriers such as limited capacity, skills, resources and regulatory incentives, as well as the complexity of value chains.

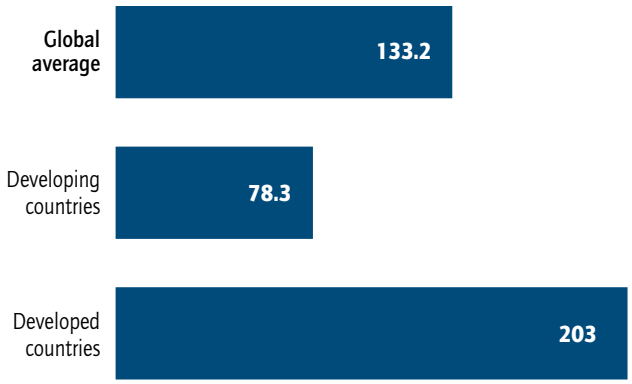
To address this data gap, an exploratory analysis estimates the carbon emissions of the global cultural and creative industries. The analysis brings together estimates of the contribution of cultural and creative industries to GDP in 86 UNESCO Member States (where data are available) with estimates of national carbon dioxide emissions for those same countries. The analysis assumes that the share of national carbon emissions attributable to the cultural and creative industries is proportional to the sector's contribution to GDP in the country. While the relationship between GDP and sectoral emissions is not, in reality, straightforward, this assumption enables an estimate to be made using a consistent methodology across multiple countries and regions. A key limitation is that the results are inevitably sensitive to the quality of national carbon emissions reporting data. Nonetheless, this exploratory analysis provides an initial step to address this data gap and underscores the need for more targeted research and policy making.

1. Scope 1 refers to an organization's direct greenhouse gas emissions. Scopes 2 and 3 address indirect emissions, resulting either from the generation of electricity, heating, etc., for the organization (Scope 2) or from the organization's activities (Scope 3).

The sample totals 86 countries, of which 43% are developed and 57% are developing countries. Collectively, these economies account for 88% of global GDP and therefore provide a strong basis from which to estimate the sector's likely global impact. As can be seen, the average CO_2 emissions for the cultural and creative sector in developed countries in 2022, adjusted for population, was 203 kilograms per capita. This was more than twice the average for the sector per capita in developing countries (78 kilograms). Across the 86 countries as a whole, the estimated CO_2 emissions in 2022 for the cultural and creative industries was 1,028 million tonnes. This is roughly equivalent to global CO_2 emissions from land-use change and forestry (1,145 million tonnes), but only about one-eighth of emissions from transport (7,941 million tonnes), or one-sixth of those from manufacturing and construction (6,261 million tonnes).[2]

Figure 8.4

Estimated country average of annual production-based emissions of carbon dioxide from the cultural and creative industries, in kilograms per capita, by developing and developed countries (2022)



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention) / Our World in Data and Climate Watch (2025) / World Bank (2025) / OECD / BOP Consulting (2025)

While the lack of harmonization among existing tools for measuring carbon emissions in the cultural and creative industries is a key issue, an equally critical aspect is ensuring these assessments are integrated into national climate mitigation commitments, given the persistent tendency toward siloed policy making (UNESCO, 2025b).

2. All emissions data are from Climate Watch (2025), processed by Our World in Data, retrieved from: https://ourworldindata.org/emissions-by-sector. It should be noted that definitions of the cultural and creative industries vary by country. They are generally expected to include a core set of arts and cultural sectors, with variation in the inclusion or exclusion of other creative sectors (fashion, broadcasting, press, etc.). As a result of this lack of standardized reporting, it is not possible to determine which specific domains are represented in this exploratory analysis.

Despite the lack of cross-sectoral methods for quantifying the emissions of the sector, there are nonetheless several examples from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports of sector-wide policies that are supporting the culture sector to improve its environmental practices. These include the provision of funding and capacity building, such as the Arts Council of Ireland's 2024 Climate Action and Environmental Policy, which positions the arts at the forefront of climate and environmental action. The Council has also introduced climate and environmental training and resources to support the sector in delivering the ambitions of the policy. The Government of Slovenia included the Green Transition in Culture project in the Decree on the Use of Funds from the Climate Change Fund for 2023-2026. The project supports the adoption of green practices and promotes the development of innovative green approaches for public institutions and non-governmental organizations. It aims to improve the management of organizations, venues and cultural events, as well as raise public awareness of the importance of the green transition. At the regional level, the SHIFT Culture eco-certification is a bespoke scheme that provides European cultural networks and platform organizations with the tools, knowledge and guidance to become eco-certified.

Collaboration between government and the culture sector itself is also key to the development of policies and measures for sustainable environmental transformation. In 2023, Germany launched the Green Culture hub through a participatory process involving stakeholders from the cultural sector, government and civil society. Funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the hub supports cultural, creative, and media sectors in Germany in transitioning to climate-friendly operations and reaching the target of climate neutrality by 2045. Its dedicated online platform[3] further supports the sector by providing advice, networking opportunities and industry-specific knowledge.

There are also detailed approaches to assessing carbon emissions that are specific to different cultural domains and subsectors, which utilize a range of tools and methodologies adapted to each subsector's value chains, infrastructure and practices. For example, TV 2 Denmark's sustainability initiative aims to improve the environmental sustainability of television production in the country. As the country's largest broadcaster, TV 2 Denmark requires every production company to submit a sustainability plan and provide a detailed account of the production's CO_2 impact for each television programme. These requirements are now embedded in the standard contractual terms when external production companies sell their programmes to TV 2.

3. www.greenculture.info.

The initiative has generally received positive feedback from production companies, and early indicators suggest that the market has embraced the change. In Italy, Green Film, initiated by the marketing agency Trentino Sviluppo S.P.A. in partnership with the Trentino Film Commission and the Province of Trento, is a rating system and certification for sustainable film production. The organization also provides a tool designed to promote sustainability for audio-visual productions and to guide producers.

Data from initiatives at the subsector level provide some indication of where the most significant impacts might be emerging. The carbon footprint of music and video streaming is one such area of negative and growing climate impacts. Emerging technologies, particularly Generative Artificial Intelligence, accelerate the energy demands involved with streaming. While streaming is often perceived as a more sustainable alternative to physical media, reducing plastic waste and transport emissions, its climate impact is far from negligible. Storing, processing and transferring digital data across the globe requires enormous energy resources. On average, one hour of media streaming generates about 55 grams of CO_2 equivalent, with most emissions coming from the end-user device (Carbon Trust, 2021). As of 2023, global music streaming subscribers surpassed 700 million, an increase of 90 million from the previous year, bringing the industry closer to the one-billion-user milestone (Mulligan, 2024).

However, there are few governmental measures to address the environmental impacts of music and video streaming or other forms of digital content, such as virtual production in film, television and gaming. While investments in next-generation computing may reduce the intensity of this energy demand, the impacts will continue to evolve. It is therefore even more critical that the policy landscape prioritizes resources to address this evolving landscape.

EQUITY AND ACCESS TO DIVERSE CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Culture for urban and regional development and revitalization

As the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report in 2022 stated, by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas, while 80% of global GDP is already produced by cities (UN, 2022). Furthermore, policy makers at municipal and other subnational tiers of government are closer to their citizens than those in national governments and are also typically able to move much faster. Combined with the strong intrinsic links between culture and place, these factors have meant that policy makers engaged in urban and regional development have often driven the integration of culture within sustainable development strategies. There is a real sense that subnational territories – cities in particular – operate effectively as 'policy labs' for trialling and iterating new policy and practice as regards culture and sustainable development (UNESCO and World Bank, 2021). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development builds on this, highlighting local authorities as strategic partners. Involving subnational authorities, as well as ensuring adequate resources and capacity, is particularly crucial for the concrete achievement of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Analysis of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports data demonstrates that the already widespread implementation of culture-based regeneration and revitalization initiatives and projects at regional, urban or rural levels, has grown again over the most recent reporting cycle. The proportion of Parties that report having implemented such cultural industry-based regeneration initiatives rose from 73% in 2017-2020 to 85% in 2021-2024 (Figure 8.5). While this increase was common across both developed and developing countries, it was greater among the latter, rising by 14 percentage points compared with 8 percentage points across developed countries.

Box 8.4 • Peru: regional and provincial culture plans to 2030

Endorsed in December 2022 through Regional Ordinance No. 361-GRJ/CR, the Regional Culture Plan 2022-2030 in Junín represents Peru's first regional-level public policy specifically addressing culture as a development axis. The strength of this initiative lies in its comprehensive territorial approach that acknowledges culture's multidimensional role in development. Recognizing the unique needs of Indigenous peoples, supporting cultural agents whose livelihoods depend on creative industries and protecting the region's vulnerable cultural heritage, the Plan establishes a structured framework for reducing gaps in the exercise of cultural rights across the region. Following the regional government's lead, the provincial municipalities of Huancayo, Jauja and Tarma each approved their own Provincial Cultural Plans through dedicated ordinances, creating a harmonized policy environment from the regional to local level. This coordinated effort reflects successful implementation of the National Culture Policy's Guideline 6.4, which calls for 'sectoral, intersectoral and intergovernmental articulation mechanisms' throughout Peru.

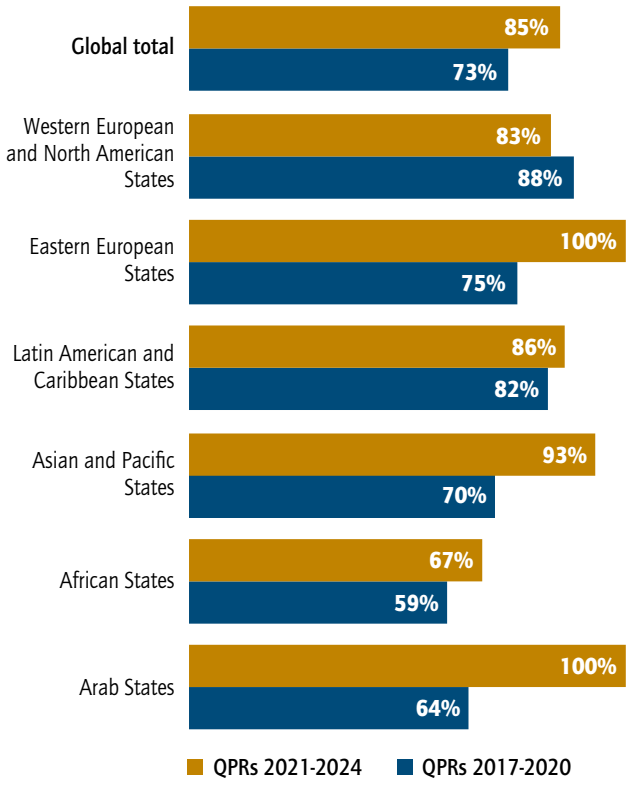
Source: Peru QPR, 2024

This increase is due largely to significant increases in the Arab States (up 36 percentage points), Eastern Europe (up 25 points) and Asia and Pacific (up 23 points). Meanwhile, Western Europe and North America is the only region that observed a reduction (down 5 points).

Interestingly, the measures reported by Parties through the Quadrennial Periodic Reports tend to focus on secondary cities and rural territories, suggesting a shift away from major urban centres toward smaller, less dense communities (BOP Consulting and KRIHS, 2019). Examples include Australia's Regional Arts Fund, which supports arts projects and professional development in remote communities targeting disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Georgia's Integrated Regional Development Programme (2020-2022) revitalized cultural infrastructure in four pilot regions to reduce socio-economic disparities with urban centres. In Costa Rica, *Arte Sobre Ruedas* (Arts on Wheels) brings technical workshops and art seminars to rural communities, promoting cultural resilience.

Figure 8.5

Proportion of Parties that have implemented cultural industry-based regeneration initiatives and projects at regional, urban and/or rural levels, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Slovakia's Ministry of Culture distributed a policy toolkit to over 150 municipalities and cultural institutions to strengthen cultural and creative industries, offering strategies for policy making, strategic planning, mapping, data collection, implementation and evaluation.

In addition, some Parties to the Convention have strengthened the ability of regions and communities to design policies and plan cultural development in accordance with their own needs. For instance, the Canada Council for the Arts uses a co-delivery model that decentralizes cultural policy making, empowering provinces and Indigenous authorities. Through three partnerships in the North, it expands access for artists in Inuit homelands and supports them on their own terms. In Africa, Burkina Faso's cultural development councils connect local deliberation with national policy, creating continuity from grassroots initiatives to national strategies.

The unequal distribution of cultural infrastructure

Culture takes many forms across different countries, regions and groups. In turn, different cultural forms determine the nature of, and demand for, the provision of cultural infrastructure in any given territory. Clearly, cultural infrastructure is not the only factor in enabling cultural participation, either for practitioners or for audience members, visitors or users. But the availability, relevance and quality of cultural infrastructure is almost always a necessary factor in supporting the effective exercise of cultural rights.

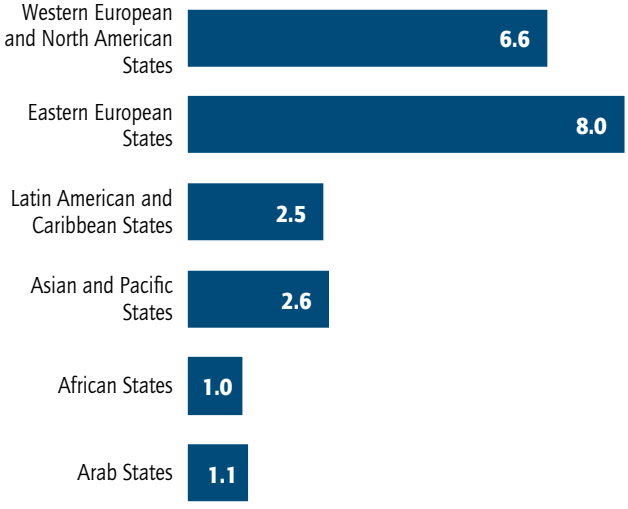
However, assessing citizens' access to cultural infrastructure is a notoriously difficult task – both conceptually, given the diversity of infrastructure types, and practically, because of difficulties in collecting consistent data. This chapter draws on analysis of a rare big data source of approximately 28,000 geo-coded cultural facilities, drawn from 244 cities across 105 countries, covering all regions, ranging from cities with a population of over 100,000 to those of 10+ million. The cultural facilities are limited to four venue-based categories – cinemas, libraries, museums and concert halls – and data on each facility type were collected using a consistent method across all cities. The analysis has some key limitations, in particular the bias toward a Global North conception of cultural infrastructure.

Despite these constraints, the data and analysis are revealing as to the extent of the disparities that exist across cities in different regions, and between cities in developed and developing countries. The data clearly suggest that territories with lower income levels will have access to fewer cultural facilities, as borne out by the average numbers of cultural facilities in cities per 100,000 people across developed countries (6.2 facilities) versus those in developing countries (2.1 facilities).

Less obviously, the fact that cities from Eastern European states have the highest average number of cultural facilities per capita (8 facilities) suggests that history also determines levels of cultural infrastructure (Figure 8.6). In this case, many Eastern European countries have benefited from both an earlier legacy of royal or imperial investment in cultural facilities, as well as major state investment in cultural infrastructure throughout most of the 20th century. However, it is worth noting that the sample of cities in Eastern Europe consists largely of capital cities – similar to some other regions (for instance, Africa, Asia and Pacific) but unlike others, such as Western Europe and North America as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, where the samples include many secondary cities. This may partly account for some of the observed differences.

Figure 8.6

Average density of cultural infrastructure across 244 cities, facilities per 100,000 people, by region



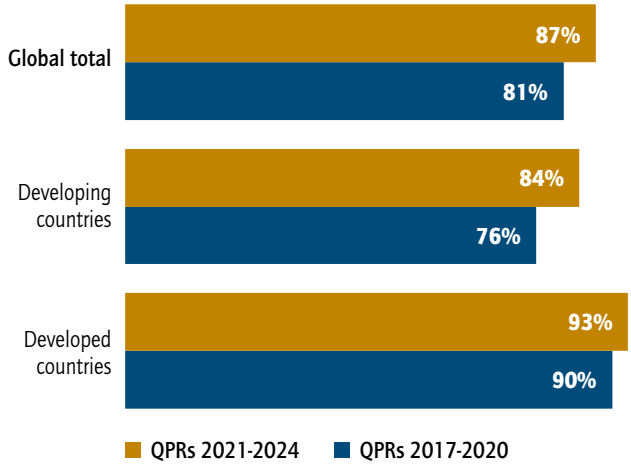
Source: BOP Consulting (2025)

Discrepancies in cultural participation

The 2005 Convention requires its Parties to facilitate participation in cultural life, including the ability to contribute to cultural life and to access a diverse range of cultural facilities and expressions. This obligation applies particularly to measures that address the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups. The existence of these policies was widespread across Parties within the last reporting period, but increased again, rising from 81% of all Parties in 2017-2020 to 87% in 2021-2024. While a higher proportion of developed countries report implementing these policies (93%), developing countries are closing the gap (at 84%, up from 76% in the previous period).

Figure 8.7

Proportion of Parties that have implemented policies or measures facilitating participation in cultural life and access to diverse cultural facilities and expressions, notably addressing the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Moving beyond assessing the existence of policies that support access and participation to measuring levels of actual cultural participation by citizens is again challenging. As with cultural infrastructure, what counts as cultural participation varies by context, and the practical collation of data is expensive, being rooted in large-scale population surveys.

While there is no comprehensive and consistent secondary global dataset to draw on, there are regional sources. In particular, Eurostat periodically assesses cultural participation across countries that are members of the European Union and other European institutions (such as the Council of Europe). Notwithstanding their limitations, the most recent Eurostat data are valuable in demonstrating disparities in cultural participation, ranging from 18% of the population in Türkiye having participated in at least one cultural activity during 2022, to 78% in Luxembourg. Countries' relative wealth, the availability and equitable distribution of cultural infrastructure, and demographic factors are likely to influence these differences. There are also significant intra-country differences in cultural participation by age, with young people participating the most consistently across all countries (Eurostat, 2022).

This finding is particularly important as older people stand to gain greatly from participating in culture in terms of their health and well-being (Murtin, 2024). The data clearly show also the influence of education levels on cultural participation.

Patterns are consistent across countries: individuals with higher education tend to participate more in cultural activities, while those with lower formal qualifications participate the least. The gap is wide: in 19 of the 26 European Union countries analysed, participation rates among people with tertiary education are at least twice that of those with only lower secondary education (Eurostat, 2024). These findings reinforce the need for policy to ensure that socio-economic characteristics and age are among the factors considered when governments design cultural participation policies to address the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

In fact, analysis of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports shows that there are indeed fewer examples of measures reported by Parties that aim to increase cultural participation among older people. One initiative is the Arts and Older People Programme, run in the United Kingdom by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. This programme aims to strengthen the voice of older people and promote positive mental health and emotional well-being through the arts. In 2022-2023, it engaged over 2,000 participants.

In comparison, many Parties have presented a range of culture-led programmes for youth to address low rates of participation. For example, Cyprus has adopted a measure to support greater levels of participation among this demographic.

Box 8.5 • Portugal: National Plan for the Arts

The aim of Portugal's National Plan for the Arts (2019-2029) is to position culture systemically in schooling to widen equitable access to arts and culture nationwide. A dedicated task force works with local governments, higher education institutions, schools, artists, cultural and arts organizations, private entities and civil society, with the aim of giving a central place to arts and heritage in the daily lives of children and young citizens. The Plan positions schools as cultural centres, and cultural institutions as educational spaces, expanding opportunities to integrate cultural education in citizens' daily lives and reducing inequity in distribution across territories and socio-economic groups. It supports active citizenship and seeks to foster a sense of belonging in local communities. More than 300 schools are engaged in this initiative. The Plan aligns with the Porto Santo Charter, a Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union initiative (2021) that sets out a map of principles and recommendations for developing a working paradigm of cultural democracy in Europe.

Source: Portugal QPR, 2024

The Youth Culture Card is a prepaid card loaded with 220 euros that allows young people, aged 18 years old, to attend concerts, festivals, theatre, dance performances, art exhibitions, film screenings, and arts festivals, as well as visit museums and archaeological sites free of charge. Mauritius' National Youth Policy was launched by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation. The policy has several key objectives, including provision of high-quality leisure activities designed to foster the self-development of young people. Two key activities are street dance battles and talent showcases, designed to support young people to express themselves and develop creative skills.

Additionally, Parties reported a range of strategies to address participation gaps through broader regeneration and social development initiatives. For instance, across Parties in Europe, public libraries are playing an increasingly strategic role in culture-led regeneration and increasing cultural participation. The non-profit organization EDUCAB Romania has transformed libraries in small communities in Romania into inclusive cultural hubs, facilitating many events for under-served communities, ranging from theatre and movie nights to digital literacy workshops and job skills training sessions. It has also supported the development of services for Ukrainian refugees in Romanian public libraries. The International Organization for Migration has supported these transformations, helping to redesign library spaces to be more open and accessible, facilitating greater community engagement and support.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Culture's presence in development cooperation strategies

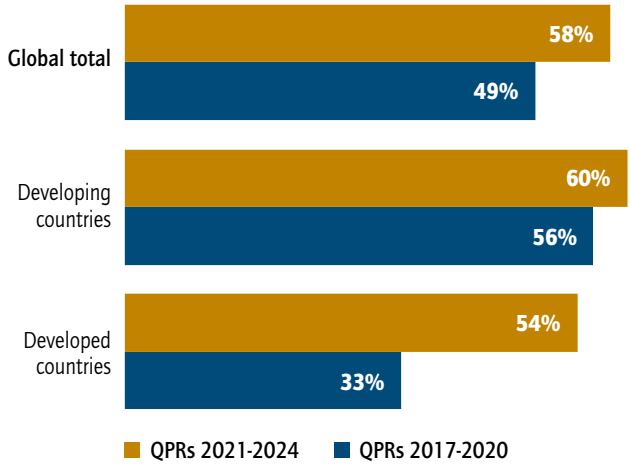
The 2005 Convention highlights the importance of deepening international cooperation to nurture diverse cultural expressions and boost the cultural sector in developing countries. These goals can only be fulfilled through the deliberate integration of culture into bilateral, regional and international frameworks and programmes for sustainable development.

Globally, the majority of Parties now report the integration of culture within their development cooperation strategies, with this proportion increasing from just under half of Parties (49%) in the 2017-2020 reporting period to 58% in 2021-2024 (Figure 8.8). This was driven by a sharp increase across developed countries (21 percentage points). The comparable rise across developing countries was much smaller (4 percentage points), but this was starting from a much higher base (56% in 2017-2020, compared with 33% in developed countries).

Regional analysis shows that the greatest increase in Parties reporting development cooperation strategies was seen across Eastern European States (14% to 41%) and African States (39% to 62%).

Figure 8.8

Proportion of Parties with development cooperation strategies, including South-South cooperation strategies, that recognize the strategic role of creativity and diverse cultural expressions, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Reported development cooperation measures include Norway's 2021 strategy integrating freedom of expression into foreign and development policy, creating safe environments for freedom of speech and support systems for artists who are at risk. Since 2017, Monaco has partnered with the Fondation Alliance Française on the Alliance 3.0 Project to bridge the digital divide and boost employability for disadvantaged communities – especially women and youth – across seven African countries (Burundi, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia). A relevant example of South-South cooperation is provided by India and the United Republic of Tanzania, who signed a cultural exchange programme (2023-2027) to deepen cultural relations between the two countries, while also working toward shared goals to support the development of cultural and creative industries in alignment with broader development goals. In 2022, Cambodia and other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the Siem Reap Declaration to strengthen regional cooperation on cultural and creative industries, leading to initiatives such as Cambodia's post-COVID-19 recovery programme for artisans implemented by the Royal University of Fine Arts of Cambodia with support from the ASEAN Cultural Fund.

Other regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have explored avenues for collaboration in the development of the cultural and creative sector. At the 2024 Council of Heads of Government meeting held in Islamabad, Belarus and other member states adopted the Framework for Cooperation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States in the Sphere of Development of the Creative Economy.

In the Pacific, the Pacific Regional Culture Strategy 2022-2032 advances a long-term goal to improve cultural development outcomes through regional cooperation. It sets out five priorities to foster partnerships and strengthen accountability: cultural policy frameworks, cultural heritage, cultural well-being, cultural innovation and cultural statistics. The strategy is led by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community – an international development organization representing 27 Pacific Island countries and territories – and is overseen by the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture and by Pacific ministers of culture.

Regional development banks and international development

While policy makers increasingly acknowledge culture's importance for sustainable development, this recognition must be translated into proportional funding for this to be effective. It is clear from the analysis of public budgets for culture contained within Chapter 1 of this report that culture-dedicated budget lines will be insufficient to support culture's holistic role within sustainable development. Another way that culture's integration within sustainable development can be funded from public sources is through international development aid. However, data suggest that currently little of this is spent on culture.

