

# Rescue the arts

## plea to national governments

Brussels, 6 April 2020



International network for contemporary performing arts

Endorsed by



Since the outbreak of the corona-pandemic, an enormous part of the global population - people of various backgrounds, ages, values and social conditions - have been facing an abrupt