According to 2022 data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on Country Programmable Aid (CPA),[4] the proportion of CPA that was spent on culture and recreation in 2022 was just US$231 million, or 0.15% of total CPA. Donor countries providing culture and recreation CPA were heavily concentrated in a handful of countries, mainly in Europe and in Asia and the Pacific, with the top four countries (France, Japan, Türkiye and Spain) accounting for half of the total.

4. Previous editions of the *Re|Shaping* report analysed data on Official Development Assistance for culture and recreation, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. However, these data have not been updated since the last report. For this reason, the present chapter relies on Country Programmable Aid (CPA). CPA refers to the portion of development assistance that is planned over several years at the country or regional level and over which recipient countries have, or could have, a meaningful degree of influence. As it reflects more closely the aid that actually reaches countries, CPA is widely used as a reliable proxy for country-level aid flows. At the time of publication, CPA data were available only for the year 2022.

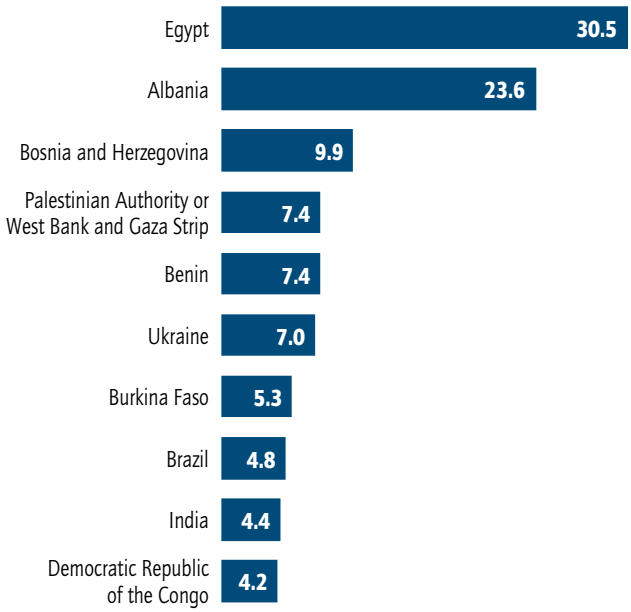
The distribution of culture and recreation-related CPA also does not appear to align closely with levels of need (Figure 8.9). In 2022, while Egypt received US$30.5 million in culture and recreation CPA – the largest amount among the top ten recipients – the Least Developed Countries collectively received only US$41.6 million (representing 18% of total cultural CPA) despite their substantial infrastructure gaps. This small funding allocation contrasts sharply with the cross-cutting role that culture is recognized to play in inclusion, livelihoods and territorial development.

At the same time, international development aid budgets are likely to decline in the near term as a result of recent geopolitical shifts. This contraction is already affecting funding for cultural civil society organizations, with early impacts becoming evident (see Chapter 4 for further detail).

Aside from CPA, the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) remains severely underfunded. Funds within the IFCD are counted in Official Development Assistance figures, and the IFCD provides funding for structural policy processes that are seldom invested in by other funding sources, making it worthy of analysis. It has annual contributions of around US$1 million (UNESCO, 2023).

Figure 8.9

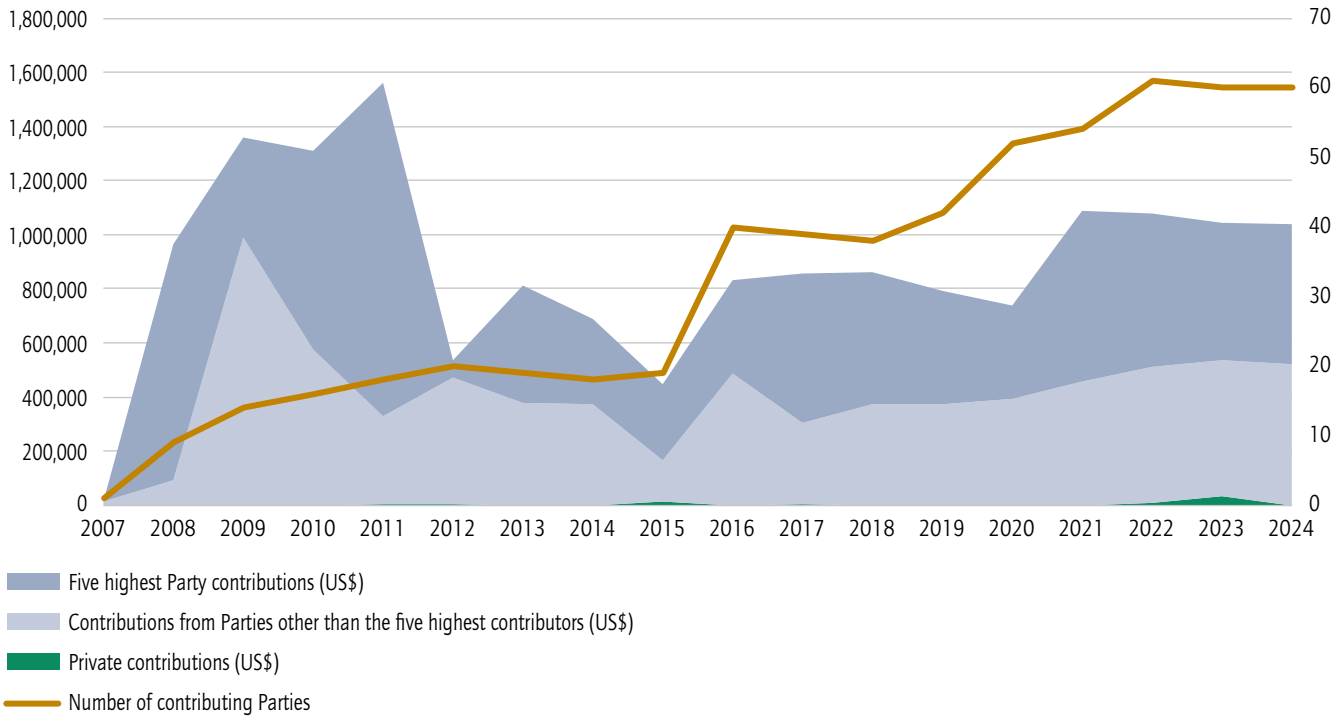
Ten largest culture and recreation Country Programmable Aid recipients, US$ million (2022)



Source: OECD (2025) / BOP Consulting (2025)

Figure 8.10

Contributions to the International Fund for Cultural Diversity (2007-2024)



Source: UNESCO (2025d)

The number of contributing Parties has fluctuated over time but has recently stabilized: rising from 54 in 2021 to 61 in 2022, then remaining steady at around 60 up to 2024 (Figure 8.10). One of the Fund's vulnerabilities lies in its heavy reliance on a small number of countries' voluntary contributions. For instance, over the 2021-2024 period, France's significant contribution (US$1.15 million) is nearly three times that of the second largest donor, Germany (US$0.45 million). Such figures illustrate the concentration risk if major donors scale back (UNESCO, 2025d). The private contributions continue to be minimal.

Still, the multi-donor nature of the IFCD facilitates support for targeted sustainable development initiatives that are in line with both national priorities and international goals for sustainable development. For example, IFCD funding to the association Alwan wa Awtar in Egypt supported training for cultural practitioners to strengthen their knowledge and skills regarding the relationship between culture and sustainable development, enabling project participants to implement culture-driven activities addressing local development challenges. These initiatives tackled the needs of Egyptian, Sudanese and Nubian community members, reinforcing the international cooperative character of the project and the IFCD. In Ghana, the IFCD supported the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts to revise the national cultural policy. The resulting draft revision includes a section dedicated to mainstreaming culture into national development strategies to accelerate poverty reduction and foster sustainable economic growth. The accompanying implementation plan lays out over 60 individual policies to support this objective, with a foreseen budget of 234 million Ghanaian cedis for 2025 to 2030.

One positive aspect of financing culture within sustainable development is the role played by regional and international development banks. As recorded in the previous edition of the *Re|Shaping* report, international development banks are active investors in the creative and cultural sector. During 2021-2024, this was particularly apparent in creative economy investments in Africa. In 2021, the African Development Bank approved a loan facility of US$170 million to fund a digital and creative enterprises programme in Nigeria. The financing helped Nigeria to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and was intended to 'build back better, greener, and more inclusively' (AFDB, 2021), creating more sustainable jobs for entrepreneurs in early-stage technology startups or in creative small and medium-sized enterprises. The programme was co-financed by the Agence Française de Développement and the Islamic Development Bank. In 2024, Afreximbank, the Pan-African trade and export development bank, committed to increase its funding to the Creative Africa Nexus (CANEX) programme from US$1 billion to US$2 billion over the next three years. CANEX's activities include providing financial products and training programmes, facilitating market access, and advocating for better policies for the sector.

Over this reporting period, the Inter-American Development Bank also reflected on the learning from their ten years of pioneering investment in the cultural and creative industries, which totalled more than US$2.5 billion between 2013 and 2022, across 126 projects (IDB, 2023). Projects covered a wide range of areas that included urban and local development; digitization of the cultural and creative industries; support for independent creative workers; financial mechanisms to foster the creative economy; export and trade promotion; opportunities for social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development; and institutional support in terms of policy development and capacity building for governments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parties to the Convention:

- Strengthen the integration of culture in development planning.
  - Institutionalize the involvement of national cultural bodies and agencies in all national development plans (NDPs) and national sustainable development plans (NSDPs).
  - Move from symbolic recognition to concrete action by setting clear cultural objectives in NDPs and NSDPs, supported by measurable indicators.
  - Strengthen monitoring and evaluation by developing tools to assess culture-related measures, thereby helping to address accountability gaps and capture culture's multidimensional contributions to sustainable development beyond GDP.
- Harness culture for environmental sustainability.
  - Integrate culture-climate action into national and regional strategies, emphasizing the contributions of culture and the creative industries to green innovation, adaptation and mitigation efforts.
  - Develop standardized methods for measuring the carbon footprint of the culture sector, and encourage publicly funded institutions and projects to have sustainability plans and to provide detailed accounts of their CO_2 impact.
  - Promote greener management practices in cultural institutions, venues and events.
  - Build capacity and incentives for cultural institutions to adopt low-carbon practices.
  - Recognize and promote the role of culture in supporting behavioural change and the societal transformation needed to achieve environmental sustainability.
- Expand cultural infrastructure and participation.
  - Promote culture-based regeneration as a tool for sustainable urban and rural development. Ensure long-term investment through multi-level government involvement and co-funding, as well as through private sector partnerships.
  - Strengthen the ability of regions and communities to design policies and plan cultural development in response to local needs.
  - Scale up inclusive cultural participation policies by prioritizing disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Ensure that these policies are supported by adequate resources and reflect culture's role in fostering social cohesion.
  - Invest in low-income areas to reduce disparities in access to cultural facilities and services.
- Foster international cooperation.
  - Integrate culture systematically into bilateral, regional and international sustainable development frameworks and development cooperation strategies.
  - Increase the share of development aid allocated to culture, beyond the current 0.15% of Country Programmable Aid, and explore the feasibility of establishing a minimum benchmark.
  - Encourage voluntary contributions to the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, strengthening its capacity to support targeted sustainable development initiatives aligned with national and global priorities.
  - Engage regional and international development banks and private investors to expand financing for the creative economy, building on successful intra- and inter-regional initiatives.

For UNESCO and other international organizations:

- Continue leveraging periodic reporting and existing programmes to generate evidence-based knowledge on culture and sustainable development, and share actionable insights with Parties and stakeholders to the Convention.
- Advocate for stronger recognition of culture's multidimensional contributions to sustainable development, beyond GDP metrics.
- Strengthen advocacy linking culture and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the role of creative expressions in fostering environmentally responsible behaviour. Promote the explicit and appropriate inclusion of cultural and creative industries in countries' National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions, helping to address major policy gaps.
- Develop a global framework to measure the environmental impact of cultural and creative industries, including carbon emissions and waste generation. Promote the integration of such assessments within national climate mitigation commitments, and encourage policy coherence across sectors.
- Promote the development of cultural infrastructure in low-income areas, including by engaging regional and international development banks as active investors to help reduce reported disparities.
- Monitor and update data on culture and recreation-related Official Development Assistance.
- Advocate at the international level for a progressive increase in the share of development aid allocated to culture within Country Programmable Aid.

Goal 4

PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

© Henrik Kam Photography Inc., *2 dancers in the hallway of 500 Capp St**

Chapter 9

Gender equality: not an optional extra

Bridget Conor

KEY FINDINGS

- There has been a steady increase of gender-related measures reported by Parties, providing more evidence that gender equality is gaining prominence in global cultural policy making. This upward trend reveals both wider recognition of gender equality and a growing diversity of initiatives and actions across regions.
- Despite these indicators of progress, several countries have seen a decline or significant defunding of governmental bodies responsible for gender equality. The proportion of countries reporting ministries or government bodies that oversee gender equality for artists and cultural professionals has dropped from 72% in 2017-2020 to 69% in 2021-2024, with the most pronounced reductions occurring in developing countries. This decline suggests that gender equality is perceived by some countries as an added bonus rather than as a core mission. This perception is now dovetailing with a widespread backlash against, and rollback of programmes supporting, gender equality and inclusion.
- Global cultural policies continue to reflect gender imbalances. Efforts to promote women's participation in cultural life remain more focused on women as audiences and consumers than as creators, professionals or leaders. This trend mirrors persistent gender stereotypes and structural barriers, including unequal access to stable employment, large pay gaps and the chronic under-representation of women in leadership positions across arts and media organizations. While the global share of women heading national arts or cultural institutions has steadily increased from 31% in 2017 to 46% in 2024, the disparities between developed and developing countries have widened, with women representing 64% of leaders in developed countries but only 30% in developing ones.
- Amid the global contraction of government initiatives promoting inclusion and diversity, civil society organizations are taking the lead in advancing gender equality. They are adopting a wide range of measures spanning advocacy, policy monitoring and capacity building.
- Where gender-disaggregated data is collected consistently and over time, it provides clear evidence of how progress towards gender equality is being made. However, both horizontal and vertical gender segregation remain entrenched across cultural and media sectors, and overall, global data collection continues to be fragmented.
- Developing countries most frequently report training and mentoring schemes that foster professional development for women by equipping them with creative, technical and managerial skills. In contrast, developed countries most often report research and monitoring initiatives that track gender disparities and strengthen the evidence base for policy making.
- The wave of post-#MeToo measures represents important progress but should be understood in the context of increasing technology-facilitated gender-based bias, harassment and abuse. In this evolving area, all stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, multilateral organizations and researchers, need to build and share knowledge, particularly regarding emerging forms of gender-based bias and harassment occurring on social media and within GenAI environments.
- Gender-based segregation, bias and discrimination are newly prominent in digital workplaces and spaces. Women are being systematically excluded from these fast-growing digital creative sectors (such as the gaming industry) and face barriers in accessing highly remunerated positions.
- Digital platforms and tools have potential to support broader gender equality policies and objectives. Notably, training and capacity-building initiatives are supporting women artists, entrepreneurs and creators to acquire new skills on social media and other online tools, which they can use to produce, circulate and monetize their work.
- There is growing attention to gender diversity, with an increasing number of Parties and civil society organizations adopting gender-inclusive language policies across the creative sectors. These efforts are accompanied by initiatives to reduce the stigma faced by trans and non-binary populations, support the visibility of their work, and strengthen measures to prevent gender-based violence in the workplace.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Women creators face persistent barriers

- **Unstable work**
- **Pay gaps**
- **Under-representation in leadership positions**
- **Online harassment**
- **Horizontal and vertical gender segregation in tech-focused sectors**

PROGRESS

Gender mainstreaming is expanding in cultural governance structures, closing gender equality gaps. These include:

- Training for public officials and interministerial task forces
- Knowledge exchange with other governments

Civil society is driving gender equality measures in advocacy, policy monitoring and capacity building, amid global contractions

Women's representation in cultural fields is rising

Biennale representation	42%	53%
Best director	24%	28%
Acts at electronic music festivals	9%	30%
Top 100 most performed living composers	11%	32%

CHALLENGES

- **Public bodies** responsible for gender equality are declining **72% → 69%**
- **Gender stereotypes** persist in policy measures: Women are more often addressed as audiences/consumers (**82%**) than as creators, professionals or leaders (**77%**)
- **Women's leadership** in national arts councils in developing countries is declining **36% → 30%**
- **Women** are substantially **under-represented in tech-focused sectors**

Tech-enabled gender bias, harassment and abuse are on the rise and need immediate action

EMERGING TRENDS

Policy focus differs:

From **developing countries** prioritizing training and mentoring

To **developed countries** focusing on research and monitoring

New areas strengthening gender equality policies

- Gender-diverse initiatives promoting inclusion and representation
- Measures addressing gender-based violence and safe workplaces
- Digital tools and platforms supporting gender equality through training and capacity building

INTRODUCTION

For the first time, the fifteenth edition of the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art, held in Dakar from November to December 2024, was curated by a woman, Salimata Diop, and there was equal gender representation across the 58 selected artists. The *Grand Prix du Chef de l'État Léopold Sédar Senghor* was awarded to Martinican artist Agnès Brezephin for her work *Fil(s) de soi(e)* (UNESCO, 2024). The 50/50 gender balance in represented artists was symbolically important as a sign of equality in the artistic field but also led to aesthetic breakthroughs. Diversified artistic perspectives were on display and new themes were visible across the Biennale. This is an illustration of sustained commitment, at both national and multinational levels, to gender equality in artistic production, representation and leadership.

Gender equality continues to be one of UNESCO's global priorities, and the key instruments that guide the work in this area focus on the importance of gender equality as a cornerstone of human rights, social well-being, sustainable development and the inherent power of culture and creativity to drive positive social change. These instruments, including the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) and the UNESCO 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist (1980 Recommendation), support the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

This chapter highlights a number of developments that signal that considerable progress towards gender equality has been made since the adoption of the 2005 Convention 20 years ago. Government bodies, their multilateral partners and civil society organizations have undertaken efforts to improve women's participation and involvement, as well as to better address their specific needs, priorities and contributions. However, in recent years, progress has been slow, with certain domains of monitoring showing indications of stagnation and regression. At one level, this is likely related to the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this is not the only factor. While gender-disaggregated data, which is crucial for informed decision and policy making, has been collected by various Parties to the Convention in different regions, this is far from consistent or widespread. There are regions where the numbers of government or parliamentary bodies in charge of gender equality policy have declined. This indicates that gender equality may be absorbed into broader portfolios of work, rather than being understood as a stand-alone priority. Furthermore, gender equality interventions are lacking across all cultural sectors and are lagging even further in areas reliant on new technology and tools.

Overall, the issue of gender equality in cultural policy must be understood in a broader context in which a backlash is now plainly visible. According to UN Women's latest report, among 150 governments surveyed, nearly one in four reports saw a backlash against women's rights (UN Women, 2025). Programmes and measures to foster inclusion and diversity in the workforce, most of which are anchored by a commitment to gender equality, are being rolled back in many parts of the world (Partridge, 2025) or are being defunded (Šišić and Binışık, 2025; ELA, 2025), and gender-inclusive language is being banned (John and Akbarzai, 2024). This is a critical moment to highlight the progress that has been made and to be mindful that the stakes in this area are only getting higher. In this context, and as part of global efforts advocating for the recognition of culture as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive development as highlighted in the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025, it is imperative that gender equality is an integral part of this advocacy.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

As a first step, it is important to consider the status of global governance structures for gender equality. The latest reporting cycle of the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, 2021-2024, provides the largest number of reports for analysis to date, and within those, 69% of Parties across the world declare that they have ministries, agencies and parliamentary governmental bodies 'in charge of' gender equality and 'relevant' for artists and cultural professionals. There is a need to nuance these headline figures, though, and qualitative insights from the periodic reports help to illustrate the many ways in which Parties to the Convention may classify their own work. For example, many countries report that they have ministries that are undertaking work on gender equality issues. However, they are often focused on women's issues in general (for example, ministries of women or women's affairs) or on issues related to the traditional roles that women may assume in economic and social life.

Within ministries of culture, dedicated units are being created to address gender equality in the culture sector specifically. Parties report plentiful evidence of more targeted interventions aligned with gender equality initiatives within these cultural governance structures. For example, in Oman the Ministry for Culture, Sports and Youth launched a Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity in 2024, which hosts dialogue sessions and encourages women's contributions to particular areas of Omani cultural life including national literature.

Several Parties, such as the Dominican Republic and Spain, report the creation of gender equality units within their ministries of culture, whose functions range from providing technical expertise to ensuring that the principles of gender equality are integrated across national cultural plans and policies, coordinating action with other government ministries and collecting data on women's participation in the creative workforce. In Ireland, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media now has an Advisory Committee on the Representation of Women and Women's Stories, which has an explicit mandate to examine how women are represented across national collections and cultural institutions. Taken together, these developments suggest that when ministries of culture expand their scope to directly monitor women's representation in cultural content and intervene to improve it, they increase their ability to effect long-term structural change that addresses the root causes of gender inequality.

A close examination of the latest data also signals evidence of regression in several regions rather than forward progress. Alarmingly, the proportion of developing countries[1] that report on ministries or government bodies in charge of gender equality that are relevant for artists and cultural professionals has dropped from 72% in the 2017-2020 reporting cycle to 64% in 2021-2024. Qualitative analysis of the most recent Quadrennial Periodic Reports found that in several countries, civil society organizations are taking the lead in adopting measures in the gender equality area. Many of these initiatives are excellent examples (Box 9.2) and should inspire governments to adopt more policies and measures in this field. These organizations are clearly stepping in to fill the gaps where resources and political will are now in retreat.

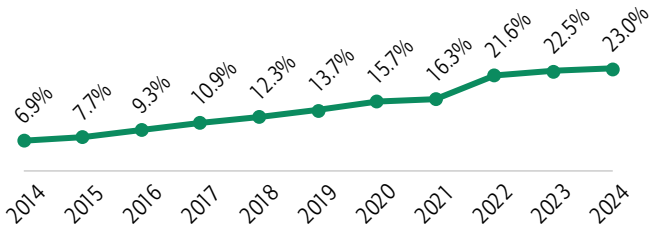
KEY TRENDS IN CULTURAL POLICY MAKING AND GENDER EQUALITY

As shown in Figure 9.1, the overall distribution of gender-related measures reported by Parties to the 2005 Convention shows a consistent increase, from 6.9% of measures in 2014, when gender equality was not included as a specific reporting area, to 23% by 2024. While there was a boost from 16.3% to 21.6% in gender-related measures between 2021 and 2022, in the 2022 to 2024 period there has been a smaller increase from 21.6% to 23%. As was also noted in the 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report, Parties continue to place growing emphasis on policies that advance women's cultural rights and support their full participation in cultural life.

1. For information on the classification of developing and developed countries used in this report, please refer to the Methodology section of the report.

Figure 9.1

Gender-related measures reported as a percentage of all reported measures, three-year rolling average



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Nevertheless, such efforts remain more strongly oriented towards promoting women's participation as audiences and consumers of the arts and culture (82% globally), than towards supporting women as artists, cultural professionals and creative entrepreneurs (77% globally). Several factors may explain this imbalance, including the persistent challenges women face in accessing stable and fairly remunerated employment in the cultural and creative sectors as well as the continuing under-representation of women in leadership positions across arts and media organizations. The ongoing distinction between more 'passive' (consumption-focused) and 'active' (creation, professional development and leadership) gender equality policy mechanisms – where the former continues to receive greater attention – reflects traditional gender roles and stereotypes that continue to hinder women's full and effective participation in culture and creative industries. In this reporting cycle, it has been noted that a number of interventions (Box 9.5) have been designed to challenge these roles and stereotypes, but this imbalance continues to be reflected in global cultural policy making.

Overall, it remains the case that gender equality remains one of the principal challenges in implementing the 2005 Convention for governments and civil society organizations in all regions of the world, as observed in the last edition of the *Re|Shaping* report. Of course, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were a pressing issue in 2022, and the long-term impacts of the pandemic continue to affect the work reported in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports. Many countries listed the pandemic as a key and ongoing challenge in this reporting cycle, and a few gender-responsive pandemic recovery plans were highlighted. Women lost jobs in culture and media at much higher rates than men during the height of the pandemic, but it is extremely difficult to find data that focus on whether and to what extent women are regaining or returning to cultural employment.

While the pandemic may have led to more flexible work practices and a greater adoption of digital tools that can enhance creative productivity and access to opportunities, including for women, these developments are uneven across the creative sector. This is an area in which qualitative and quantitative data and knowledge related to gender equality are scant and should therefore be a key focus of advocacy and policy making going forward.

BOX 9.1 • Developments in governance: the Gender Collective in Colombia

In 2024, the Gender Collective team within the Populations Directorate of the Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Knowledge in Colombia was established. It has three lines of work that echo some of the key trends within the recent Quadrennial Periodic Reports: first, the mainstreaming of a gender approach to close gender inequality gaps in culture and the arts; second, transforming 'sexist practices, imaginings, stereotypes and representations'; and third, eradicating all forms of gender-based violence.

The Gender Collective has a training and action plan and an assigned budget. The work follows from a state-mandated resolution passed in Colombia in 2023, Resolution 0242, which focuses on gender mainstreaming* approaches to the cultural sector. This Resolution was intersectional, focusing also on ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. It led to the creation of a broader Gender and Diversity Committee, an intra-ministerial space that serves to support the implementation of gender mainstreaming approaches across cultural sectors.

These developments indicate that gender equality is being prioritized in particular segments within Colombian cultural governance structures and approaches and that a gender mainstreaming strategy is valuable.

In the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports, gender mainstreaming is referred to by a range of other Parties to the Convention, including Cambodia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Sweden and Timor-Leste. Sharing knowledge between countries working on gender mainstreaming programmes is crucial to ensure that this kind of governance leads to impactful results.

* Gender mainstreaming, which involves integrating gender transversally into all policies and programmes, ideally requires a number of prerequisites including conducting a gender analysis, involving a gender expert (or experts), consulting relevant individuals and civil society organizations, especially women and women's rights organizations, and implementing gender budgeting and evaluation.

Source: Colombia QPR, 2024

LEADERSHIP IN CULTURE AND ARTS – BOTH PROGRESSION AND REGRESSION

A key theme that runs through all the previous editions of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report is the ways in which pursuing gender equality in the cultural workforce is a prerequisite to achieving structural change in reducing gender disparities across the creative sector. What has not fundamentally changed after 20 years of the Convention is that vertical and horizontal segregation by gender in culture and media continues to hamper gender equality globally (UNESCO, 2021). This means that women are still often shut out of gatekeeping and decision-making roles across the cultural sectors (because of issues such as homophily[2] and sexism) and sectors continue to stratify cultural workers into 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles and professions (Wreyford, 2015; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015). Once women do enter parts of the cultural industry that have historically been viewed as the preserve of men (for example, more 'technical' roles in the film and music industries or positions of power such as commissioning editors in the publishing sector), they still often face multiple barriers to full creative freedom and empowerment. For example, they face ongoing bias and discrimination that are difficult to address or formally report (McCarry et al., 2023). They may also encounter disproportionate or gendered expectations that are not placed on their counterparts who are men, or be encouraged – implicitly or explicitly – to commission and support cultural work that perpetuates broader structural and social inequalities (such as publishing women authors but only in certain genres) (Weinberg and Kapelner, 2018). In order to meet the 2005 Convention's goals and Sustainable Development Goal 5, particularly target 5.5 – to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life –, stakeholders must continue to focus policy-making measures on equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making.

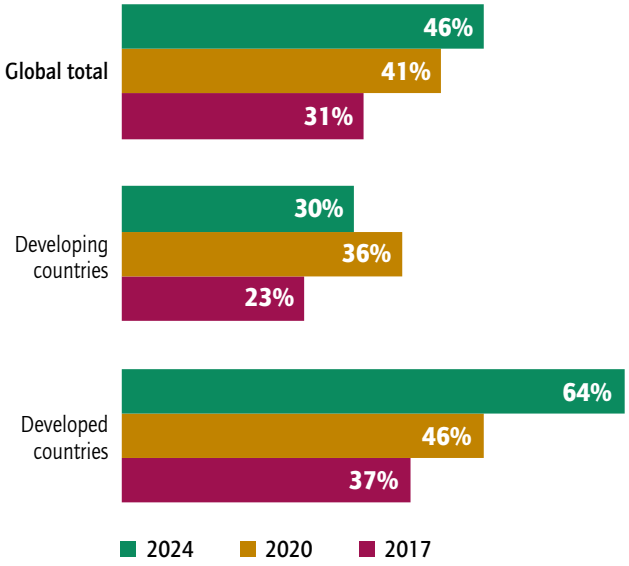
One way to tackle this is to examine data on leadership in cultural governance structures, tracking gender representation in the role of heads of national arts or cultural councils of Parties to the Convention. As shown in Figure 9.2, data illustrate the proportion of women identified as heads of national arts or cultural councils across the reporting countries.

2. Homophily can be defined in this context as the ways in which 'collaboration is more likely to occur between those who have similar cultural, education and demographic backgrounds' (Carr and Van Raalte, 2025). Recent studies focused on cultural work indicate that gendered project leadership (for example, in the film industry) intersects with homophily. According to the article 'She must be seeing things!', 'men's tendency to work with other men persists even after taking into account the underrepresentation of women in the industry' (Jones et al., 2024).

According to these figures, there has been a steady global increase in the proportion of women in these key leadership roles, from 31% in the 2017-2020 reporting cycle to 46% in 2021-2024. In developed countries, women in this sample outnumbered men as heads of arts organizations in 2021-2024. However, in developing countries there has been a concerning downward trend: the share of women serving as cultural heads has fallen from an already low 36% in 2017-2020 to 30% in 2021-2024. This decrease is likely linked to the decline in reported government and parliamentary bodies in developing countries dedicated to gender and relevant to arts and cultural sectors. The lack of attention being paid to gender equality in governance structures is leading to knock-on effects in cultural governance more specifically. It is also a matter of concern that the gap is widening between developed and developing countries. There is an urgent need for collective solutions to halt this regression. Box 9.3 showcases an example of this type of collective measure supporting women's access to leadership and managerial positions in the music sector.

Figure 9.2

Proportion of women as heads of national arts or cultural councils among Parties, by developing and developed countries



Source: BOP Consulting (2025)

Analysis of the most recent Quadrennial Periodic Reports also provides insight into the preponderance of types of policy measures that are being implemented in this area. Even in developed countries where the gender balance in leadership data looks strong, only five measures were identified that explicitly tackled this issue. Despite these measures numbering so few, there are valuable lessons.

For example, in Belgium, the Flemish government commissioned research on this issue from the Flemish Institute of the Arts, which collected data on gender in arts leadership across seven arts institutions and 207 subsidized arts organizations. The findings revealed the different vectors of the issue; for example, ongoing vertical segregation was evident, with certain levels of arts management roles comprising up to 75% men. Such data gathering is vitally important for designing effective policy solutions that could aim to disentangle this inequality, by tying cultural funding to requirements for gender equality in managerial positions, for example.

Overall, significant challenges remain in this area. Much of the established research on the conditions of cultural work has shown that features of this work, especially at senior levels, involve everything from compulsory socializing beyond the traditional 9-to-5 working days, to the need to be constantly connected and available, especially via new digital tools that require an 'always on' mentality (Collins and Golding, 2024). All of these features can make it challenging for people who need to work part-time or for those who have caring responsibilities or other life commitments. Too often, the failure to accommodate those with caregiving responsibilities is reduced to a simplified argument: women are often primary caregivers and therefore cannot take on demanding leadership roles in these areas (CCEBA and FLACSO, 2021). This assumption is further reinforced by the persistent stereotype that women are less competent or qualified for leadership than men. However, such beliefs are unfounded. Evidence demonstrates that individuals of all genders can effectively assume leadership roles when supportive organizational and social structures are in place to enable their participation. Therefore, continued advocacy for targeted research is essential to identify where the core problems lie, as well as to develop concrete policy mechanisms that support women to take on leadership roles and that provide flexible work arrangements for all who need them.

Appointing more leaders with lived experience and expertise in gender-focused policy making helps ensure the quality and effectiveness of the policies and measures that are proposed and implemented. More broadly, cultural organizations – both public and private – and other gatekeeping bodies can play a role in reshaping norms around working hours, flexible arrangements and leadership practices. By promoting inclusive and adaptable approaches, they can support greater gender equality and diversity in leadership across the cultural and creative sectors.

FROM TRAINING AND MENTORING TO MEASURES PROMOTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Across the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports, a variety of different types of measures were used to tackle several interconnected issues. There are training and mentoring schemes to encourage access for women into cultural and creative industries, research and monitoring schemes to generate data and knowledge, and temporary special measures such as quotas and incentives. There is also a vibrant set of measures that aim for a step change in symbolic practices: these tackle gender stereotypes and discrimination within cultural forms. All have different effects, and tangible results may take time to emerge, depending on the scope of particular measures and programmes. Ideally, evaluation mechanisms are built into all of these approaches in order to assess their efficacy in the short and long term.

Training, mentoring and capacity building

The most frequently reported types of gender equality measures from developing countries were training and mentoring schemes. These schemes (which may include entry-level training, technical and vocational education, and continuous learning) are among the most important types of intervention because they can offer women their first taste of how particular industries work and the kinds of roles (creative, technical and managerial) that are available within those industries. They also provide a range of professional networking opportunities. Recent research has also argued that arts mentoring schemes may be especially effective in the post-pandemic creative sector by strengthening artistic and creative activities and networks (Taylor and Luckman, 2024). Often, training and mentoring schemes are most effective when directed towards specific creative sectors and targeted groups of women, providing them with the opportunity to train and develop their creative skills, such as in the case of the Female Filmmaker Project in South Africa (Box 9.2). State-supported workshops and events can also provide bespoke training opportunities. In Algeria, the 'Djazair with Love' masterclass held in 2023 and hosted by the National Centre for Cinema Development, gave seven women from different parts of the country the opportunity to undertake screenwriting training. In the State of Palestine, the 'Through Women's Eyes' initiative from 2018 to 2023 trained a group of young journalists and photographers in the use of social media and contemporary photography techniques.

BOX 9.2 • SWIFT, Female Filmmaker Project and the Urusaro Film Festival in Africa

The continued attention paid to impactful initiatives in the screen industries is evident in three newly reported measures in Africa. Sisters Working in Film and Television (SWIFT) was launched in Namibia in 2024, led by the Namibia Film Commission and the SWIFT branch in South Africa. This is an excellent example of regional collaboration. SWIFT is an established civil society organization with programmes focused on advocacy, safe working environments, training and mentoring, and content creation from women filmmakers.

In South Africa, the 'Female Filmmaker Project' led by the National Film and Video Foundation is notable as another strong collaborative example. This project, which is in partnership with the film production company Yellowbone Entertainment and state-supported bodies including the KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission and the South African Broadcasting Corporation, is explicitly focused on encouraging women filmmakers, especially writers and directors. Twelve women undertook the 2022/2023 programme of development and production workshops, and ten films were produced.

In Rwanda, the non-governmental organization CinéFEMMES held the eighth edition of the Urusaro International Women Film Festival in 2024. CinéFEMMES reports year-on-year growth in the size, scope and influence of the festival, which has become a prominent international platform for women filmmakers. It also integrates educational programmes led by filmmakers for emerging talent, and plays a crucial advocacy role for gender equality in culture and the arts more broadly.

Source: Namibia QPR, 2024; Rwanda QPR, 2024; South Africa QPR, 2024

Training schemes can also be targeted in order to support leadership education for future cultural leaders. For example, in Peru the Women Cultural Managers Scholarship, awarded by the Lima Art Museum, the Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University, the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences and the Scientific University of the South, provides scholarships for women in cultural management. Supported by UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture, and established in 2020, the scholarship prioritizes applicants from regions outside metropolitan Lima and from groups requiring special protection, providing an intersectional pathway for women's professionalization in cultural management.

As Box 9.3 illustrates, mentoring schemes such as the Mentoring Program for Women Entrepreneurs in the Music Industry can also be scaled up to build larger regional collectives, further amplifying the training and capacity-building benefits of these measures.

BOX 9.3 • MEWEM Europa, mentoring for women in the music industry

The Mentoring Program for Women Entrepreneurs in the Music Industry (MEWEM) is a regional collaboration, bringing together civil society organizations from six European countries – Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Romania and Spain. It is funded by Creative Europe and supported by national government bodies, such as in France and Germany. The civil society organizations involved, including the *Fédération nationale des labels et distributeurs indépendants* (FÉLIN; National Federation of Independent Labels and Distributors), *Mujeres de la Industria de la Música* (Women in the Music Industry) and RAW Music, all have expertise in advocating for musicians as cultural workers in their countries and, in some cases, had already established national programmes focused on supporting women musicians and entrepreneurs in the music business.

The MEWEM scheme is focused on building a regional mentoring network and enabling women to move into leadership and management positions in the music industry. As revealed by FÉLIN's survey on music labels in France, the music sector has almost been exclusively led by men (their research found that only 8% of music labels were run by women). MEWEM has built mentoring relationships for 140 women, and trained another 80 professionals to conduct mentoring programmes, which can then be deployed by other European organizations. This kind of mentoring scheme illustrates what is possible when civil society organizations with industry expertise are given the resources to build regional alliances and deliver an impactful programme in a particular cultural sector.

Source: France QPR 2024; Germany QPR 2024; MEWEM Europa

Research and monitoring

The most frequently reported measures from developed countries in this reporting cycle are focused on research, monitoring and evaluation of the state of gender equality. Research alone is not sufficient to shift the dial on inequality and bias, but it plays a crucial role in tracking the numbers of women and men in cultural employment, access to public funding based on gender, women's representation in leadership roles, and enrolment in relevant education and training programmes. As more gender-disaggregated data have become available over the last twelve years of monitoring, countries have been able to 1) take into account the scale of the problem in particular sectors, 2) design tools and measures to address them, and 3) follow up with longitudinal and evaluative work to assess whether particular tools have been effective.

Research projects are widely cited across the most recent Quadrennial Periodic Reports, illustrating the impacts of research and monitoring. In Poland, the 'Equal Chances in Cinema Industry in Poland' research project is a collaboration between the Polish Film Institute and the private organization Box Office Lab. Their report found that only 30% of Polish films were directed by women. As a result, the Institute changed its own representative gender balance in who it hired as experts to evaluate projects for funding, which indicates how research can shift internal governance practices.

Larger research projects are also visible which enable cross-sectoral comparison. For example, in Chile the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage commissioned research across four cultural fields – visual arts, music, audiovisual production and book publishing – to understand gender gaps, barriers and inequalities. Chile also reports other notable measures, including a gender-sensitive response to the COVID-19 pandemic and cultural funding allocation with a gender-focused lens. At the multi-country level, UNESCO has launched a dedicated pilot initiative to strengthen gender equality, inclusive participation and leadership across the cultural and creative sectors, through research, capacity building and policy dialogue (Box 9.4).

Finally, an observatory model is cited in several of the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports, including from Argentina, Italy and Spain, as a strategy for integrating research and monitoring into larger mechanisms aimed at reducing gender inequalities. In Spain, the Observatory for Gender Equality in the Area of Culture has been established in the Ministry of Culture and Sport; it partners with numerous civil society organizations working in visual arts, music, film and publishing. The Observatory has produced reports that include statistical indicators for gender representation in publishing, film production and the visual arts.

BOX 9.4 • Promoting gender equality in culture: UNESCO's pilot initiative

Under the third phase of the UNESCO–SIDA programme 'Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity and Artistic Freedom', supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), a dedicated pilot initiative on gender equality was implemented in 2024-2025, the first of its kind within the programme. Through a flexible, context-based approach, it combines research, capacity building and policy dialogue to promote gender-transformative cultural policies and strengthen gender equality, inclusive participation and leadership across the cultural and creative sectors.

- **Peru – Professionalization and leadership in cultural management**

In Peru, the pilot initiative scaled up the Cultural Managers Scholarship, providing tailored training to women in the cultural sector and establishing a Women Cultural Managers Network to foster collaboration, mentorship and leadership among alumnae. It also offered seminars on applying a gender lens to cultural projects, including tools to prevent gender-based violence in the arts. Building on the project's achievements, a sustainability strategy with the Ministry of Culture of Peru has consolidated the Women Cultural Managers Scholarship as the first public initiative with nationwide reach, aimed at reducing the gender gap in the cultural and creative sector, and positioning it as a model for institutional ownership and capacity building.

- **West Africa – Research and capacity building for gender-transformative policy**

In West Africa, a study of the working conditions of women and men in the cultural and creative sectors across 15 countries offered one of the first comprehensive regional analyses of gender dynamics in the sector. It revealed persistent gaps in leadership and access to funding and training, but it also highlighted emerging women-led networks and mentorship initiatives. Based on these findings, a pilot training programme in Senegal equipped public officials, academics and civil society actors with practical tools to design gender-responsive cultural policies and monitor progress through gender-sensitive indicators, under the 'Girls for Culture | Culture for Girls' initiative.

- **Indonesia – Research and dialogue on gender diversity in the arts**

In Indonesia, a study led by Koalisi Seni examined the working conditions of gender-diverse artists in the country's creative ecosystem, exposing structural discrimination while also highlighting forms of 'affective work' and queer 'artivism' (a portmanteau of 'art' and 'activism') rooted in resilience and care. The Media and Creative Industry Workers' Union for Democracy led the dialogue and information-sharing process, organizing events in Medan, Bali and Maumere to discuss findings and develop a policy brief. These dialogues helped build a community of practice among creative professionals and policy makers, ensuring that gender equality remains at the heart of cultural policy discussions.

Source: UNESCO, 2025d

This observatory model for research, monitoring and evaluation is one that could be used more widely in gathering data going forward; it may also assist in growing globally comparative gender-equality datasets, for which there is still an urgent need.

Temporary special measures – quotas, incentives, bonuses

Temporary special measures are a well-established set of instruments used to promote gender balance in culture and media. They may relate to broader legislative instruments that guarantee equal opportunities, mandate equal pay for equal work and outlaw gender-based discrimination. A common modality in this area is the quota, which sets targets for women's participation and representation and incentivizes or requires organizations to meet those targets. These instruments do not tackle the wider social and cultural issues associated with gender bias and sexism, but they can be effective, often quickly, at raising the profiles of women artists and diversifying artistic programmes.

Temporary special measures continue to be reported globally although they were not widely implemented in the most recent reporting cycle. But what is notable in the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports are the varied ways in which they can be framed and tied to funding. There are 'gender incentives' instituted by publicly funded film organizations in Austria and Germany that encourage productions to hire women as creative and technical department heads.

There are quotas or funding reserves in the music, film and arts sectors in Argentina, Peru and Haiti, respectively.

There are also newer measures, such as the 15% 'parity bonus' in France, awarded by the National Centre of Cinema to productions that employ as many women as men in key positions. Since 2022, all productions seeking funding are required to submit gender-disaggregated data about the identity of their production staff, both creative and technical.

These kinds of instruments build in efficacy once they become a baseline for cultural funding and by placing reporting requirements on employers and producers. They may also raise broader awareness about the representativeness of different areas of arts and culture and who is being hired where.

Gender representation in cultural content

A further set of initiatives focuses on gender representation. These include measures and programmes that tackle the continued gender inequalities within cultural content, for example on screens, in galleries and museums or in music production. This is crucial, as gender inequality in the cultural and creative industries cannot be alleviated simply by paying attention to employment or who does the work of writing, directing, composing or producing. These industries have huge representative power in how stories are told and whose perspectives are heard and seen. They may impact how audiences engage with culture and how it speaks to their own experience. Historically, culture and media have reproduced forms of bias and exclusion – gender-based stereotypes, for example, or harmful gender roles.

The latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports recount a number of measures designed to intervene in this area. For example, in Croatia, the 'Women and Media' project, led by the Agency for Electronic Media in collaboration with several public sector and civil society organizations, is designed to increase general critical media literacy, diminish gender stereotypes and increase the visibility of women across Croatian media.[3] Ma3mal 612 Think Factory in Jordan has instituted a Cinema in Education programme explicitly designed to tackle harmful gender-based stereotypes and outdated portrayals of women in the Arab world (Box 9.5). Other notable initiatives aim to improve the gender balance in how artists are represented and in the composition of national art collections (for example, the 'Know My Name' initiative in Australia, Box 9.7). They also address gender representation in crucial areas of the music industry, such as ensuring fair and equal crediting for songwriting and audio recording (as seen in the 'Gear Up' initiative in Manitoba, Canada).

3. See https://www.zeneimediji.hr/

BOX 9.5 • Representing gender: Jordan's Cinema in Education programme

In Jordan, the civil society organization Ma3mal 612 Think Factory is a cultural platform for artists and citizens that uses film as a medium to address political, social and economic issues. More broadly, Think Factory describes itself as a think tank comprising cultural practitioners, artists, social scientists, politicians, technicians and others from across the Arab world.

One of their recent programmes is Cinema in Education, a module designed for film and audiovisual schools in the Maghreb–Mashreq region. The curriculum is designed to 'confront and deconstruct the stereotypical and often harmful portrayals of women in cinema, particularly in the Arab world'. The module involves examining the historical and cultural contexts of harmful stereotypes, as well as collectively imagining new cinematic narratives that represent women's diverse roles and identities. Importantly, Think Factory devised this programme to train both students and professors, employing a methodology that integrates film screenings with classroom activities and forms of assessment.

The Cinema in Education model can be replicated and delivered elsewhere, as educators become more familiar with the programme and its methods. Think Factory has also made some of its content available online, disseminating its work more widely.

Source: Jordan QPR, 2024

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

In assessing progress towards gender-equal participation in cultural life, with a focus on women as creators and cultural professionals, one useful metric is the proportion of public funding allocated to women artists and cultural producers. Another complementary way to assess women's participation in cultural life is through their representation in national and international festivals, awards and biennales, which is closely linked to visibility and recognition of impactful cultural work. According to the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports, 32% of recipients of national arts prizes and awards are women, a figure that has remained relatively stable over time and indicates that national award systems continue to fall short of achieving gender equality.

Research that examines different types of cultural events provides a more nuanced understanding of the recognition and visibility accorded to the achievements of women artists. For example, the global average of women artists represented in major biennales across their three most recent editions has increased from 42% in 2015-2017 to 53% in the 2022-2025 period. In Figure 9.3, the proportion of women artists represented in major biennales can be tracked per event and over time.

This data presents a mixed picture: there has been significant progress in places such as Sharjah and Shanghai, sustained gender parity in others and serious regression in Berlin and São Paulo. At major international film festivals, the gender balance of jurors is relatively steady at 46% women.

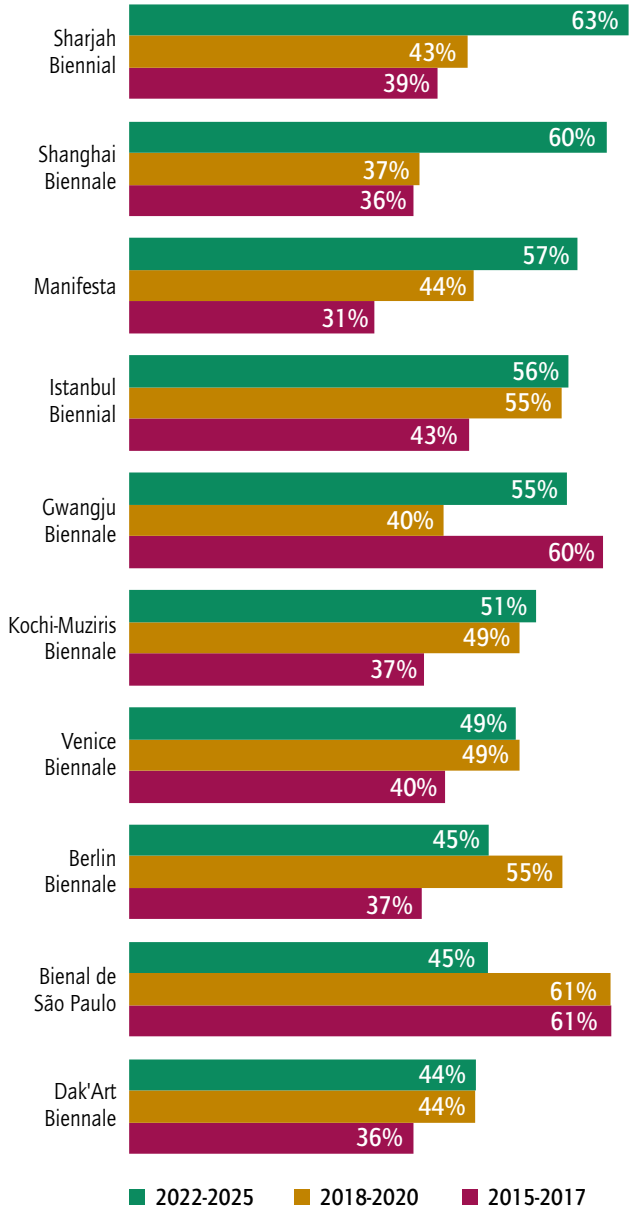
Slight progress is evident when looking at the winners of Best Director and Best Screenplay, which have moved from 24% to 28%, although these figures remain significantly low given the continued attention to inequalities in the film sector. Numbers are more promising when including Best Film winners, with women's participation at 42% compared with 33% in 2021.

In the music industry, the mean percentage of women acts performing at electronic music festivals has slowly risen from 9% in 2012 to 30% in 2023. In Figure 9.4, longitudinal data illustrate that the number of women composers among the top 100 most performed living composers has increased over 11 years, from 11 in 2013 to 32 in 2024.

When women and gender-diverse individuals are able to participate freely and on an equal footing in cultural activities, despite persistent gender-based stereotypes and discrimination, they can move beyond the role of audience or consumer to take on more active roles as artists, writers, filmmakers or composers. With access to adequate training and public funds to develop their skills and artistic practice, they are then better positioned to achieve higher levels of recognition and acclaim, including receiving high-profile awards and leadership roles, both nationally and internationally. Data indicate that over time, the proportion of women participating across a range of cultural fields – from electronic music to major artistic biennales – has increased. Nonetheless, progress remains slow, and there are periods in which gender-equal cultural participation appears at best, stagnant and at worst declining.

Figure 9.3

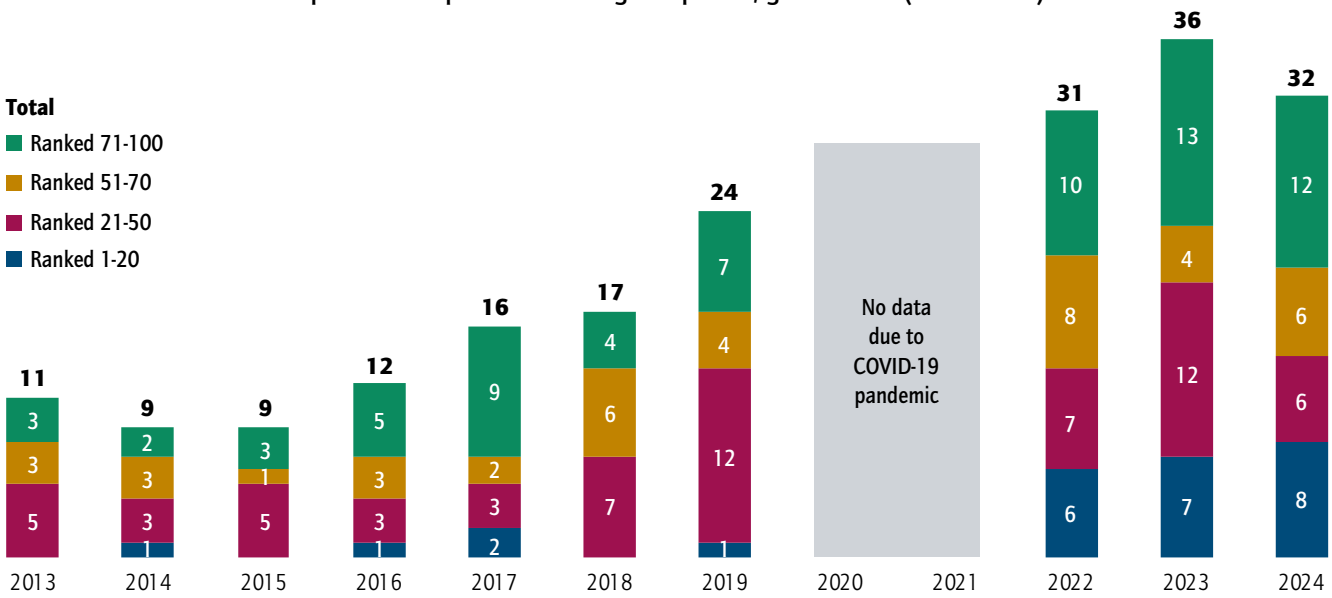
Proportion of women artists in major biennales in their most recent three editions, per biennale



Source: BOP Consulting (2025)

Figure 9.4

Number of women in the top 100 most performed living composers, global total (2013-2024)



Source: Bachtrack (2025) / BOP Consulting (2025)

NEW AREAS OF INTERVENTION

The last edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report noted emerging intersectional frameworks, policies and measures that move beyond a narrow focus on equality between women and men to address gender diversity more broadly. For this edition of the report, three areas are worth highlighting. The first are initiatives that can be broadly categorized as gender-diverse initiatives. Second are new interventions that are implicitly or explicitly framed as post#MeToo measures that tackle gender-based violence and harassment and are aimed to secure safe working environments. Third are initiatives that use digital technology and tools to advance gender equality in culture and media.

Gender-diverse initiatives

The nascent theme of gender diversity identified in the 2022 edition of the *Re|Shaping* report has expanded notably in the latest reporting cycle. One clear trend in the most recent Quadrennial Periodic Reports is the growing attention to measures that actively move beyond binary gender language and promote gender inclusivity. There are numerous geographically diverse examples, with innovative initiatives observed in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa. Some of these focus on language itself as an essential foundation, encouraging the adoption of gender-inclusive language policies that apply across cultural and other sectors, as seen in Chile, Italy and Serbia.

BOX 9.6 • The Diversity Roadmap and 'Gender Is a Galaxy'

In Switzerland, the Diversity Roadmap has been run by the civil society organization Helvetiarockt since 2019, with support from the Swiss Federation of Music Venues and Festivals, and is designed to create discrimination-free spaces in the music industry. The Diversity Roadmap has already been translated into three languages and is available digitally at www.diversityroadmap.org. Since 2022, Helvetiarockt has focused on the priority issue of sexualised violence at music clubs and festivals, with support from the Federal Office for Gender Equality. The project has involved both qualitative and quantitative research with representatives from clubs and festivals to identify where the barriers lie.

'Gender Is a Galaxy' is a related initiative within the Diversity Roadmap programme. It began with advocacy events in two music clubs, Schiffbau and Exil, in 2022. It aimed to raise awareness about gender diversity and the need for gender-neutral bathrooms in music clubs. 'Gender Is a Galaxy' offered these clubs explicit guidance about how to make changes on-site and exchanged with club patrons to raise awareness. 'Gender Is a Galaxy' offers a compelling vision of gender diversity, and its wider programme exemplifies action that advances several aims simultaneously: accessibility, advocacy and achievable outcomes.

Source: Switzerland QPR, 2024

Other measures involve multistakeholder collaboration to ensure that measures include transgender artists and creatives. In Nigeria since 2017, the Gender Council, which is a trans-led organization, has partnered with the Female Artists Association of Nigeria in various programmes related to ending violence against women in arts and culture. In Argentina, the civil society organization Impacto Digital has developed the *Contratá Trans* programme, aimed at reducing stigma experienced by trans and non-binary populations and elevating their ability to work across a diverse range of areas including culture and the arts.

Many of these measures are from civil society organizations, which suggests that in the context of the global contraction of initiatives promoting inclusion and diversity, these organizations are currently the main driving force in advancing this agenda. This signals that more work needs to be done to ensure that government bodies can work together with civil society to expand collective capacity and understanding of gender diversity as fundamental to gender equality.

Safe and inclusive work environments

Within the most recent reporting cycle, a post-#MeToo impetus is noticeable. This has facilitated a wide variety of research and data-gathering mechanisms and a clear focus in policies and measures on both making visible and eliminating gender-based harassment and violence in culture and media. Of course, raising awareness about the everyday realities of gender-based violence remains the starting point for addressing gender-based violence, and crucial work on this issue long predates the #MeToo movement.

Many countries report recent and broad-based measures focused on the prevention of gender-based violence in society generally. These efforts often involve ministries of culture and civil society organizations, as seen in Indonesia, Morocco and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Artist-led responses also offer promising examples. In Ethiopia, the 'Theatre Forum on the Harassment and Abuse of Women' highlights an applied theatre model in which artists and audiences work together to elevate narratives that address the causes and consequences of gender-based violence.

There are a range of measures that can broadly be described as focused on awareness raising and creating and maintaining 'safe spaces'. This includes initiatives in Colombia, Peru, South Africa and Switzerland (Box 9.6). There are also numerous reported measures aimed at establishing reporting and support mechanisms, complaints procedures and sanctions. Notable examples come from Finland and the Republic of Korea, and may include enabling government bodies with ombudsperson functions to be extended in the arts and cultural sector, as is the case in Belgium. This is an effective move, as previous research has found that the informality of much work in the cultural and creative industries, as well as ongoing gendered power relations, contributes to cultures of silence and non-disclosure (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017).

Overall, gender-based violence remains a routine feature of the lives of women and gender-diverse people, so fresh alliances and frameworks may provide new directions and resources for coordinated action. What is crucial in this area is that measures are not simply reactive. Mechanisms like reporting and psychological support are valuable, but when implemented in isolation they do not address the root causes of gender-based violence in culture and media – structural inequalities, unequal power relations and cultures of misogyny and impunity. Additional measures, including those that address representations of gender or promote gender-equal cultural leadership, need to be implemented within these frameworks. As a leading researcher in this area recently argued, positive changes are evident, but overall the post-#MeToo landscape is a 'mixed picture', and there is a risk of complacency within cultural sectors (Bull, 2024). This risk is only heightened in the context of the current backlash against funding and initiatives that advance gender equality and inclusion.

Gender equality and the digital environment

The final area of intervention that is emergent in the latest reporting cycle broadly relates to the digital environment. Limited yet notable initiatives make use of digital technology for capacity building in areas such as artwork digitization, piloting blind recruitment efforts and showcasing cultural outputs from women and gender-diverse content creators. These measures, supported by civil society organizations, government bodies and multilateral organizations including UNESCO, illustrate the potential of digital technology to advance gender equality in cultural policy making. While they represent important progress, they must also be contextualized against the serious challenges that persist in this domain. For instance, the wave of gender diversity and post-#MeToo initiatives should be viewed alongside the growing evidence of technology-facilitated gender-based bias, harassment and abuse – issues that researchers and practitioners are only beginning to understand.

Gender-equality-focused data gathering can be challenging in the digital environment, as user data for particular social media platforms (whether X, Instagram or Substack) is considered highly commercially sensitive and often cannot be disaggregated or used to identify users, revenue or growth. When considering rates of global internet adoption, United Nations Trade and Development data from 2023 indicate that in high- and upper-middle-income countries, rates are close to gender-equal; however, disparities widen between men and women using the internet in lower-middle-income countries (where men are ahead by nearly 9%) and in low-income countries, where the disparity increases to 14%.

Table 9.1

Mobile internet adoption rates for women and gender gaps in mobile internet adoption, by region (excluding high-income countries)

Region	Proportion of women who use mobile internet	Gender gap in mobile internet adoption
Europe and Central Asia	79%	4%
Latin America and Caribbean	81%	0%
East Asia and Pacific	83%	4%
South Asia	55%	31%
Sub-Saharan Africa	36%	32%
Middle East and North Africa	62%	16%
Global total	**66%**	**15%**

Source: GSMA (2024)

In Table 9.1, data on mobile internet adoption rates from Group Managed Service Accounts indicate a continued gender divide in low- and lower-middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. At one level, attention needs to continue on the foundational work of closing the gender accessibility gap and to ensure that everyone, globally, has access to digital technology and tools.

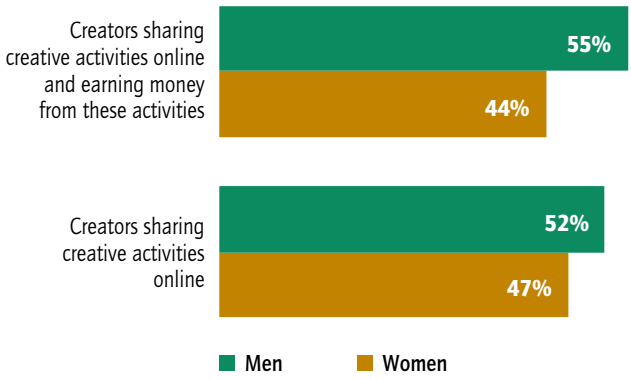
One emerging trend in the latest Quadrennial Periodic Reports is initiatives that focused on digital training and capacity building for women. These were explicitly aimed at women artists, entrepreneurs and creatives. For example, in Cabo Verde, a programme was implemented to support women entrepreneurs through training in social media marketing. This programme was explicitly framed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in acknowledgement that the pandemic required many cultural professions and artists to pivot to online modes of work and cultural participation. In Ethiopia, two programmes led by civil society organizations (Gerar – The Creative Hub and the Ethiopian Women Visual Artist Association) focused on upskilling women artists via digital tools in order to help them navigate the online art market.

These initiatives signal that digitally focused gender equality measures can be effective when they build on lessons learned in sectors like visual arts, where established industry knowledge and policy-making experience already exist. In these examples, women entrepreneurs and artists learn new skills via social media and other online tools, which they can then use to produce, circulate and monetize their work.

As mentioned above, illustrative data on content creators is challenging to collect, but when available, it shows how vertical segregation appears anew in areas like online income generation. Data sourced for this chapter indicate that, in 2022, content creators across all platforms were more likely to be women but that, on average, women content creators earn less than their counterparts who are men. In Figure 9.5, and via data from Adobe, men are 5% more likely to share creative activities online and are 11% more likely to monetize those same activities.

Figure 9.5

Gender distribution of content creators



Source: Adobe (2022)

One other type of intervention that was discernible in the Quadrennial Periodic Reports was experiments in using digital tools to either minimize discrimination or remove traditional barriers to access. For example, in Denmark, the public broadcaster TV2 has been developing the 'Recruitment Diversity Initiative' since 2023.

This has involved traditional blind recruitment training, as well as the introduction of a tool called Develop Diverse, which runs job advertisements and external communications through an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based filter to ensure diversity and remove unconscious bias. While details about its outcomes remain limited, this initiative raises new questions about how digital technology and tools, if ethically deployed, could be harnessed both to support women artists and creatives to elevate and share their work online, and to make technical interventions that support structural and systemic change.

These mechanisms are urgently needed because new forms of gender-based violence and harassment are increasingly visible in the digital environment. Recent UNESCO research illustrates that gender bias is widespread in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools like large language models (UNESCO and IRCAI, 2024). GenAI theoretically has the potential to remove barriers to access and unlock 'new possibilities for artistic expression' (Eisenmann et al., 2025) in the cultural and creative sector, but that potential quickly drains away if the old biases are reinscribed in the technology.

Vertical segregation and large pay gaps are also visible in the cultural sectors that are heavily reliant on software and hardware – for example, the gaming industry. The often-cited figure is that around 70% of people working in the video game sector are men, which is largely reflective of the wider technology sector, in which around 26% of the workforce are women (Women in Tech, 2023). A recent survey of professional developers, who presumably work more and more in areas like GenAI, reports that 93% identify as men (Stack Overflow, 2022). These statistics signal serious structural issues because so-called digital 'solutions' lack accessibility and inclusivity. Women are systematically excluded from these fast-growing sectors and are not accessing highly remunerated positions. All this illustrates that old and familiar narratives – gender-based segregation in the workforce, gender bias and discrimination – are newly prominent in digital workplaces and spaces.

Finally, despite the positive work that is visible in the areas of safety and security for women in culture and media, technology-facilitated gender-based violence is of growing concern (UNESCO, 2023). Women working in the cultural and creative sector (as artists, performers or writers), who are often more visible in public spaces and online, are more likely to be targeted by trolling, harassment and abuse (Mendonca et al., 2022). Research focused on content creators finds that, when controlling for other factors, creators who identify as women face significantly higher odds of experiencing online harassment compared to men, as do disabled and LGBTIQ+ creators (Heung et al., 2024).

Legislative mechanisms can play an important role in tackling this area, criminalizing particularly kinds of technology-facilitated gender-based violence such as deepfakes, as has been the case in the Republic of Korea (Park, 2024). What is crucially important is that all stakeholders – government bodies, civil society organizations, multilateral organizations, researchers and cultural producers – must now put time, effort and resources into tracking these developments. More research is needed to understand the dynamics of gender segregation in technology-focused cultural sectors. New interventions are needed to enable women to operate online as artists and creatives without the threat of technology-facilitated abuse. Policy makers should ensure that digital tools and platforms including AI are developed and used ethically, preventing them from perpetuating or exacerbating discrimination, stereotypes and gender-based violence. International normative instruments such as UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2022) as well as the Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the 2005 Convention in the Digital Environment (UNESCO, 2017) should be implemented at the national level and take into consideration the cultural sector with a strong gender perspective. Furthermore, the recommendations made by the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment should be implemented through a gender lens, in particular those concerning the development of national digital culture capacity plans and the evaluation of AI's impact on artists and creators, taking into account the specific conditions and needs of women and gender-diverse creatives.

BOX 9.7 • Know My Name initiative

The 'Know My Name' initiative, launched by the National Gallery of Australia in 2019, is a gender equity initiative designed to tackle historical gender bias in the visual arts. The National Gallery acknowledged at the beginning of the initiative that women artists accounted for only 25% of its Australian art collection and 33% of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection. This initiative involved changes to programming and collection development, as well as education and awareness-building activities.

A particularly noteworthy feature of this initiative is how it leveraged digital communication channels and platforms to promote its activities. For example, the exhibition 'Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now', which ran from 2020 to 2022, was accompanied by a virtual conference involving nearly 60 presenters and facilitators (all women) and a social media campaign across Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram. The Gallery also partnered with a range of external organizations including Wikimedia Australia, and this resulted in the publishing of 79 new Wikipedia pages dedicated to Australian women artists and 1,539 new references added to new and existing pages. 'Know My Name' illustrates how an initiative led by a publicly funded institution can work in innovative ways to expand the collective knowledge base on women as cultural producers and aim for permanent structural change.

Source: Australia QPR, 2021

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that progress towards gender equality is visible since the 2005 Convention was adopted. There has been an increase of reported gender-related measures, and the increase in the number of Parties to the Convention and Quadrennial Periodic Reports provides more evidence of the existence of efforts towards gender equality in global cultural policy making, as well as the types and variety of actions that government bodies, ministries of culture and civil society organizations can take. It has been increasingly demonstrated how valuable rigorous data collection is in this area and how, when gender-disaggregated data is prioritized, new insights emerge that can directly inform and strengthen policy making. It has also been observed that gender equality programmes in the cultural and creative sector have a wide variety of modalities and can be combined to prioritize gender equality as a cornerstone of economic, social and cultural emancipation.

All these insights provide compelling reasons as to why it is important that culture and gender equality are recognized together as key drivers of sustainable and inclusive development. Gender equality is indeed a transversal issue (UNESCO, 2025b). Culture will only support sustainable development if it is culture that is fairly, safely and ethically produced and is fully representative.

As this chapter has noted, some of the fundamental principles of equity and diversity are currently facing intense backlash. Coupled with this, the latest reporting period reveals troubling signs of regression. More than ever, there is a need to work together across the next 20 years to reinstate gender equality as a priority area for action and to reiterate the transformative power of gender equality and diversity for all.

The final recommendations of this chapter reflect the need to take direct lessons from the latest data, as well as to reflect further on the lessons learned over 20 years of implementing the Convention. There is a combination of shorter-term and long-term recommendations, acknowledging both the important work that has already been done and the key and emerging issues to address collectively going forward.

For governments (ministries of culture, arts councils, funding bodies and regional and local authorities)

- Establish dedicated structures for gender equality within ministries of culture. These units should ensure effective coordination, implementation and monitoring of interventions designed to advance gender equality in the cultural sector.
- Integrate gender mainstreaming across national cultural policies and programmes by training public officials to apply gender perspectives in policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Encourage knowledge sharing between governments to promote effective and transferable approaches.
- Establish information systems that regularly collect gender-disaggregated data on cultural participation and leadership in areas such as women's access to resources and funding, workforce participation and representation in leadership positions. Use these data to conduct targeted research that can guide stronger evidence-based policies for gender equality.
- Implement programmes and measures that actively support women as creators, cultural professionals and leaders. More specifically, governments should:
    - Introduce temporary special measures, such as quotas and parity bonus mechanisms, as formal requirements within national funding schemes. These measures should require cultural employers and organizations to produce gender-disaggregated data.
    - Support funding streams and programmes that prioritize gender equality, intersectionality and gender diversity.
    - Strengthen frameworks that promote safe and inclusive working environments in the cultural and creative sector, and develop actionable measures to prevent gender-based violence online and offline.
    - Provide access to training and mentoring opportunities to support the professional development of women artists, particularly in emerging digital fields, and to reduce gender segregation across creative sectors and career levels.
- Recognize and support the valuable work of civil society organizations advocating for gender equality in culture and the arts. Strengthen their capacity by providing financial and institutional support, and actively partner with them to ensure that gender equality remains a priority area in future cultural policy efforts.
- Ensure that digital tools and platforms, including AI, are developed and used ethically, preventing them from perpetuating or exacerbating gender-based discrimination, stereotypes and violence.
- Integrate gender considerations into national digital capacity-building plans and programmes. Ensure that the perspectives and needs of women and gender-diverse creators are addressed.

For cultural institutions, media and civil society organizations (non-governmental organizations, academics and private companies)

- Collectively work with governments, cultural funders, ministries of culture and intergovernmental organizations to advance gender equality within the cultural and creative sector by sharing resources, data and expertise. Jointly review collaborative programmes – such as those focused on training and mentoring, gender representation, and eliminating gender-based violence – to identify successful models to build on.
- Apply lessons learned from successful gender equality programmes in the creative sector when designing new programmes in areas that require more research and policy attention, including video game production, online content creation and the development and use of new technology platforms.
- Design new gender-prioritized programmes and measures that focus on the impacts of AI on artists and cultural professionals.
- Collect data and information on gender-based bias and harassment cases that are emerging in social media, GenAI and related areas, and share ethical practices and measures that address these issues.

For intergovernmental organizations

- Prioritize and invest in gender-disaggregated data collection, both quantitative and qualitative. As part of this, explore opportunities to build globally representative datasets on cultural participation and cultural employment. A renewed commitment to data collection in these areas will also enable longitudinal tracking of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging fields of cultural employment in the digital environment, including AI.
- When revising reporting frameworks (to reflect developments in the digital environment, for example), develop indicators that fill existing knowledge and experience gaps at the intersection of ethical AI and gender equality. This includes monitoring AI-related initiatives that affect artists and cultural professionals (as recommended by the Reflection Group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment) and ensuring that such monitoring is carried out with a gender lens.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to support countries in developing and revising cultural policies from a gender lens. Strengthen national capacities to monitor governance mechanisms that promote gender equality and track women's representation in leadership roles across the cultural and creative sectors.
- Work with Parties, other international organizations and civil society to advocate for the recognition of culture and gender equality as mutually reinforcing drivers of sustainable and inclusive development in the context of the post-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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www.echelman.com – sculptor, www.julielemberger.com – photographer*

Chapter 10

Global mandate: safeguarding artistic freedom in law, policy and practice

Andra Matei

KEY FINDINGS

- Artistic freedom is grounded in international human rights law, and its realization depends on effective legal protections and institutional safeguards, supported by an interconnected ecosystem of governments, civil society, regional human rights bodies and intergovernmental organizations. UNESCO's 2005 Convention and 1980 Recommendation are at the core of this normative and institutional architecture.
- Protective frameworks have expanded globally, with over 90% of Parties to the Convention reporting constitutional or national statutory guarantees for artistic freedom. Regional human rights mechanisms, international cooperation programmes and UN monitoring initiatives have further increased visibility and attention. Nevertheless, the growing formal recognition of artistic freedom and its rising prominence on international and regional agendas coexist with a persistent implementation gap. Legal frameworks are not always matched by the institutional capacity, enforcement tools and operational mechanisms to ensure effective protection.
- Political unrest, armed conflict and forced displacement have compounded the risks faced by artists and cultural professionals, and exposed the fragility of current protection systems. While engagement with the protection of artists at risk of or in exile is highest in Western Europe and North America (62%), the global response in this regard remains limited to 37% of Parties, highlighting an urgent need for increased international attention. Civil society organizations have played a crucial role in providing emergency support, but many initiatives remain fragile, under-resourced and dependent on short-term donor funding. Strategic action is required to move from temporary emergency relief towards durable pathways for sustainable professional reintegration.
- While 90% of Parties report national regulatory frameworks that guarantee the right to create without censorship or intimidation, legal repression remains one of the greatest threats to artistic freedom. Furthermore, only 61% of Parties report having independent bodies to monitor violations of artistic freedom, which contributes to a lack of systematic monitoring, fragmented data collection and limited accountability for infringements of this right.
- The misuse of legal frameworks, together with other widespread forms of pressure targeting artists and fuelling their self-censorship, underscore the urgent need to expand accessible legal support and defence mechanisms for artists.
- Artists – particularly those from marginalized communities – are also facing growing threats to their artistic freedom online. Key threats include digital surveillance and algorithmic bias. Despite this, only 27% of developing and 19% of developed countries report implementing measures specifically addressing artistic freedom in the digital environment. Regulatory gaps are particularly acute in corporate governance, highlighting the need for rights-based, culturally grounded digital governance frameworks and robust support systems.
- Artists continue to confront significant economic and social challenges, including precarious professional status, fragmented funding structures, insufficient social protection and disparities in equity. At the same time, reported action is increasing: 74% of Parties referred to implementing social protection measures (from 40% previously). Reports also point to concrete initiatives (including by civil society) to collect data and advance research on the working conditions of artists.
- Copyright frameworks are vital for upholding artists' economic rights, but their effectiveness is constrained by weak implementation and harmonization challenges.
- Equity in access to funding and inclusive policy frameworks remain under-developed, especially for vulnerable communities such as Indigenous Peoples, women, LGBTIQ+, youth and artists with disabilities. The latest global consultation shows that only 8% of countries reported adopting policies or measures for artists belonging to Indigenous communities. Despite clear links to international human rights commitments, integrated and intersectoral policy frameworks to address the compounded inequalities often faced by artists belonging to these vulnerable groups are still lacking.
- Civil society actors remain essential in filling institutional gaps. They lead monitoring efforts, raise awareness about the status of artists' rights, advocate for stronger protections and provide them with operational support. However, effective protection of artistic freedom requires deeper, more systematic collaboration between civil society organizations and governments. At the same time, civil society should be able to operate in a safe and enabling environment, free from undue constraints, including restrictive regulations and pressures related to political contexts or funding conditions.

CULTURE SNAPSHOT

Realization of artistic freedom depends on:

Effective legal protections

Institutional safeguards

Shared normative understanding

Strong policy frameworks

PROGRESS

Over 90% of countries report **constitutional or legal guarantees** for artistic freedom, demonstrating growth in protective frameworks

Regional human rights mechanisms, international cooperation programmes and UN monitoring initiatives are raising visibility in international agendas

Civil society actors are playing a crucial role in:

- **Monitoring violations** of artistic freedom
- Raising awareness and **advocating** for artists' rights
- Providing **operational and emergency support**
- Advancing **research** on emerging issues

In response to economic and social challenges facing artists, **74%** of countries (from 40% previously) report implementing **social protection measures for artists**

CHALLENGES

Implementation gaps remain between legal frameworks and operational mechanisms

- **Only 61%** of countries have **independent bodies** monitoring artistic freedom violations
- **Copyright frameworks** for upholding artists' economic rights are weak

Legal frameworks are being **misused** to suppress artistic freedom, while **defence mechanisms** for artists are under-developed

Only 37% of countries have reported public initiatives to **protect artists at risk or in exile**, highlighting the fragility of protection systems

Equity gaps persist in targeted artist support measures, especially for vulnerable communities

EMERGING TRENDS

New threats to artistic freedom are growing **online**, including **digital surveillance and algorithmic bias**

Initiatives to protect artistic freedom are expanding:

- Temporary relocation schemes
- Emergency stipends
- Residency pathways
- Legal and psychosocial support
- Reintegration programmes

INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical turbulence, conditions for artistic participation are shifting, often undermining stability and freedom. The pandemic exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in the cultural and creative sectors, leaving many artists without income, mobility or institutional support (UNESCO, 2021). Meanwhile, conflicts in some countries have decimated cultural infrastructure and displaced countless artists, amplifying global tensions around artistic expression.

Artistic freedom is upheld by an interdependent ecosystem of rights, including freedom of expression, association, assembly, conscience and participation in cultural life. UNESCO has defined artistic freedom as encompassing not only the freedom to create and disseminate works but also the conditions that enable these rights to be realized (UNESCO, 2019).

UNESCO Member States remain bound under international law to protect these rights and foster environments where artists can imagine, produce and share their work. In particular, Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines everyone's right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts, and Article 19 guarantees freedom of expression. While the Universal Declaration is a non-binding document, it has inspired several binding international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provide legal recognition to the ecosystem of rights related to artistic freedom. Overall, these rights go beyond the protection of artistic work, to include artists' physical safety, autonomy, recognition and the rights that underpin economic security and professional stability. In addition, the Final Declaration of the World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 commits to fostering an enabling environment that ensures respect for and the exercise of human rights, particularly cultural rights, across all cultural fields, including the digital environment. It emphasizes inclusive access to and participation in cultural life, with a view to strengthening the economic and social rights of artists and cultural professionals. Furthermore, it promotes artistic freedom and freedom of expression, while respecting cultural and linguistic diversity, with special attention to historically vulnerable groups.

As this chapter will show, these rights have largely been integrated in national legislation and policy, but formal recognition has not consistently translated into protection. Monitoring led by civil society, such as through reports by Freemuse, an international non-governmental organization that monitors and documents artistic freedom worldwide, continues to document widespread violations of artistic freedom, including arbitrary detentions, censorship, legal harassment and travel bans, often under laws related to blasphemy, defamation or national security (Freemuse, 2022, 2023, 2024). Previous editions of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report have also underlined this, and pointed to the frequent lack of reliable data, which are essential to identify violations and provide targeted support to affected artists. Yet, government reporting at the national level remains inconsistent, and independent monitoring mechanisms are still under-developed. Credible data collection depends on trained local actors, secure reporting systems and solid institutional support.

Economic insecurity further heightens the risks artists face. In the post-pandemic context and amid regional instability, public funding for the arts has declined in many countries, and access to social protection remains fragile in many cases, with temporary measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic not always sustained.

This chapter explores how these challenges are being addressed, examining them across three related areas. First, it looks at the legal and institutional foundations of artistic freedom, and considers whether legal recognition is effectively reflected in policy and practice. Second, it analyses the most pressing global threats to artistic freedom today, including conflict, displacement and heightened risks in the digital era. Finally, it explores the economic and social rights that are essential to artists' professional security.

SAFEGUARDING ARTISTIC FREEDOM: NORMATIVE, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Artistic freedom is grounded in international human rights law, yet its realization depends on effective legal protections, independent institutions and a shared normative understanding across public and civil society actors. This section examines how states are translating their commitments to artistic freedom into practice through legal frameworks, normative mechanisms and institutional safeguards. It addresses a core concern of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention): whether international recognition of artistic freedom is matched by legal enforceability and institutional capacity at the national level.

The normative architecture has expanded in recent years, under the guidance of instruments such as the 2005 Convention and the 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist (1980 Recommendation), as well as regional human rights jurisprudence. While government and civil society-led efforts have aimed to translate the principles of these instruments into practice, progress is often undermined by legislative gaps, limited enforcement and weak institutional responses.

As the 2005 Convention enters into its third decade of implementation, it is thus essential and timely to assess how legal protections and institutional mechanisms are being developed, applied and sustained across diverse regional and political contexts.

An ecosystem of legal, institutional and policy frameworks

At the international level, the 2005 Convention establishes clear and binding obligations for its Parties, and the 1980 Recommendation, although non-binding, continues to be a central normative reference that has shaped national debates and legislation on artists' rights for over four decades. The ongoing relevance of the 1980 Recommendation was underscored by UNESCO's *Empowering Creativity* report, which synthesized the outcomes of the fifth global consultation on the implementation of the Recommendation, carried out in 2022 to 2023 among UNESCO Member States. According to the survey, 69% of developed countries and 57% of developing countries reported having specific laws or regulations dedicated to the status of artists. The *Empowering Creativity* report thus highlighted advances such as these, but also stressed persistent gaps, particularly in access to social protection and effective implementation of adopted laws and policies (UNESCO, 2023c).

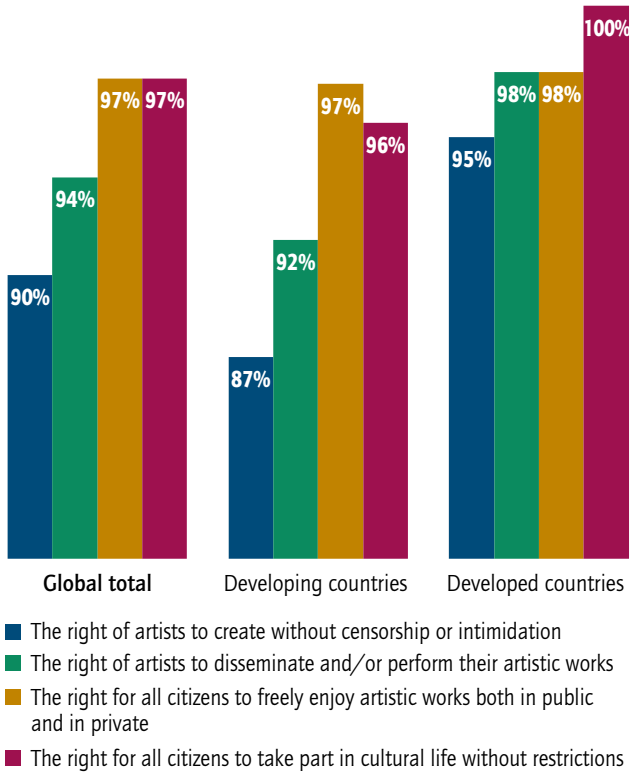
Constitutional provisions in many countries and regional human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, enshrine artistic freedom within broader guarantees of freedom of expression and cultural participation. At the national level, during the 2021-2024 period, Quadrennial Periodic Reports data show that globally over 90% of Parties report the existence of constitutional or legal guarantees across key dimensions, including the rights to create, disseminate and enjoy artistic works.

For instance, building on earlier progress, including the removal of criminal defamation provisions in Lesotho, Liberia and the Maldives, several Parties to the 2005 Convention introduced important legal reforms during this reporting period, including Scotland's repeal of its blasphemy law (2021) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and South Africa's repeal of criminal defamation (2023).

Amid increasing awareness of the challenges to artistic freedom, recent years have also witnessed several important international and regional initiatives that signal a growing institutional commitment to advocate for policy reform in this field. The MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, endorsed by 150 States, explicitly commits to reducing inequalities and reinforcing artists' rights (UNESCO, 2022b).

Figure 10.1

Proportion of Parties reporting that their constitution and/or national regulatory frameworks formally acknowledge artistic freedom across key dimensions, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Artistic freedom also featured prominently in discussions during the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference. The Outcome Document from the event emphasized cultural rights, including artistic freedom; the need to support decent work for artists and cultural workers; and the need to protect artists, cultural workers and institutions in situations of conflict, disaster or forced displacement (UNESCO, 2025a).

Other international organizations have also implemented efforts to address important dimensions of artistic freedom in recent years. Notably, the International Labour Organization organized a technical meeting in 2023 on the future of work in the arts and entertainment sector, conducted additional research and developed policy guidance thereafter (ILO, 2023). Regional organizations, from the Council of Europe to the African Union and the Organization of American States, have increasingly integrated artistic freedom into their human rights and cultural mandates.

Within the European Union's institutional framework, the 2023-2026 Work Plan for Culture proposes measures to improve working conditions and foster sustained peer exchange across its member states (Council of the European Union, 2022), and the Culture Compass for Europe establishes priorities to safeguard artistic freedom and ensure decent working conditions for artists and cultural workers (European Commission, 2025). This multi-layered institutional architecture highlights that durable protection emerges not from a single body, but from complementary responsibilities shared across governance levels.

In recent years, artistic freedom has also been reinforced through relevant developments in jurisprudence, which has contributed to highlighting the importance of rights related to artistic freedom within regional human rights frameworks. For example, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has explicitly affirmed that creative and artistic expression, including critical and controversial works, falls squarely within the scope of the right to freedom of expression as articulated in Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights. A landmark affirmation of this principle is found in the 2011 case *Fontevecchia and D'Amico v. Argentina*, where the court emphasized that artistic expression merits protection against undue interference or censorship. Building on this baseline, the court, in the 2021 case *Maya Kaqchikel Indigenous Peoples of Sumpango v. Guatemala* (clarified by an interpretation in 2022), recognized community radio as integral to Indigenous Peoples' rights to culture and participation, reaffirming the cultural dimension of freedom of expression. Such jurisprudence provides a robust legal foundation for defending artistic freedom across the American continent and continues to inform current debates and measures reported during the 2021-2024 period. Artistic freedom has also been gradually gaining importance in the agenda of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ARTICLE 19, 2024).

In Europe, the European Court of Human Rights has likewise addressed artistic expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the 2018 Pussy Riot case, the court reaffirmed that Article 10 protects not only the ideas expressed but also the form in which they are conveyed, including provocative or non-verbal forms of artistic expression. At the national level, constitutional jurisprudence has also reinforced these protections. In 2021, the Constitutional Court of Georgia ruled that restrictions on satirical artistic works violate freedom of expression, affirming that artistic expression falls within the scope of constitutional guarantees.

In Africa, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has increasingly recognized artistic freedom as integral to freedom of expression rights. Its 2019 Declaration on Freedom of Expression emphasizes that restrictions on expression, including artistic forms, must be strictly necessary, lawful and proportionate to a legitimate aim (ACHPR, 2019).

At the United Nations (UN) level, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression have provided authoritative interpretations reinforcing the importance of artistic freedom. Another special procedure, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as the Human Rights Committee have addressed cases involving artists, embedding artistic freedom more firmly within the global human rights framework. The Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council, which periodically analyses the human rights record of UN Member States and provides opportunities for civil society contributions, is also a significant element for accountability.

International cooperation programmes are also contributing to improving national frameworks, including the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals. This programme supports governmental institutions and civil society stakeholders in driving reform to align legislation and policies with the principles of the 2005 Convention and the 1980 Recommendation, to protect and promote artistic freedom and improve the professional and legal status of artists and cultural professionals. Between 2021 and 2025, the programme, which is funded by Norway, provided technical assistance to governments for developing and implementing legal, regulatory and policy frameworks to advance the status of the artist, as well as financial support to civil society organizations to undertake advocacy, training, data collection and monitoring to safeguard artistic freedom. These initiatives were implemented in 46 countries, and also included ad hoc projects focused on assisting artists and cultural institutions in emergency situations. To assist countries in developing and strengthening their legal and policy frameworks, the programme also facilitated production, jointly with the International Labour Organization, of the *Methodological Guide for the Participatory Development of a Law on the Status of the Artist* (UNESCO and ILO, 2023).

Taken together, these normative and legal frameworks, jurisprudence, human rights mechanisms and international support programmes provide a strong baseline for the protection of artistic freedom. Their effectiveness, however, depends on mechanisms that ensure adequate monitoring and safeguarding, which are the focus of the next section.

Box 10.1 • International cooperation supports policy research and action

As with other areas addressed by the 2005 Convention, improving policy frameworks related to artistic freedom requires adequate data and knowledge to help identify and analyse needs and design appropriate responses. Progress in this area often emerges through partnerships among national and international actors, as well as joint initiatives connecting public and civil society stakeholders, as illustrated by two recent examples from Africa.

The report *The Status of Women Artists and Cultural Professionals in The Gambia* was produced with support from the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme. The report features data on employment status, income, internet use and education among a sample of 487 artists and cultural professionals. On this basis, the report analysed their income-related capabilities, access to opportunities, recognition and networking, and experiences of work-related harassment and censorship, as well as the state of gender equality including pay gaps. The study was part of a broader project on the status of Gambian artists and cultural professionals implemented by the National Centre for Arts and Culture, with a particular focus on gender equality. Building on this, a National Endowment Fund for Arts and Culture was operationalized in 2023; it serves to financially support artistic and cultural programmes in the country. Throughout 2023, 100 women cultural professionals also acquired knowledge about economic and labour rights for artists, fair contracts, Intellectual Property, resource mobilization and protection from gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, the Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (PANAF) is an initiative that advocates for freedom of artistic expression across the creative sector. It aims to provide an inclusive platform for organizations, artists and culture producers and promote safe and enabling environments for artistic creativity. PANAF was founded by Selam, a non-profit cultural organization headquartered in Sweden with offices in Ethiopia and Kenya, and is supported by the Swedish Arts Council's Programme for Artistic Freedom and the Swedish Institute.

In recent years, PANAF has assessed artistic freedom in eight African countries (Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia), analysing the current situation and formulating policy recommendations. At the national level, their research enables civil society and policy makers to establish policy dialogues, while at the international level, it facilitates peer learning, networking and dialogue. These processes were brought together at the second PANAF Summit, held in Zanzibar in February 2025.

Source: Gambia QPR, 2023; Uganda QPR, 2023; UNESCO, 2023a; PANAF, 2025

Concrete mechanisms to safeguard artistic freedom

Effective institutional safeguards are indispensable for translating legal recognition of artistic freedom into practice. The main responsibility for safeguarding artistic freedom lies with the governments, which may reinforce it through the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, registries, complaint procedures and other means. National institutions such as independent national human rights institutions, ombudsperson offices and cultural observatories play an important role in documenting violations and facilitating redress. However, the status of this right is impacted by an interdependent network of governments, intergovernmental organizations, the UN and regional human rights bodies and mechanisms, and civil society organizations.

Recent examples of good practices highlight how safeguards are being developed across regions, initiated either by governments or by civil society organizations. At the governmental level, in Greece, Law 5039/2023 (Articles 107-108) established a national Registry of Employed Persons in Culture, enabling the government to track employment conditions and extend labour and social protections to cultural workers. In Namibia, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture commissioned a report to strengthen the monitoring of artistic freedom and provide recommendations to improve its protection and promotion; the Ministry also organized a public dialogue to catalyse collective efforts to integrate social protection mechanisms into the cultural and creative sector. Moreover, the National Arts Council led an extensive consultation process to revise the draft National Arts Fund Act and develop its supporting regulations, in order to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for artists in the country.

Other initiatives are led by civil society organizations, some operating in partnership with government and others addressing institutional shortcomings in the protection of artistic freedom. In Indonesia, Koalisi Seni, a national coalition of artists and cultural organizations, has established a nationwide Artistic Freedom Monitoring System that systematically records violations, with support from the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity and the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme, creating one of the few dedicated mechanisms in Asia (Koalisi Seni, 2025a).

Box 10.2 • The vera* Trust Centre in Austria

Established in 2022, vera* is an independent trust centre created to support individuals affected by violence, harassment and abuse of power in the arts, culture and sports sectors. Operated by two independent organizations with support from the Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, the centre provides psychological and legal counselling, offers guidance on possible courses of action, and acts as a central point of contact for those who perceive themselves as victims of power abuse. Ensuring low-threshold access is a core priority, alongside coordination with existing support services, political institutions and administrative bodies. Beyond individual assistance, vera* also develops workshops, awareness-raising initiatives and structural measures aimed at fostering safer working environments in cultural and artistic fields.

Source: Austria QPR, 2024

In Germany, the Themis Advice Centre operates as a sector-wide counselling and complaints mechanism for sexual harassment and violence in the performing arts and audio-visual fields, offering confidential support and pathways to remedy such problems. Another relevant example is that of the vera* Trust Centre in Austria (Box 10.2).

Awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives can also contribute to establishing protections and safeguarding artistic freedom. In Malawi, for instance, the National Commission for UNESCO organized a series of Artistic Freedom Workshops in 2021 and 2023 to train government officials, artists and civil society actors on international standards and national frameworks. In Ghana, the National Commission on Culture led a comprehensive training programme to empower artists with a deeper understanding of the cultural, policy and legal aspects that shape their work, and engaged them in consultation processes related to regulatory reforms affecting them. Civil society organizations also play a critical role in this area. In Africa, for instance, Ikirenga Art and Culture Promotion in Rwanda led research and advocacy to raise awareness of the importance of artistic freedom and to promote institutional reforms to enable it. The organization also trained artists on relevant legal frameworks, digital security, business skills and self-care for their mental health and well-being. In Angola, the Association for the Defense of Women and Peoples provided artists with access to information about their rights and with targeted legal support. At the subregional level, PEN International promoted artistic freedom, raised awareness on the critical role of writers, and advocated for their enhanced protection in Malawi, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The organization strengthened the capacities of local PEN Centres, supported authors in each target country to produce articles on writers' contributions to society and the challenges they face, and fostered public dialogue around the themes emerging from these pieces.

Collectively, these developments point to a global shift from declarative guarantees to operational mechanisms that embed artistic freedom in law, practice and institutional culture. Yet, the reach and effectiveness of these mechanisms vary widely across regions, an issue explored in the next section on key challenges.

KEY CHALLENGES TO FREEDOM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN A SHIFTING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Freedom of artistic expression is today threatened by several major – and often interconnected – political, technological and economic factors, including legal and political repression, armed conflict, digital threats and socio-economic pressures. Taken together, these challenges call for differentiated and evolving forms of protection.

In this regard, this section examines three specific challenges: first, protecting artists that experience displacement and exile, and supporting them for their sustainable reintegration; second, addressing legal constraints and under-enforcement; and third, adapting protection frameworks to unregulated digital environments. While Parties to the 2005 Convention and civil society actors have piloted effective responses, many initiatives remain fragile and disconnected from broader policy systems.

Displacement, exile and sustainable reintegration

By the end of 2024, a record 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, including 73.5 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2025a, 2025b). While it is not possible to determine how many of these individuals are artists or cultural professionals, even a small proportion would amount to tens of thousands of practitioners whose livelihoods and freedoms are directly affected.

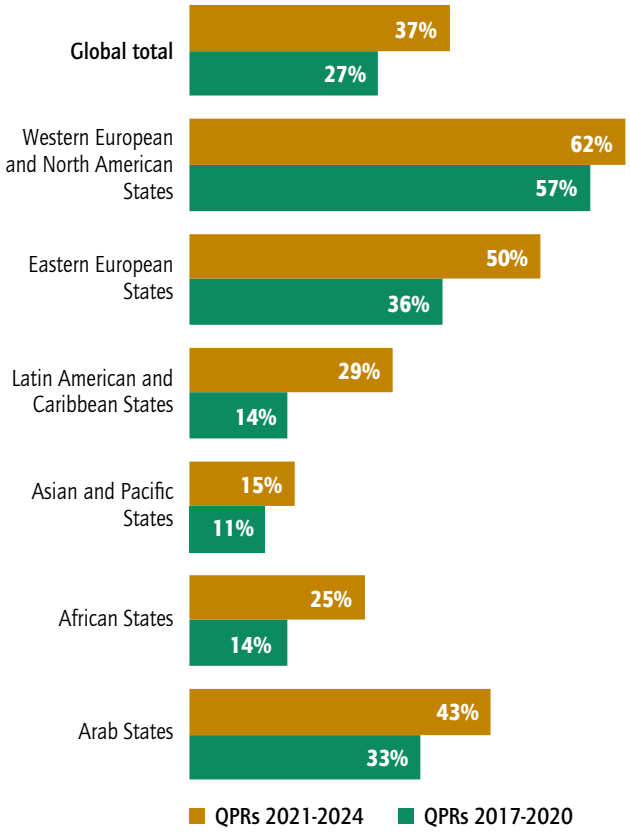
In contexts marked by political unrest, armed conflict and mass displacement, artists face escalating risks to their safety and freedom of expression. Since 2020, responses to protect artistic freedom have expanded in scope and scale, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic shock to cultural infrastructures and subsequent crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, as well as by intensified crackdowns on rights and freedoms in several other countries.

These pressures have required not only immediate protection but also credible pathways to long-term professional development, whether in host countries where artists and cultural professionals have relocated, or where possible, through supported returns to their home countries.

Across the 2017-2020 and 2021-2024 periods, all regions recorded an overall increase in the share of Parties reporting initiatives developed or supported by public authorities to protect exiled or at-risk artists. While still far from sufficient, this progress led to a global increase from 27% to 37%. Western Europe and North America reported the highest percentage, at 62%, alongside notable increases of 15 percentage points in Latin America and the Caribbean and 14 percentage points in Eastern Europe (Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2

Proportion of Parties reporting initiatives to protect artists at risk or in exile which have been developed or supported by public authorities during the last four years, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

The rise is most visible in temporary relocation schemes, emergency stipends, residency pathways, legal and psychosocial support, and reintegration programmes. Emergency measures are typically the first line of response, covering relocation or safe housing, stipends, residencies, legal aid and psychosocial support. Austria's Office Ukraine Shelter (2022-2024) connected nearly 2,000 Ukrainian artists and family members to host institutions and residencies. Germany's Goethe-Institut in Exile opened safe spaces for Afghan and Iranian artists. Meanwhile, the International Cities of Refuge Network, which connects over 80 cities in Europe, the United States and Latin America, continues to embed artists at risk within municipalities via city-level hosting.

Civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in initiatives that provide emergency support. For example, the Ukrainian Emergency Art Fund, established by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA NGO), the media outlet Zaborona, the art gallery the Naked Room and flagship public national museum Mystetskyi Arsenal, rapidly channelled emergency assistance to nearly 900 artists in 2022-2023. Moreover, with funding from UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund and the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme, between 2022 and 2024, MOCA NGO supported the creative projects of 21 Ukrainian cultural institutions, which contributed to artists' livelihoods and the continuation of cultural life in the country.

Finland-based Artists at Risk coordinates emergency relocation, housing, and professional and psychological support for artists in danger, mostly in collaboration with European municipalities and host institutions through the Artists at Risk European Network of Safe Havens, but also in other regions. With more than 330 host partners, Artists at Risk has supported over 1,100 artists from around the world. For example, with support from UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund and the Aschberg Programme, the organization provided safe artistic residencies for 38 Ukrainian women artists (and their dependents) across 13 European countries in 2022, and for 57 internally displaced Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals in 13 Ukrainian hosting institutions in safer areas of the country in 2023. Artists at Risk also curated an Artists at Risk Pavilion, hosted from April to May 2024 by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, on the sidelines of the 60th Venice Biennale. The Pavilion exhibited artworks by ten artists hailing from different crisis-affected regions.

Meanwhile, another civil society organization, Artists at Risk Connection, is dedicated to protecting artists and cultural professionals around the world, including by connecting them to relocation programmes, providing them with tools and guidance to navigate emergency financial aid for urgent needs and issuing resilience grants.

These efforts illustrate the urgency and flexibility required when artists face acute repression, violence or exile. To raise awareness about these challenges, Artists at Risk Connection, UNESCO and the Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN held a high-level event at the UN Headquarters in New York in April 2024. The international network On the Move has also established a working group on At-Risk and Displaced Arts Workers, gathering 17 public and civil society organizations that operate in this field, to share practices and advocacy tools and to raise awareness about related issues.

Several programmes also target reintegration. Germany's Culture Helping Culture supports Ukrainian refugee artists through mentorship, performances and residencies. In Jordan, the Al Balad Theatre has been building professional capacities and regional collaboration for refugee artists since 2016. France's Agency of Artists in Exile, another civil society organization, offers studio space and professional development to artists from dozens of countries. In Greece, Multaka Athens engages migrants and refugees as museum guides, strengthening cultural participation and employability in the heritage and museum sector.

Offering relocation to safe locations within artists' own countries or region is often preferable, as it supports easier adaptation to a new setting, access to audiences and peer networks, and greater cost-effectiveness. The 'Stand with Sudanese Artists' initiative, implemented by Action for Hope and Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy), with support from international, regional and local partners including UNESCO, provided emergency financial assistance for displaced Sudanese artists to relocate and resume their work in safer localities both within the country and abroad. It also supported the setup of the Wasel (which means 'connection' in Arabic) Culture Hub in Port Sudan, coordinated by the Portive Cultural Center. The hub provides a safe work and meeting space as well as networking platform for displaced Sudanese artists, allowing them to continue their creative production, discuss common challenges, develop new skills and interact with the local community.

Despite the increase in reported efforts to support artists' temporary relocation, provide emergency financial, legal and psychological assistance, and facilitate artists' integration into their host communities, responses remain fragmented and time-limited, constrained by limited resources at the national level and often dependent on short-term donor funding. These constraints underscore the fragility of existing initiatives and the need for more durable frameworks. Stronger policy anchoring, diaspora engagement and regional coordination are needed to align emergency measures with sustainable reintegration and broader cultural policy frameworks. This challenge links directly to the following section on legal repression and the under-enforcement of existing protective laws, policies and measures.

Censorship through legal frameworks and gaps in protection

Censorship through legal frameworks remains one of the greatest threats to artistic freedom. Some countries retain or misuse laws on blasphemy, defamation, terrorism or 'public morality' to suppress expression and intimidate artists. The deterrent effect of foreign agent laws on artists and cultural institutions has also emerged as a trend in recent years. Gaps in protection exist when artists face attacks and threats from organized crime, as well as repression and violence during times of protest – risks that are notably heightened during election periods (Freemuse, 2025).

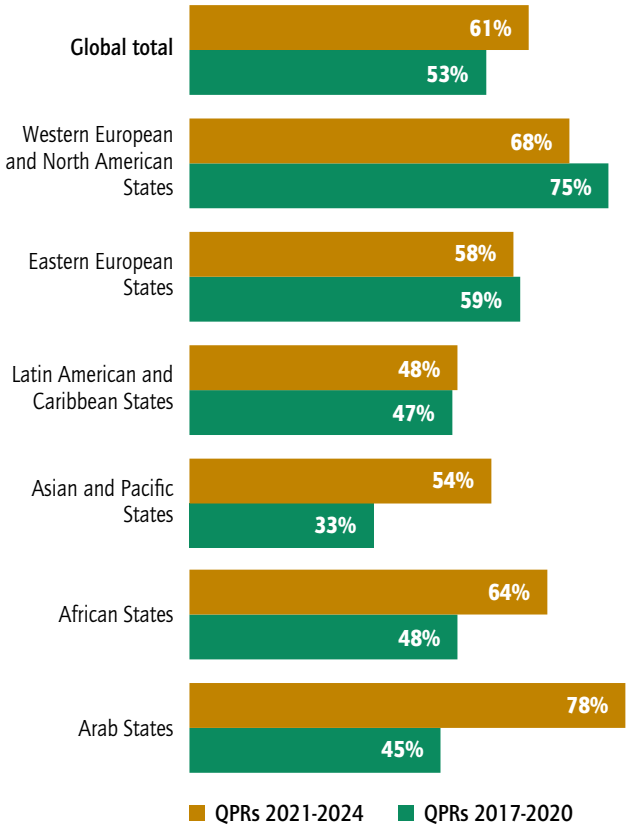
Evidence shows that a large majority of countries in the world have legal frameworks aligned with the goals of the 2005 Convention in the field of freedom of artistic expression. As previously noted (Figure 10.1), Quadrennial Periodic Reports data submitted by Parties between 2021 and 2024 show that 90% reported that their constitution and/or national regulatory frameworks recognize the right of artists to create without censorship or intimidation, and 94% reported that these frameworks recognize the right of artists to disseminate and perform their work. Yet, even where strong legal frameworks exist, implementation and remedy often lag behind, as the following sections will argue.

In many contexts, censorship and repression persist, yet Parties lack systematic monitoring systems and reliable official data to document these violations. The absence of reliable public monitoring systems leaves violations invisible in official records and creates significant gaps in protection. Civil society organizations have therefore assumed a critical role in documenting restrictions, producing independent data that both exposes ongoing repression and highlights these gaps to operationalize legal commitments.

As of 2024, 61% of Parties reported having independent bodies to monitor violations of artistic freedom, up from 53% in the previous cycle. The greatest increases were seen in the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific, with increases of 33 percentage points (from 45% to 78%) and 21 points (from 33% to 54%) (Figure 10.3). It is noteworthy that there was a 7 percentage point decline in Western European and North American States. Civil society organizations and networks are considered indispensable to this ecosystem, often filling gaps left by governments. In Asia, for instance, ArtsEquator built the Southeast Asian Arts Censorship Database (2025), the first of its kind, documenting over 600 cases of censorship between 2010 and 2022 across several countries in the region. Incidents ranged from bans and prosecutions to intimidation, gatekeeping and self-censorship. These diverse approaches to limit artistic freedom create a climate of fear that produces a significant chilling effect, particularly in politically sensitive media such as film and publishing.

Figure 10.3

Proportion of Parties reporting independent bodies are established to receive complaints and/or monitor violations and restrictions to artistic freedom, by region



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

In Latin America, the Bogotá-based Fundación Cartel Urbano produced *The State of Artistic Freedom of Expression in Latin America* report (2022-2023). In Africa, in addition to the assessments undertaken by the Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (Box 10.1), Zimbabwe-based Nhimbe Trust also documented violations and published a regional report advocating stronger protections (Nhimbe Trust, 2023).

At the global level, the 'Building Bridges – Breaking Barriers' project led by Freemuse facilitated the consolidation of a global network of partner organizations engaged in monitoring and advocating for artistic freedom. The initiative brought together a diverse group of organizations with regional and thematic expertise, to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange across different contexts. This resulted in contributions to Freemuse's *The State of Artistic Freedom* global reports and to the UN Universal Periodic Review process concerning several countries, combining Freemuse's expertise on UN mechanisms with on-the-ground insights from regional partners.

The 2023 Safe Havens Freedom Talks Conference held in Athens, preceded by 'garden sessions' that allowed artists to carry out in-depth discussions, represented a key forum to identify the gaps, resources and needs in the global support system for artists who are at risk, which provided input into the development of a hyperlinked map made available on the Safe Havens Freedom Talks website (Safe Havens Freedom Talks, 2025). By making patterns of censorship visible, these initiatives provide evidence for advocacy, international accountability and policy reform, underscoring the indispensable role of civil society in safeguarding artistic freedom.

Box 10.3 • Center for the Analysis of Liberty and Authoritarianism's Emergency Agenda (2019-2022)

In Brazil, the Center for the Analysis of Liberty and Authoritarianism (LAUT) has developed a civil-society-driven complaints and monitoring mechanism, seeking to identify the risks to freedom and democracy within the country, including restrictions on artistic freedom. The Center is an independent, non-partisan research institution funded by private and foundation donations. Through its Emergency Agenda (2019-2022), it documented 80 cases of censorship of artistic freedom, capturing actions by a wide range of state and non-state actors. Though non-exhaustive, the database provided systematic weekly updates, highlighting how restrictions on artistic freedom are embedded in broader formal and informal acts that damage or put at risk democracy and freedoms.

The artistic freedom component of the Emergency Agenda was curated by MOBILE, the Brazilian Integrated Movement for Freedom of Artistic Expression, a network of entities and collectives that work to defend and promote artistic freedom of expression in the country. MOBILE is coordinated by ARTIGO 19 and 342 Artes, in partnership with LAUT, Rede Liberdade, Artigo Quinto and Mídia NINJA. The cases featured on LAUT's Emergency Agenda Platform were selected from among the 280 incidents documented between 2019 and 2022 on MOBILE's platform, which focuses specifically on restrictions on artistic freedom. The MOBILE platform includes a form allowing the public to report violations of artistic freedom; it also features information and tools to help users identify different types of violations and access legal support.

Source: Brazil QPR, 2024; LAUT, 2025; MOBILE, 2025

Recent geopolitical crises have generated new forms of restrictions, in which cultural and political measures intersect directly with artistic freedom. The ongoing armed conflict in the Gaza Strip has triggered an alarming moment for artistic freedom, given its direct impact on the safety and livelihoods of artists and cultural professionals in Gaza, as well as in view of the increase in reported attacks and restrictions in countries traditionally regarded as strong defenders of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, several UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, issued a joint statement in November 2023 expressing alarm at the attacks, reprisals, criminalization and sanctions against individuals, including artists, who publicly voiced solidarity with the victims of the conflict. They noted the pressures artists faced to change the subjects of their creative work, as well as cases in which artists were accused of being 'troublemakers' or 'indifferent to the suffering of one side or the other', lost their jobs, were excluded from artistic programming, or were censored because of their calls for peace (OHCHR, 2023).

Meanwhile, cultural boycotts against Russian artists following the invasion in Ukraine in February 2022 have also generated significant debate about the impact of politicized decision making on cultural rights. Numerous cultural institutions, festivals, competitions and orchestras unilaterally terminated engagements with Russian artists solely on the basis of their nationality. A white paper published by Avant-Garde Lawyers (2022) highlights how such exclusions, though often intended as symbolic condemnation of state actions, in practice penalized individual artists. The report warns that normalizing exclusionary measures in times of geopolitical conflict risks creates a precedent where artists are targeted for their identities rather than their work, undermining the universality of artistic freedom.

While cultural boycotts may reflect collective geopolitical dynamics, the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) to curb artistic freedom operates through individualized legal harassment. These cases – frequently filed by powerful actors such as public bodies or officials, high-profile individuals or companies, on baseless, frivolous or exaggerated grounds – are often initiated not with the expectation of winning in court, but to intimidate and silence their targets by exhausting them financially and psychologically.

Growing concerns about SLAPPs have, for instance, been reflected in the passing of an anti-SLAPP Directive by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, and the adoption of a Recommendation on countering the use of SLAPPs by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2024.

Furthermore, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights held its first public hearing on the issue in 2023, and in 2024 it opened a consultation to gather input for producing a dedicated thematic report on the subject. At the country level, and in support of the Critical Voices project spearheaded by the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Denmark to UNESCO, the Danish Union of Journalists and the Danish Actors' Association brought together artists, journalists and scientists at the Folkemødet 2022 Festival to raise awareness of common risks they face; they have also begun establishing monitoring units in the country to gather the data needed to respond to trends and specific attacks, such as SLAPPs.

While boycotts and SLAPPs operate through different mechanisms, both may generate legal and social pressures that deter artists from exercising their rights, often leading to self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse, with intimidation and reputational risk discouraging them from pursuing sensitive themes.

The legal threats, pressures and gaps in protection that continue to affect artists underscore the urgent need for accessible legal support and specialized defence mechanisms. Independent organizations, including Avant-Garde Lawyers and the Artistic Freedom Initiative, provide this expertise by assisting artists in navigating domestic and international procedures. Yet, the scale of available support remains far below the demand. Also relevant is to build capacities among judicial and legal actors to protect artistic freedom. In this regard, the Forum for Humor and the Law, ForHum, was created in 2022 to serve as a platform for lawyers, scholars, artists and other stakeholders interested in the relationship between humour, free expression and the law. Its website features a peer-reviewed blog, a resource library and a database of legal cases related to humour and satire from around the world. Together with Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, ForHum published a toolkit to support the judiciary and other relevant actors in the protection of humour and satire as critical forms of democratic expression (Godioli et al., 2025).

In addition to the more overt forms of censorship and intimidation, several informal pressures and 'under the radar' threats also restrict freedom of artistic expression. These may include government pressure on cultural institutions and artists, excluding them from support or opportunities because of their political viewpoints or their identity (gender, ethnicity, etc.), and administrative restrictions applied more harshly on some cultural expressions than others (for example, health and safety regulations, or denial of production and presentation spaces) (Whyatt, 2023). One particular challenge concerns the difficulties in monitoring this set of pressures, since they tend to be less explicit.

Taken together, these dynamics show that while some progress has been made through reforms and independent monitoring, the persistence of outdated statutes, informal pressures and insufficient access to legal defence continues to undermine artistic freedom. Addressing this gap requires not only repealing restrictive laws but also strengthening judicial independence, building institutional capacity and ensuring specialized legal support, so that recognition in law is matched by real and enforceable protection in practice.

Digital governance and unregulated threats

Digital environments have become essential for artists to reach audiences, build networks and express ideas. But the same systems that offer visibility can also expose artists to new risks, including automated moderation (the removal of content without human review), digital surveillance and algorithmic bias (systematic distortions in training data leading to unequal treatment of content), as well as orchestrated disinformation and misinformation campaigns, hate speech and public mobilization targeting artists. These threats disproportionately affect artists from marginalized communities, particularly women and LGBTIQ+ creators, whose content is more often flagged as inappropriate or controversial.

Measures specifically addressing artistic freedom in digital environments remain limited globally, reported by fewer than one-third of countries in the latest global consultation on the implementation of the 1980 Recommendation. In the absence of comprehensive state responses, civil society has played a leading role. According to this consultation, around half of participating non-governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations reported initiatives aimed at helping artists navigate digital challenges or harness new opportunities. These types of initiatives train artists in platform navigation, document content takedowns, and advocate for transparency in algorithmic decision making. For example, Don't Delete Art – a coalition of artist-activists, art collectors and human rights organizations – has helped inform artists about the risks they face and how they can take advantage of the new possibilities opened by the digital environment. In November 2025, the pro bono art and law organization Lawyers for the Creative Arts, together with the National Coalition Against Censorship (a federation of nearly 60 American non-profit organizations dedicated to the promotion and defence of the First Amendment right), held a webinar on 'Tactics to Avoid Art Censorship Online'. Another Don't Delete Art member, Artists at Risk Connection, produced a safety guide for artists that includes modules on cybersecurity (ARC, 2021) and delivered digital safety training for artists, including through a workshop at UNESCO's 2022 World Press Freedom Day celebration in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination, which gathered artists and cultural professionals, civil society and government representatives from Central America and Uruguay. Yet, most existing efforts equipping artists to face digital challenges remain project-based, reactive and vulnerable to political and platform shifts.

The consequences of the regulatory vacuum on artistic freedom, and other fundamental freedoms, in the digital space are evident in corporate governance. The company Meta's January 2025 moderation changes, removing fact-checking requirements and loosening hate speech rules, prompted widespread concern from civil society. ARTICLE 19, an international non-governmental organization actively working on freedom of expression, warned that this could result in unchecked harmful content, especially affecting vulnerable groups (ARTICLE 19, 2025). While the European Union's Digital Services Act (2022) represents one attempt at systemic accountability, such frameworks remain rare. Beyond platform rules, digital surveillance has become a key tool for repression. Even after fleeing their home country, artists can continue to be targeted via spyware and harassed online. Freemuse (2022) documents how prosecutions under digital security laws are now one of the fastest-growing forms of silencing artists. These practices blur legal enforcement and intimidation, creating a chilling effect that silences artists before formal censorship occurs.

The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) adds further complexity. AI can be used to create deepfakes and non-consensual content to harass, humiliate or coerce artists into silence. From the perspective of socio-economic rights, by training AI models based on artists' work and reproducing it without consent, GenAI undermines copyright and authorship, and complicates equitable remuneration. Different regions are beginning to regulate in divergent ways: the European Union's AI Act imposes transparency, the United States' approach relies largely on courts and fair use, and China requires licensing of training data. No coherent international framework has yet emerged, leaving protection for artists fragmented.

In her 2025 report on AI and creativity, the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Alexandra Xanthaki, warned that while several international declarations acknowledge the human rights implications of AI, they have not been translated into concrete action and frequently fail to address the impact of AI on cultural rights. She urged governments to recognize the many ways in which the use of AI can erode human creativity and to demonstrate political will to address violations of cultural rights linked to its use.

Among her recommendations were to adopt measures that ensure the recognition and visibility of works created by humans and to strengthen the ability of individual and collective authors to retain control over how their data are collected, stored, used and shared in AI systems. Governments should also strengthen regulations that protect right holders' moral and material interests when their works are used to train AI models, and ensure that clear accountability mechanisms are in place to identify and address harms caused by AI systems in creative contexts (Xanthaki, 2025).

Against this backdrop, some governments and civil society actors have begun to experiment with policy and governance innovations that address the intersection of AI, artistic freedom and cultural policy. Countries have also introduced measures that explicitly address artistic freedom in the digital environment. According to the 1980 Recommendation consultation, 27% of developing and 19% of developed countries reported such measures. While important, these figures remain low, and more progress is needed to ensure that legal and regulatory reforms, policies and measures are developed and implemented in line with international human rights standards, and that they advance artistic freedom rather than unduly restrict it.

An example of a reform that strengthens creators' ability to negotiate fairer terms is Sweden's transposition, in 2023, of the European Union Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market into Swedish law. The amendments introduced to the country's legislation impose licensing obligations on content-sharing platforms and improve transparency in connection to artists' remuneration. The initiative provides a legislative model for copyright in platform-dominated markets, anticipating challenges from algorithmic moderation and AI-generated content.

Complementing government-led efforts, civil society initiatives offer counterbalances to unregulated digital power. In 2023, the Latin American Civil Society Alliance for Fair Access to Knowledge produced a study analysing the impact of copyright law on the development of AI across 19 Latin American countries. The report highlighted asymmetries between the countries where AI development and use is majorly concentrated and Latin American contexts, noting how restrictive copyright frameworks risk hindering local innovation. It also presented a model legal text for potential adoption by Latin American States. This study is relevant as it frames AI not only as a copyright challenge but also as an opportunity to strengthen local cultural production and the work of cultural professionals. By situating AI within cultural policy debates, it emphasizes the need for inclusive frameworks that ensure digital environments support, rather than undermine, the creative sectors in the wider region (Díaz Charquero and Rangel, 2023).

To encourage reflection on the critical use of AI by stakeholders in the cultural and creative industries, in August 2025, FUTURX – a research and development centre in Argentina focused on the intersection of music, technology and internet culture – and the UNESCO Regional Office in Montevideo, organized a panel discussion. It focused on the development of protocols to facilitate cultural organizations' decision making when faced with common challenges posed by AI, preventing abuses and protecting copyright, guaranteeing transparency and trust, and protecting and strengthening cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2025b).

In New Zealand, Te Hiku Media, a Māori broadcasting and digital organization, is developing culturally grounded speech-recognition tools to preserve language sovereignty and embed Indigenous data ethics. In Canada, the Anishinaabe-led Biskaabiiyaang metaverse project fosters Indigenous storytelling through decentralized digital tools. In Ethiopia, Gerar – The Creative Hub implemented a project aimed at equipping women visual artists to thrive in the digital age, by enhancing their skills to manage their digital presence effectively, boosting their market reach and career prospects.

Together, these examples show both the effectiveness of rights-based, culturally grounded frameworks for digital governance, as well as the potential of artist- and community-led governance models and the importance of empowering artists so that they are not left behind in the digital era. For lasting protection, governments should not only regulate platforms and AI in accordance with international human rights standards, but also scale up and support such models to build resilient protections for artistic freedom in the digital age.

SUPPORTING THE ARTIST: BUILDING STABILITY THROUGH GUARANTEEING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS

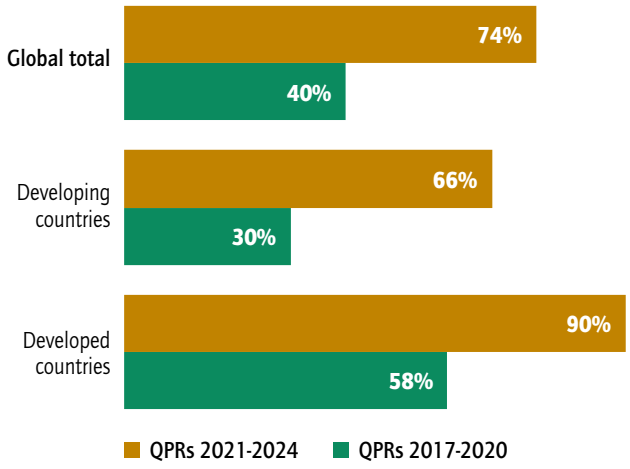
Artists globally face significant economic and social challenges that are intensified by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, global inflation and political shifts. These conditions expose long-standing vulnerabilities within the cultural and creative sector, including precarious legal status, fragmented funding structures, insufficient social protection, and disparities in equity and Intellectual Property rights. Effective responses require comprehensive institutional frameworks informed by civil society insights, expert reflections and legislative innovations, supported by clear statistical evidence.

Institutional initiatives to advance artists' socio-economic rights

During the 2021-2024 period, several Parties to the Convention introduced or strengthened measures that take the professional status of artists into account, reflecting a broader trend towards expanding protections for cultural workers. Indeed, while in 2017-2020 only 40% of reporting Parties referred to having such social protection measures, the figure rose to 74% in 2021-2024 (Figure 10.4). The progress was observed in both developed (from 58% to 90%) and developing countries (from 30% to 66%), although there remain differences across regions, with the highest percentage registered in Eastern Europe (100%) and the lowest in Africa (59%). The increase in initiatives in this field was likely driven by temporary support measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which raised awareness of the precarious working and socio-economic conditions for artists and cultural professionals.

Figure 10.4

Proportion of Parties having adopted or revised social protection measures that take the professional status of artists into account in the last four years, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

To support this overall progress, several countries have introduced new regulations or updated existing frameworks. Lithuania amended its programme for the social protection of artists between 2020 and 2022, expanding access to creative downtime payments during states of emergency and mobilizing additional funds to cover social security and health insurance contributions. Other examples in Europe include Belgium's reforms in support of artists' social status through the creation of an arts labour commission and the issuing of arts work certificates to improve their social protection (effective from 2024) (Valais, 2025), Portugal's Decree Law on the Statute of Professionals in the Cultural Area (effective from 2022), and Romania's approval of the Emergency Ordinance No. 21/2023 regarding the Status of the professional cultural worker (2023). In Africa, Cabo Verde adopted a law on the status of the artist in 2025, while Djibouti and Mozambique developed draft legislation in this area. In Seychelles, a process of consultations and a baseline study on the socio-economic protection of artists and the related legislative gaps were also conducted to pave the way towards a law on the status of the artist. In Senegal, where a law on the status of the artist and cultural professionals came into force in 2021, the Directorate of Arts, Ministry of Culture and Historical Heritage has encouraged cultural stakeholders to take greater ownership, in particular by facilitating their active involvement in finalizing and validating the law's implementing texts, and raising awareness about it. In turn, following the adoption of a status of the artist decree in 2021, Côte d'Ivoire launched a process to develop another decree setting the conditions and modalities for the granting of a professional artist card. In Malawi, following the adoption of the National Arts and Heritage Bill in 2024 – which will mobilize and disburse funds to artists and cultural practitioners to support the development of the cultural and creative industries – a participatory process was facilitated to develop the rules, regulations and implementation procedures of the National Arts and Heritage Promotion Fund.

In the Arab region, through Presidential Decree No. 23-376, Algeria has formalized the professional status of artists and introduced legal guarantees for access to social protection and economic rights. Complementing this, Algeria's Ministry of Culture has promoted inclusive policies and support schemes such as retirement pensions and social security mechanisms tailored to artists. These efforts are further reinforced by its national copyright office, mandated to safeguard Intellectual Property and the economic rights of creators. Despite challenges in the implementation of these reforms, they illustrate the potential of combining national legislation with practical support infrastructure. In Tunisia, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs implemented a series of consultations with artists and cultural professionals, aimed at refining the draft law on the status of the artist, facilitating its endorsement and concrete implementation, as well as informing the elaboration of the related decree-laws. Capacity building was also delivered to the national and local institutions that will implement and monitor the new law once it is adopted.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Chilean Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage spearheaded advances in the decent cultural work agenda, including by coordinating an Interministerial Committee set up for this purpose, as well as through research, dialogue and awareness-raising actions.

In turn, the Dominican Republic launched ARTSECURE, a project aimed at developing a comprehensive social security framework tailored to artists and the cultural sector. Led by the Ministry of Culture and supported by UNESCO and the European Union, the initiative seeks to improve artists' and cultural workers' access to social and labour rights, reduce the vulnerability caused by informality, and strengthen the creative economy.

There have also been concrete actions at the regional level. For example, the European Parliament has called for the establishment of a European framework for artists' working conditions; the Culture Compass for Europe states that the European Commission will propose a European Union Artists Charter. Moreover, as a result of a sustained collaborative process spearheaded by UNESCO, the International Labour Organization and the African Union, 29 African Union member states validated the joint CREATE Programme in April 2025. It promotes decent work in the cultural and creative economy across the region. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers of Culture of the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination adopted a Regional Policy for the Promotion and Protection of Artists and Cultural Workers in Central America (Box 10.4).

As in other policy areas, developments in this field need supporting data, and some initiatives have been established in recent years to analyse current challenges. In Germany, the Systemcheck research project, implemented by the Federal Association for the Independent Performing Arts, investigated the income and social security situation of self-employed workers and those that have a portfolio career (that is, a combination of work as employed and self-employed) in the performing arts. For the first time, it provided quantitative and qualitative data on their working conditions, generating wide public, academic and policy interest. Its findings highlighted precariousness, gaps in social protection, and the need for systemic reform. The project produced policy recommendations to improve social security systems for creative professionals, positioned artists' organizations as relevant policy partners and encouraged reforms that could also benefit other sectors.

In Slovenia, in the wake of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Poligon Creative Centre conducted a unique three-year longitudinal study funded by the Slovenian Centre for Creativity that surveyed over 4,400 respondents, representing more than 10% of the national workforce in the cultural and creative sector. Results showed the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing problems, such as chronic precarity and low income. It concluded that only systemic reform, not temporary crisis measures, can address these challenges in Slovenia's cultural and creative industries.

Facilitating data collection and research to inform robust laws, policies and measures to enhance the status of the artist is one of the key areas of support provided by the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme. Research on the conditions of artists and cultural professionals with a view to enhancing related regulatory frameworks was produced under government-led projects in Madagascar and Uganda, as well as in Mongolia, where it focused on the film industry. Efforts were accompanied by awareness-raising and capacity-building actions.

Box 10.4 • Protecting and promoting the status of the artist in Central America

The Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination led the design of a regional policy for the protection and promotion of the status of artists and cultural professionals in Central America, with support from the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme. The initiative, launched in September 2023, included the set-up of a technical committee composed of governmental focal points from each of the participating countries (Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) and an advisory group composed of members of civil society and the artistic community of each country. Based on an initial diagnosis of the condition of the artist in the SICA (Central American Integration System) region countries, technical support was provided for the design and implementation of national participatory consultations. These fed into the development of a draft regional policy, aligned with the 2005 Convention and the 1980 Recommendation, which was approved by the Council of Ministers of Culture of the SICA region in 2025.

Recognizing the initiative's impact, the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) approached UNESCO to request access to the information gathered under the initiative, as well as to the draft regional policy document guidelines and other practical tools developed to support the participating governments in implementing the project's different phases. These resources provided key input towards the development of a policy on the status of artists and cultural workers at the Ibero-American level, led by the OEI with support from the Spanish Agency for International Development and in partnership with UNESCO.

Source: UNESCO, 2024, 2023b; CECC, 2025

In the State of Palestine, an assessment of the legal environment was conducted to advance regulatory reforms favouring the establishment, operation and growth of cultural entrepreneurship. In Zimbabwe, a baseline study, supported by UNESCO and the International Labour Organization in the framework of an initiative led by the National Arts Council, provides a roadmap to support the transition of the cultural and creative sector from informality to a more structured and sustainable framework. In Peru, a report produced following a comprehensive and inclusive data collection approach as part of technical assistance offered to the Ministry of Culture, presents a detailed vision of the socio-economic, educational and labour conditions of cultural and art workers, and also served to improve the web platform of the National Registry of Workers and Organizations of Culture and the Arts (Rentoca). In Argentina, the Cultural Institute of the Province of Buenos Aires created a digital platform, the Cultural Information System of the Province of Buenos Aires, to serve as an observatory to monitor, gather and provide access to data on cultural and creative industries. The platform supports the design of regulatory frameworks to strengthen the creative sector and improve the status of artists and cultural workers.

Several civil society-led programmes supported by UNESCO also advanced important research. For instance, the Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy produced, among other outputs, a policy paper that examines the vulnerabilities and untapped potential of cultural and creative industry workers in Cambodia, as well as the complementary *Know Your Rights* pamphlet for artists. In Yemen, the Madarat Cultural Organization developed a public policy paper analysing the legal, economic and institutional barriers facing the country's creative practitioners. The paper serves as a basis for artist-led advocacy within a project focused on the two culturally active governorates of Hadhramaut and Aden. In Brazil, a study was conducted by the Instituto Pensar in collaboration with specialized consultancy Garimpo de Soluções on the situation of cultural professionals in the country, paying special attention to women and youth in small cities, to produce recommendations supporting parliamentarians in designing and implementing a regulatory framework for the creative economy that protects and promotes the status of the artist and cultural professionals.

Copyright frameworks are also critical for upholding artists' economic rights. Recent initiatives in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania illustrate emerging state-led efforts to strengthen copyright enforcement and raise awareness, though these measures remain uneven in scope and effectiveness. While these frameworks are relevant to expanding protections, challenges still remain around implementation capacity and regional harmonization.

Box 10.5 • The Creativity and Copyright Association in Viet Nam

Established in 2021 under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Viet Nam Creativity and Copyright Association is a nationwide body dedicated to copyright protection for literary and artistic works. Operating with legal status, its tasks include promoting copyright protection and creative development; advising authorities on copyright policy; organizing conferences, fairs and exhibitions; publishing materials and running media platforms to raise awareness; and fostering international cooperation. The Association represents a formal institutional mechanism for strengthening copyright enforcement and supporting creators, linking creative development with legal protection across Viet Nam.

Source: Viet Nam QPR, 2024

Regional economic initiatives also play a crucial role. The Creative Africa Nexus (CANEX) programme, spearheaded by Afreximbank, represents a substantial regional economic initiative aimed at addressing informality and Intellectual Property challenges within Africa's creative industries. CANEX has committed US$2 billion between 2024 and 2027 to provide structured financial support to some cultural and creative sectors (such as film), facilitate capacity building for professionals, incubators and accelerators, and market access for cultural and creative products. With its governmental and civil society partners, the programme also undertakes high-level political advocacy to improve policy formulation and create an enabling regulatory and operating environment for creative professionals. By targeting copyright enforcement and formalization of creative labour, CANEX strengthens integration into regional and international markets (Afreximbank, 2024). Comparable large-scale economic initiatives are rare outside Africa, though there is a need for similar regional initiatives globally.

Transparency in public funding

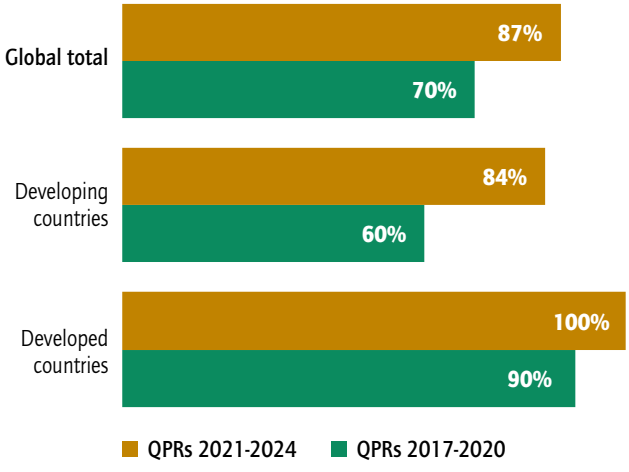
Transparency in public funding remains a cornerstone of artists' economic rights, but data show a gap between commitments and institutional practice. According to Quadrennial Periodic Reports data from 2021 to 2024, 87% of Parties reported measures and initiatives intended to ensure transparent decision making in state funding, grants and awards for artists, up from 70% in the 2017-2020 cycle. Developed countries reported near-universal adoption of such measures (100%), compared to 84% in developing countries, with particularly strong reporting in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and North America (Figure 10.5).

This reflects growing policy attention to transparency as a guiding principle.

At the same time, observations from civil society and other sources highlight structural risks that these numbers alone cannot capture. *The Fragile Triangle of Artistic Freedom* report, for example, refers to tensions between artists', civil society organizations' and cultural organizations' autonomy and funding frameworks, which often incentivize alignment with governments' policy agendas and donors' institutional priorities (Reitov and Whyatt, 2024). Dependency on funding can lead artists, civil society and cultural organizations towards self-censorship or indirectly pressure them to conform to dominant political narratives. Culture Action Europe in its 2025 position paper *EU Funding for Culture in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034* also emphasizes that funding for cultural projects should respect the independence of organizations and uphold the right of beneficiaries to determine their own methods. Taken together, these reflections suggest that underlining transparency alone is insufficient: funding mechanisms must also safeguard pluralism and independence if they are to protect artistic freedom in practice.

Figure 10.5

Proportion of Parties with measures and initiatives intended to ensure transparent decision making on government funding/state grants and awards for artists, by developing and developed countries



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

Equity and inclusion in access to public funds and other forms of support

In the section on 'Cultural Rights as Human Rights' of the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference Outcome Document, government representatives pledge to increase efforts to ensure the equitable distribution of opportunities to access, contribute to and benefit from culture in the face of persisting inequalities (UNESCO, 2025a). The effectiveness of this and other international commitments to equal access, like those enshrined in the 2005 Convention, ultimately depend on whether governments embed them in legislation and policy frameworks that respond to diverse social realities.

According to the 1980 Recommendation global consultation, 77% of developed countries and 74% of developing countries reported measures and policies aimed to ensure gender equality in the cultural sector. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated data makes it difficult to assess the impact of such measures and policies in practice. Where such data are available, they tend to reveal disparities, for example in income levels between men and women artists, as highlighted in the UNESCO *Empowering Creativity* report (2023c). Targeted measures for Indigenous Peoples, minorities, youth and artists with disabilities remain limited within national cultural policies despite their relevance to international human rights commitments. According to the 1980 Recommendation global consultation, only a small share of countries report adopting specific legal or policy measures for artists belonging to Indigenous communities (8% globally) and sexual minorities (also 8%). Support for youth (19%), cultural minorities (15%) and artists with disabilities (14%) is somewhat more common but still remains low (Table 10.1). In light of these deep disparities within the cultural sector and the way multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion can interact to affect some artists' status, UNESCO's *Empowering Creativity* report (2023) and civil society organizations such as Culture Action Europe have emphasized the importance of adopting intersectional frameworks in cultural policy design to recognize the compounded vulnerabilities faced by women, LGBTIQ+ creators and minority groups.

In recent years, some Parties to the 2005 Convention have adopted relevant measures in this field. Spain's Statute of the Artist (a set of labour, social protection, fiscal and educational measures approved by a series of Royal Decrees, following work by a Parliamentary Committee and in consultation with several civil society organizations) incorporates targeted provisions for migrants, women and youth. On the other hand, the Cultural Rights Plan adopted by Spain in 2025 acknowledges that there are multiple barriers to the exercise of cultural rights and that an intersectional and sustained political response is needed.

Table 10.1 • Most frequently reported types of artists' groups for which specific support measures exist, by region

	Global total	Western European and North American States	Eastern European States	Latin American and Caribbean States	Asian and Pacific States	African States	Arab States
Young people	19%	22%	22%	19%	15%	15%	25%
Cultural minorities	15%	16%	13%	19%	11%	13%	25%
Linguistic minorities	12%	14%	13%	10%	11%	13%	0%
Religious minorities	5%	4%	4%	2%	7%	10%	0%
Sexual minorities	8%	8%	7%	12%	11%	3%	0%
Artists with disabilities	14%	12%	16%	10%	19%	15%	25%
Artists based in rural areas	9%	8%	7%	7%	11%	13%	0%
Indigenous Peoples	8%	4%	2%	14%	11%	10%	0%
People with refugee/ migrant status	10%	10%	16%	7%	4%	8%	25%

Source: UNESCO (1980 Recommendation)

In Latin America, Uruguay's periodic report highlighted new equity-focused initiatives embedded within broader social protection reforms, while, with support from the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme, the National University of Costa Rica led a participatory process to formulate a proposal for updating the National Policy on Cultural Rights, with a view to promote decent working conditions for young artists. The proposal was presented to the Ministry of Culture and Youth for its consideration. In Asia, the Republic of Korea reported targeted programmes for artists with disabilities. The Federation of Disability Culture and Arts Associations of Korea is a corporation under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, established by an alliance of 11 cultural and artistic organizations across the country. Among other things, it supports artists with disabilities to develop their creative work and to foster their employment opportunities and independent living. Together, these examples show efforts to introduce equity considerations into national cultural and labour frameworks, and highlight how often developments in this area require collaboration between governments and civil society.

At the same time, monitoring by civil society provides important context, reminding us that reforms remain partial. Freemuse's *State of Artistic Freedom 2022* highlights that women artists are disproportionately targeted by censorship, harassment and moral restrictions, especially in contexts where 'indecency' or 'public morality' laws are applied. These limits to their artistic expression impact their inclusion in cultural life and capacity to live off of their artistic work. In Southeast Asia, Koalisi Seni has documented the emotional and professional challenges faced by women in the cultural and creative industries, with UNESCO Jakarta translating this research into English in 2024 to inform regional policy dialogues. More recently, the organization examined the conditions of gender-diverse artists and creatives (Koalisi Seni, 2025b).

These examples underscore that improving artists' social and economic rights requires not only stabilizing working conditions but also correcting entrenched disparities in recognition and access to funding and other resources for professional development. Achieving equity in the cultural sector demands long-term structural transformation and intersectional policy frameworks that address the ways in which women artists, LGBTIQ+ creators and minority artists are affected by multiple vulnerabilities that reinforce each other. Without embedding equity as a core principle of cultural policy, progress risks remaining fragmented and temporary, leaving many communities under-represented in national frameworks.

For Parties to the Convention

- Continue to engage with international and regional human rights frameworks, networks and mechanisms that reinforce recognition and build a shared normative understanding of artistic freedom, including initiatives across the UN system.
- Align national legal frameworks with international human rights standards by reviewing, amending or repealing restrictive legislation often used to silence dissent, such as blasphemy laws and those including criminal defamation provisions. Strengthen the enforcement of laws safeguarding artistic freedom, ensuring they are legally enforceable and effective in practice. Establish institutional safeguards, including autonomous and well-resourced national human rights institutions and ombudsperson offices, while enhancing judicial independence and institutional capacity.
- Reinforce support measures for artists displaced by political unrest and armed conflict. Embed emergency protection mechanisms – such as relocation schemes, stipends, residencies, and psychosocial and legal support – into national and international crisis-preparedness and response frameworks. These initiatives should provide durable pathways for professional development and social integration, while aligning with broader cultural policy frameworks and moving beyond temporary relief to address the chronic fragility of current systems.
- Invest in systematic data collection through national observatories, independent monitoring bodies and partnerships with civil society to close evidence gaps and track progress on artistic freedom. Monitoring should cover both overt violations and more subtle forms of restriction, for instance through administrative constraints.
- Guarantee accessible legal support and specialized defence mechanisms for artists, including those prosecuted under laws criminalizing defamation, blasphemy, or other provisions used to unjustifiably limit artistic freedom; and for those who are targeted by SLAPPs and other pervasive threats to artistic freedom.
- Close regulatory gaps by establishing human-rights-based and culturally grounded frameworks for digital governance and resilient protection systems for artistic freedom in the digital age. These should address threats posed by digital surveillance and algorithmic bias, and ensure that authors retain control over their moral and material interests, including in the context of Generative Artificial Intelligence.
- Expand social protection systems for artists by formalizing their professional status and integrating them into labour, welfare, health and Intellectual Property frameworks. This will ensure that progress is not precariously linked only to temporary crisis measures. Continue to collect quantitative and qualitative data related to artists' working conditions and support civil society in advancing important research in this area.
- Embed equity in funding access and policy design. Develop integrated and intersectoral policy frameworks, especially in support of artists from vulnerable communities, including women, youth, Indigenous communities and other minority groups. Commit to making the equitable distribution of opportunities a core principle of cultural policy through long-term structural transformation grounded in intersectional approaches.
- Support civil society's efforts to safeguard artistic freedom by reinforcing its capacity to carry out monitoring, research, awareness-raising, advocacy and training initiatives, and to provide essential operational support to artists at risk. Deepen sustained and systematic collaboration with civil society organizations, guaranteeing an enabling environment for their independent action free from undue political or funding constraints.

For civil society

- Continue leading independent monitoring efforts and advancing research, to make visible violations of artistic freedom, raise awareness about the status of artists' rights, advocate for their reinforced protection and provide them with emergency and operational support to bridge the persistent implementation gap between law and practice.
- Enhance strategic engagement with key institutions and human rights mechanisms at national, regional and international levels – including special procedures, quasi-judicial bodies and the UN Universal Periodic Review process – to advance artistic freedom. Strengthen collaboration with other stakeholder groups (such as journalists, academics, educators and human rights defenders) to foster joint action and accountability in support of freedom of expression in all its forms.

For UNESCO

- Actively cooperate with the international network of actors supporting artistic freedom – including governments, civil society, regional and international human rights bodies, and other intergovernmental organizations – to ensure cross-sectoral synergy.
- Elevate artistic freedom in high-level policy agendas, by promoting its inclusion through relevant international fora. Build commitment among governments and advocate for a coherent global framework that safeguards artistic freedom across regions and addresses the persistent implementation gap.
- Enhance coordination with regional organizations and other UN agencies to expand cooperation on awareness raising, advocacy, monitoring and capacity building in the field of artistic freedom. Support the integration of emergency protection and support mechanisms for at-risk and displaced artists into international emergency response frameworks, with attention to facilitating – beyond urgent forms of assistance – their sustainable professional reintegration.
- Continue implementing international cooperation programmes that support artistic freedom, such as the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals, in collaboration with governments and civil society.
- Strengthen the implementation of international normative instruments, such as the 2005 Convention and the 1980 Recommendation, which contribute to shaping legislation, policies and measures impacting on artists' rights. Ensure complementarity and synergy so that the principles embedded in these legal instruments are translated into practice across regions and countries.

Annexes

Author biographies

Methodology

Bibliography

List of figures and tables

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Author biographies

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Principal Editor

Jordi Baltà Portolés is a freelance consultant, researcher and trainer in cultural policy, sustainability and international cultural relations. His areas of interest include cultural diversity, local cultural policy, cultural rights and the relationship between culture and sustainability. He is a member of the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility for the 2005 Convention, an advisor on culture and sustainable cities at the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments and regularly works with other organizations, including Trànsit Projectes and On the Move. Jordi Baltà Portolés holds a PhD from the universities of Girona and Melbourne, and teaches regularly at several universities.

Andy C. Pratt

Chapter 1 • Building on strong foundations

Andy C. Pratt is Emeritus Professor of Cultural Economy at City St George's, University of London. He also holds the UNESCO Chair on Global Creative Economy. His academic research has three strands: the social and economic dynamics of clustering and knowledge exchange, the definition and measurement of employment in the cultural and creative industries, and cultural governance and policy making at the national, regional and urban scales. Andy C. Pratt has worked as an advisor for the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, UN Trade and Development, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the British Council and the Goethe-Institut.

Audrey Yue

Chapter 2 • Reconfiguring media diversity

Audrey Yue is Provost's Chair Professor in Communications and New Media and Deputy Director of the Centre for Trusted Internet and Community at the National University of Singapore. Her research spans cultural policy and urban communication, transnational Chinese media cultures and queer Asian studies. She has published eight books and over one hundred articles and chapters, with recent essays in *Big Data and Society* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. She has collaborated with art councils in Australia, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, creating indicators for multicultural participation and digital well-being. She is currently completing a project on digital information resilience supported by the Ministry of Education, Singapore.

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Chapter 3 • The digital environment: online culture, offline implications

Heritiana Ranaivoson is Research Professor at imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel. He holds a PhD in Economics from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University and was associate researcher at Mines ParisTech. He has led several research projects at international and national levels for the European Commission, the European Parliament, UNESCO and Google. Heritiana Ranaivoson has published extensively in the fields of cultural and media diversity, media innovation, media policy, audiovisual platforms and the role of recommender systems in cultural industries. His latest co-edited book is *European Audiovisual Policy in Transition* with Routledge.

Ayeta Anne Wangusa

Chapter 4 • Civil society, voices for culture and action

Ayeta Anne Wangusa is a creative economy and communication specialist who provides cultural and pan-African thought leadership for sustainable development through her work at Culture and Development East Africa. She has been a member of the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility for the 2005 Convention since 2015. She is a board member of the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa and Real Transformation Initiative, Tanzania. As a researcher, she has on different occasions been commissioned by UNESCO, the African Union Commission, the International Labour Organization, Afreximbank and the British Council for creative economy research. She is a PhD student in Media and Communication Research at the University of Leicester.

Marie Le Sourd

Chapter 5 • The shifting borders of cultural mobility

Marie Le Sourd has been Secretary General of On the Move, the international cultural mobility information network, since 2012 and Board Member of Culture Action Europe since 2025. Prior to this position, she directed the French Cultural Centre in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2006-2011), and worked at the Culture Department of the Asia-Europe Foundation in Singapore (1999-2006), including as Acting Director. Over the years, Marie Le Sourd has developed extensive knowledge of international cultural cooperation and funding schemes for the mobility of artists, cultural professionals and networks. She is deeply interested in the multiple and evolving needs, motivations, contexts and realities of mobility for artists and cultural professionals.

Rana Yazaji

Chapter 5 • The shifting borders of cultural mobility

Rana Yazaji is Co-Director of Artas Foundation, a Swiss foundation for arts in conflict regions. She is also a lecturer and researcher at Zurich University of the Arts, focusing on international cooperation and contemporary arts in war and post-war contexts. She bases her work on the combination of research and cultural practices focusing on three interconnected levels: creative initiatives, institutional building and policy discussions. In 2011, she co-founded Ettijahat – Independent Culture, a Syrian organization formed to support independent arts and culture to play a role in social and political transformation. In 2014, she became Executive Director of Culture Resource (*Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy*), a cultural organization active in the Arab region.

André Gouws

Chapter 6 • Tracking cultural goods and services in global trade

André Gouws is a South African economist specializing in trade and cultural policy. A former trade diplomat and senior official in national and local government, he has contributed to key strategies for the cultural and creative industries, including South Africa's Cultural Economy Master Plan and Cultural Satellite Account. He has led socio-economic impact assessments of cultural policies and advised on creative export strategies. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Pretoria and is currently Professor of Practice at the University of Johannesburg while consulting on cultural and trade policy.

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Jen Snowball is Professor of Economics at Rhodes University, South Africa, specializing in cultural economics and the creative industries. She is a researcher at the South African Cultural Observatory, which provides policy-relevant data and research on South Africa's cultural and creative sectors. She co-leads the Cluster of Research Excellence in Creative Economies, a collaboration between the African Research Universities Alliance and the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, and serves as an editor of the *African Journal of Creative Economy*.

Véronique Guèvremont

Chapter 7 • Reinforcing the Convention's influence in international fora

Véronique Guèvremont is a Professor at the Faculty of Law of Laval University in Quebec City, Canada. She holds the UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and is co-head of the Arts, Media and Cultural Diversity axis of the International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of AI and Digital Technologies. She is also Scientific Co-Director of Innovations and Social Implications at the IVADO artificial intelligence research consortium. A graduate of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, she has been teaching international cultural law and international economic law since 2006. Since 2015, she has been a member of the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility for the 2005 Convention.

Leandro Valiati

Chapter 8 • Mind the gap: culture and sustainable development

Leandro Valiati has pioneered academic research and transformative evidence-based policy frameworks in the field of cultural and creative industries. He is based at the University of Manchester and has held academic appointments at Sorbonne University and Queen Mary University of London. He was recognized for Exceptional Talent and Global Leadership in Creative Industries by the British Academy, and holds advisory and fellow positions in the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, Global Creative Economy Council, and the United Kingdom's Department for Culture, Media and Sport's College of Experts. He is also the author of *The Political Economy of the Creative and Cultural Industries*, which rethinks policy approaches to multidimensional development based on cultural and creative industries.

Bridget Conor

Chapter 9 • Gender equality: not an optional extra

Bridget Conor is Associate Professor of Communication at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Her areas of interest include cultural work, inequalities in cultural industries and wellness media. She is the author of *Screenwriting: Creative Labour and Professional Practice* and the co-editor of *Gender and Creative Labour*. She also wrote the 2021 UNESCO report *Gender and Creativity: Progress on the Precipice*.

Andra Matei

Chapter 10 • Global mandate: safeguarding artistic freedom in law, policy and practice

Andra Matei is an award-winning lawyer working at the intersection of art, law and freedom of expression. She is the founder of Avant-Garde Lawyers, which supports artists through strategic litigation and legal advocacy. A member of the Paris Bar, she has taught at the Paris Bar School, New York University and the University of Applied Arts Vienna. She has led landmark cases challenging censorship and legal repression in politically sensitive contexts, helping shape international standards on artistic freedom. Her work has been recognized for its innovation and impact by both the Quebec Bar and the Paris Bar.

Methodology

MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2005 CONVENTION

Since 2012, UNESCO has monitored the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 Convention) through its quadrennial periodic reporting mechanism. The monitoring of the implementation of the 2005 Convention functions as a continuous cycle of data collection and analysis, research and knowledge production, as well as evidence-based decision making at the national and global levels – with the participation of key stakeholders to the Convention including Parties, civil society organizations, experts and cultural policy makers.

At the heart of the monitoring mechanism lie the Quadrennial Periodic Reports, which are structured around the Convention's Monitoring Framework and serve as the primary data source for the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report series. These periodic reports, submitted to UNESCO by the Parties to the Convention every four years, compile policies and measures adopted at the national level to implement the Convention and advance its goals.

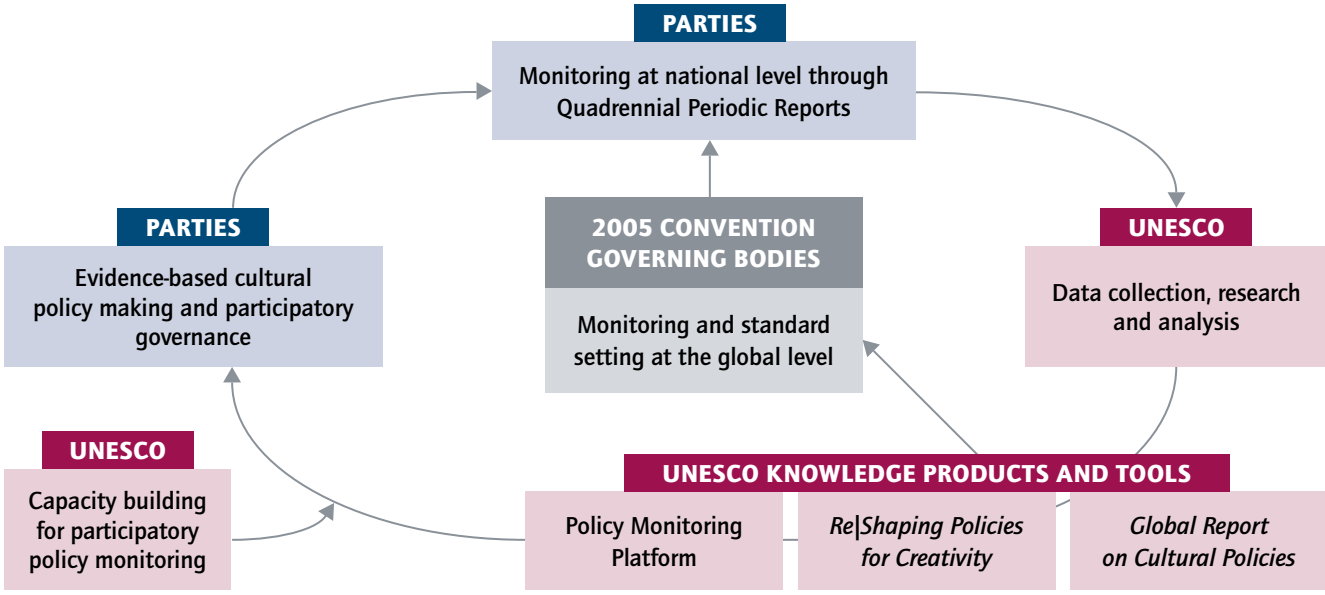
To assist developing countries Parties to the Convention, UNESCO deploys capacity-building activities on participatory policy monitoring.

Among these activities, UNESCO encourages the creation of multi-stakeholder national working teams responsible for gathering information from relevant authorities, drafting periodic reports and distributing the Civil Society Organizations Form used to collect measures adopted by civil society organizations. This work has been supported through funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the International Fund for Cultural Diversity and the engagement of international experts, principally from the EU/UNESCO Expert Facility. In 2024, regional peer-to-peer learning exchanges were exceptionally held in all regions to foster the sharing of experiences and challenges, promote South-South cooperation, and build regional communities of practice that are expected to continue in future reporting cycles.

The data collected through periodic reports feed into an array of UNESCO knowledge products and tools, including the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report, the *Global Report on Cultural Policies* and the Convention's Policy Monitoring Platform. The knowledge generated by these tools is also taken up by cultural policy makers and experts, leading to stronger evidence-based cultural policy making and more effective implementation of the Convention at the national level. At the international level, the governing bodies of the 2005 Convention play a key role in setting priorities and standards for monitoring its effective implementation by all Parties (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The 2005 Convention's monitoring cycle

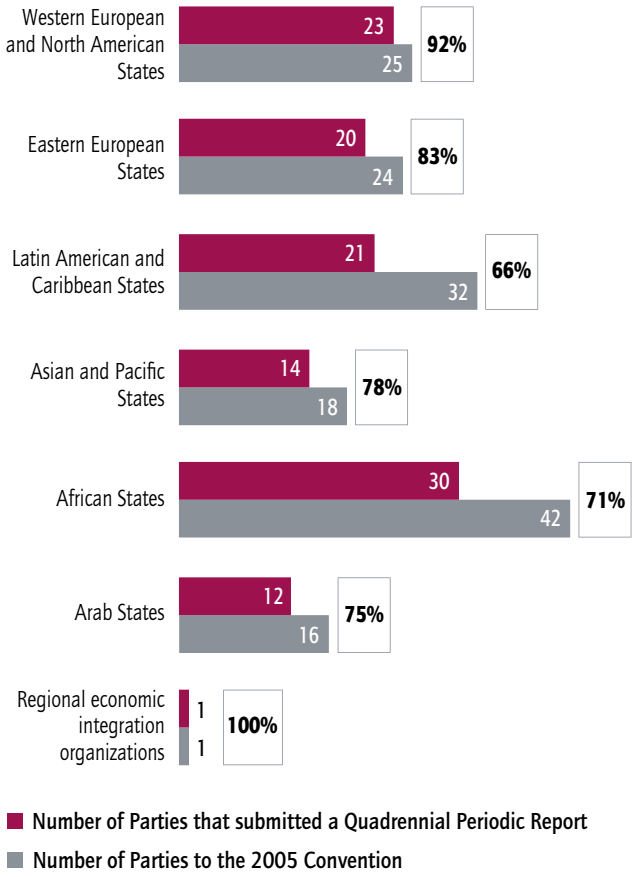


PRIMARY DATA SOURCE 1: QUADRENNIAL PERIODIC REPORTS OF THE 2005 CONVENTION (2021-2024)

This edition of the *Re|Shaping* report draws its analysis from 133 Quadrennial Periodic Reports submitted to UNESCO by Parties to the 2005 Convention between 2021 and 2024. The reports were submitted by 121 Parties, which represent 77% of the total number of Parties to the Convention as of January 2025 (121 of 158). The distribution of the number of Parties having submitted reports per region, compared to the total number of Parties in that region, is presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Submission of Quadrennial Periodic Reports, by region (2021-2024)



Source: UNESCO (2005 Convention)

In cases where a Party submitted more than one periodic report between 2021 and 2024, only data from the most recent report is included in the analysis of key questions and statistics. Furthermore, sample sizes vary across figures as they reflect the primary source data only of those Parties that responded to the concerned question.

PRIMARY DATA SOURCE 2: SURVEY RESPONSES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1980 RECOMMENDATION

To supplement the Quadrennial Periodic Reports data, several chapters also draw on responses from UNESCO Member States and from non-governmental and international non-governmental organizations to the survey on the 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist (1980 Recommendation).

A total of 140 responses were received for the fifth global consultation on the implementation of the 1980 Recommendation, carried out in 2022-2023. Of these, 68 were submitted by UNESCO Member States and 72 by non-governmental and international non-governmental organizations. The data from the 1980 Recommendation survey included in this report represent 35% of UNESCO Member States as of January 2023 (68 of 193). Responses from Western Europe and North American States were the most represented (68%), followed by Eastern European States (48%), Latin American and Caribbean States (36%), African States (36%), Asian and Pacific States (16%), and Arab States (16%).

COUNTRY CLASSIFICATIONS

Where relevant, this report uses two classifications to assess indicator-level impact: regional classification (UNESCO Electoral Groups; Table 1) and classification of countries as developing and developed (Table 2).

Table 1

Regional classification

UNESCO Electoral Group	Region
Group I	Western Europe and North America
Group II	Eastern Europe
Group III	Latin America and the Caribbean
Group IV	Asia and the Pacific
Group V(a)	Africa
Group V(b)	Arab States

The classification of countries as developing and developed is based on the income levels of UNESCO Member States, determined by gross national income per capita as published by the World Bank in 2022. Income thresholds follow those established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Table 2

Developing and developed countries classification

	Income classification	Gross national income per capita range
Developing countries	Low-income countries	Less than US$1,135
	Lower-middle-income countries	US$1,136 - US$4,465
	Upper-middle-income countries	US$4,466 - US$13,845
Developed countries	High-income countries	Greater than US$13,846

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was conducted in partnership with BOP Consulting.

Analysis according to question type

- **Key questions:** The findings in this report are primarily based on responses to key questions in Quadrennial Periodic Report forms. Analysis involved counting or calculating the proportion of responses to specific closed-answer questions, which were usually binary (yes/no) or organized by cultural domain.[1]
- **Numerical and statistical questions:** Responses to statistical questions, which asked Parties to provide specific values or percentages, were also analysed. As data quality varied, all responses underwent a quality assurance process prior to analysis to ensure consistency and identify outliers, and were validated against other sources where appropriate. Data from global datasets, such as those of the OECD and World Bank, and national statistical repositories were used to supplement these responses.
- **Open-text response questions and reported policies and measures:** Within the language processing tool Dataiku, which centralizes data from UNESCO instruments, Artificial Intelligence (AI) was applied to identify key themes and typologies across the open-text responses and policies and measures reported by Parties. In addition to the above data, chapter authors were provided with 3,908 policies and measures collected from the Quadrennial Periodic Reports submitted between 2021 and 2024. Each policy and measure had been individually reviewed for pertinence and relevance by the UNESCO Secretariat. These policies are featured throughout the report as in-text and case study examples and have been uploaded to the Convention's Policy Monitoring Platform.

Longitudinal analysis

Where possible, data from previous editions of *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* were used to identify trends and changes in responses to key questions over time. The reporting cycles are as follows:

- **2021-2024** refers to the data submitted by Parties to the 2005 Convention in the most recent reporting cycle and analysed for this edition of the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report.
- **2017-2020** refers to the data submitted by Parties in the previous reporting cycle, as published in the 2022 edition of *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity*.

As part of the longitudinal analysis, keyword searches on transversal topics were conducted to assess how frequently these issues were mentioned in Quadrennial Periodic Report measures submitted between 2012 and 2024. Analysis was performed using AI-assisted tools, followed by human verification. Longitudinal analyses of policies and measures are presented in Chapters 3 and 9, focusing on AI and gender, respectively. To account for variations in the number of periodic reports and measures submitted each year, keyword frequency is expressed as a percentage of the total measures submitted that year, calculated using a three-year rolling average.

INCORPORATION OF SECONDARY DATASETS

In this report, secondary datasets supplement the two primary data sources. Use of secondary data varies across chapters, depending on the theme and availability of primary source data. Some secondary datasets are updated versions of those developed in previous editions of the report, while others were newly created for this edition. These datasets were developed to address gaps in the existing Quadrennial Periodic Report data and to reflect emerging policy areas where data is becoming more available, such as AI and Aid for Trade. It should be noted, however, that identifying robust secondary data on the cultural and creative sectors remains a significant challenge in efforts to strengthen the report's evidence base.

The methodological notes below explain how these datasets were developed.

1. The Quadrennial Periodic Report form identifies the following cultural domains: cinema and audiovisual arts, design, media arts, music, performing arts, publishing and visual arts.

Collective management and reproduction rights organizations

In Chapter 1 'Building on strong foundations', Table 1.1 uses the dataset 'Percentage of Parties with Collective Management Organizations and Reproduction Rights Organizations' to assess the degree to which regions and countries have established effective collective management organization ecosystems. The table presents the cultural domains represented by organizations that are members of three major international rights management bodies: the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC), the International Bureau of Societies Managing Recording and Mechanical Reproduction Rights (*Bureau International des Sociétés gérant les droits d'enregistrement et de reproduction mécanique*, BIEM) and the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations (IFRRO).

Compensation of digital content creators

In Chapter 3 'The digital environment: online culture, offline implications' and Chapter 9 'Gender equality: not an optional extra', Figures 3.5 and 9.5 use secondary sources that estimate the revenue earned by content creators from sharing artistic or cultural expressions on digital platforms (such as social media, streaming and video platforms) as well as through additional marketing or advertising income.

Detailed user data from these platforms is considered commercially sensitive, and they rarely release information that can be disaggregated to reveal creator demographics, revenues or growth by content type. This lack of transparency limits analysis. Consequently, data on digital content creators included in this report are drawn from market research providers.

Figure 3.5 uses information on data rights remuneration from the CISAC. Figure 9.5 presents the results of an Adobe survey conducted among content creators in Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

Mobility of artists and cultural professionals

Chapter 5 'The shifting borders of cultural mobility' makes extensive use of several secondary data sources beyond the primary data. Most significantly, these include the Cultural Mobility Yearbooks and Cultural Mobility Flows Reports published since 2022 by On the Move, an international cultural mobility network.

Culture and Recreation Country Programmable Aid

In Chapter 8 'Mind the gap: culture and sustainable development', Figure 8.9 presents countries' aid levels and distributions, based on the total amount and share of Country Programmable Aid allocated to culture and recreation. The Country Programmable Aid data is the most recent available from the OECD, from 2022.

Country Programmable Aid refers to Official Development Assistance that is planned at the country or regional level over multiple years. It provides a more accurate reflection of actual aid flows than overall Official Development Assistance and proves a reliable proxy for aid recorded at the country level.

THE 2005 CONVENTION MONITORING FRAMEWORK

The 2005 Convention Monitoring Framework was developed to assess progress and challenges in implementing the Convention over time, to guide data collection and to promote a better understanding of the Convention's scope. The Monitoring Framework is structured around four goals, divided into eleven areas of monitoring that identify policy domains where action is needed. Each area of monitoring also has two indicators, along with associated means of verification.

The structure of both the Quadrennial Periodic Report form and the *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report is based on the 2019 version of the Monitoring Framework. In 2025, however, UNESCO began a process to revise this framework at the request of the Convention's governing bodies, particularly in response to the increasing impact of digital technologies on the cultural and creative sectors and the imbalance in the global flow of cultural goods and services. This timely revision aligns with UNESCO's broader efforts to strengthen statistical assessment of the cultural and creative ecosystem, including through the revised 2025 Framework for Cultural Statistics[2] and the *Global Report on Cultural Policies*, both launched at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025.

The revised Monitoring Framework will be accompanied by an updated Quadrennial Periodic Report form, which is expected to be in place for the next submission deadline for Parties' reports, scheduled for 2027.

2. As the 2025 revision of the Framework for Cultural Statistics was not available in time to inform the data analysis for this edition of *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity*, the report instead uses the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics.

DETAILED MONITORING FRAMEWORK OF THE 2005 CONVENTION

Goal 1 • SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE FOR CULTURE

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Areas of monitoring	Indicators	SDG Targets	Means of verification
CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS	1. Policies and measures support the development of dynamic cultural and creative sectors	8.3 8.3 4.4	1.1 Integrated strategies and frameworks 1.2 Sectoral laws and policies 1.3 Job creation and entrepreneurship measures 1.4 Education and training programmes
	2. Policymaking is informed and involves multiple public bodies	16.6 16.7 16.7	2.1 Ministry with competence and budget for culture 2.2 Interministerial cooperation 2.3 Decentralized responsibilities 2.4 Information systems and statistics
MEDIA DIVERSITY	3. Policies and measures support diversity of the media	16.10	3.1 Media freedom 3.2 Media accountability 3.3 Media monitoring 3.4 Media ownership
	4. Policies and measures support diversity of content in the media		4.1 Public service media with cultural mandate 4.2 Content diversity in programming 4.3 Domestic content incentives 4.4 Data and information trends
DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT	5. Policies and measures support digital creativity, enterprises and markets	4.4	5.1 Diverse actors in the digital industries 5.2 Digital transformation of industries and institutions 5.3 Digital creativity and competencies
	6. Policies and measures facilitate access to diverse cultural expressions in the digital environment		6.1 Access to domestic digital content 6.2 Digital literacy 6.3 Data and information trends
PARTNERING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY	7. Measures strengthen the skills and capacities of civil society	17.17	7.1 Enabling environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) 7.2 Structuring of CSOs 7.3 Training and mentoring for CSOs 7.4 Funding for CSOs
	8. Civil society is involved in the implementation of the Convention at national and global levels	17.17 16.7	8.1 Policy dialogue mechanisms with public authorities 8.2 Participation in policy design 8.3 CSO initiatives 8.4 Participation in the work of the Convention's governing bodies

Goal 2 • ACHIEVE A BALANCED FLOW OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES AND INCREASE THE MOBILITY OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Areas of monitoring	Indicators	SDG Targets	Means of verification
MOBILITY OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS	9. Policies and measures support the outward and inward mobility of artists and cultural professionals	10.7 10.7	9.1 Outward mobility 9.2 Inward mobility 9.3 Mobility information systems
	10. Operational programmes support the mobility of artists and cultural professionals, notably from developing countries		10.1 Mobility funds 10.2 Cultural events and exchange facilities 10.3 South-South mobility programmes 10.4 CSO mobility initiatives
FLOW OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES	11. Policies and measures support balanced international flows of cultural goods and services	10.a 8.a	11.1 Export strategies and measures 11.2 Implementation of preferential treatment 11.3 Aid for Trade
	12. Information systems evaluate international flows of cultural goods and services	17.11 17.11 10.b	12.1 Value, origin and destination of cultural goods 12.2 Value, origin and destination of cultural services 12.3 Direct foreign investment in culture and creative sectors
TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS	13. Trade and investment agreements refer to the Convention or implement its objectives	10.a	13.1 Special status for cultural goods and services 13.2 Cultural clauses related to e-commerce and digital products 13.3 Preferential treatment provisions
	14. Other agreements, declarations, recommendations and resolutions refer to the Convention or implement its objectives		14.1 Agreements aligned with the goals of the Convention 14.2 Declarations, recommendations and resolutions aligned with the goals of the Convention

Goal 3 • INTEGRATE CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Areas of monitoring	Indicators	SDG Targets	Means of verification
NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PLANS	15. National sustainable development policies and plans include action lines to support diverse cultural expressions	8.3 17.14	15.1 Culture and creative sectors in national development plans 15.2 Public cultural bodies in planning and implementation 15.3 Evaluation of national development plans and strategies
	16. Policies and measures support equity in the distribution of cultural resources and inclusive access to such resources		16.1 Culture-based regeneration plans 16.2 Participation and access to diverse cultural expressions
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	17. Development cooperation strategies include action lines to support diverse cultural expressions	17.2	17.1 Culture and creative sectors in development cooperation strategies 17.2 Official development assistance (ODA) for culture 17.3 Evaluation of development cooperation strategies
	18. Development cooperation programmes strengthen creative sectors in developing countries	17.9 17.9 17.9	18.1 Support for cultural policy design and implementation 18.2 Support for cultural micro and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development 18.3 Support for artists and creation

Goal 4 • PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

5 GENDER EQUALITY

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Areas of monitoring	Indicators	SDG Targets	Means of verification
GENDER EQUALITY	19. Policies and measures promote gender equality in the culture and media sectors	5.c 5.5	19.1 Government bodies in charge of gender equality 19.2 Support to women's participation in cultural life 19.3 Support to female artists and cultural professionals
	20. Monitoring systems evaluate levels of representation, participation and access of women in the culture and media sectors	5.5	20.1 Levels of women's representation in the culture and media sectors 20.2 Levels of women's participation in cultural life
ARTISTIC FREEDOM	21. Policies and measures promote and protect freedoms of creation and expression and participation in cultural life	16.10	21.1 Legal recognition of artistic freedom 21.2 Monitoring of artistic freedom violations 21.3 Protection of artists and cultural professionals at risk
	22. Policies and measures promote and protect the social and economic rights of artists and cultural professionals		22.1 Transparency of public funding schemes 22.2 Social protection 22.3 Economic rights

PARTIES THAT HAVE SUBMITTED QUADRENNIAL PERIODIC REPORTS (2021-2024), BY REGION

Western Europe and North America

Andorra (2024)
Austria (2024)
Belgium (2021)
Canada (2024)
Cyprus (2024)
Denmark (2024)
Finland (2024)
France (2024)
Germany (2024)
Greece (2024)
Iceland (2024)
Ireland (2024)
Italy (2024)
Luxembourg (2024)
Monaco (2021, 2024)
Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (2021)
Norway (2024)
Portugal (2024)
Spain (2022)
Sweden (2024)
Switzerland (2024)
Turkey (2021)
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2024)

Eastern Europe

Armenia (2024)
Azerbaijan (2022)
Belarus (2024)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022)
Bulgaria (2024)
Croatia (2021)
Czechia (2022)
Estonia (2021, 2024)
Georgia (2024)
Latvia (2024)
Lithuania (2024)
Montenegro (2024)
Poland (2024)
Republic of Moldova (2024)
Romania (2024)
Serbia (2021, 2022)
Slovakia (2024)
Slovenia (2024)
Ukraine (2023)
Uzbekistan (2024)

Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina (2024)
Belize (2023)
Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (2024)
Brazil (2021, 2024)
Chile (2024)
Colombia (2024)
Costa Rica (2024)
Cuba (2024)
Dominican Republic (2024)
Ecuador (2024)
Guatemala (2024)
Haiti (2023)
Jamaica (2024)
Mexico (2024)
Panama (2024)
Paraguay (2024)
Peru (2024)
Saint Lucia (2024)
Trinidad and Tobago (2023)
Uruguay (2024)
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (2024)

Asia and the Pacific

Australia (2021)
Bangladesh (2024)
Cambodia (2024)
China (2022, 2024)
India (2024)
Indonesia (2024)
Lao People's Democratic Republic (2024)
Mongolia (2024)
New Zealand (2024)
Niue (2023)
Republic of Korea (2022)
Samoa (2024)
Timor-Leste (2024)
Viet Nam (2024)

Africa

Benin (2024)
Botswana (2024)
Burkina Faso (2024)
Cabo Verde (2024)
Cameroon (2024)
Central African Republic (2024)
Côte d'Ivoire (2021, 2024)
Democratic Republic of the Congo (2024)
Djibouti (2021, 2024)
Eswatini (2024)
Ethiopia (2024)
Gabon (2024)
Gambia (2023)
Ghana (2021, 2024)
Guinea (2024)
Kenya (2024)
Lesotho (2024)
Madagascar (2024)
Malawi (2024)
Mali (2024)
Mauritius (2024)
Namibia (2024)
Nigeria (2021, 2024)
Rwanda (2024)
South Africa (2022, 2024)
South Sudan (2024)
Togo (2021, 2024)
Uganda (2023)
United Republic of Tanzania (2024)
Zimbabwe (2024)

Arab States

Algeria (2024)
Egypt (2024)
Jordan (2024)
Kuwait (2023)
Mauritania (2024)
Morocco (2024)
Oman (2024)
Qatar (2024)
State of Palestine (2023)
Sudan (2024)
Tunisia (2024)
United Arab Emirates (2024)

Regional economic integration organizations

European Union (2021, 2024)

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RE|SHAPING POLICIES FOR CREATIVITY

From music and film to literature and design, creative expressions give voice to the world's diversity. This diversity, in turn, can only thrive when creativity is nurtured by effective policies and institutions.

Twenty years ago, governments and civil society came together at UNESCO with a shared vision, leading to the adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions – a landmark international treaty that continues to guide how countries support culture and creativity today. The *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity* report series monitors how this vision is put into action.

Drawing on data from more than 120 countries, this fourth edition analyses the latest trends, challenges and opportunities shaping creative sectors, as well as the policy responses designed to address them. Cultural governance today faces mounting pressures as digital transformation and deepening global inequalities raise fundamental questions about who can create and access culture. This report offers insights and recommendations to inspire policy action, supporting governments, institutions and civil society to establish the conditions for creativity to flourish.

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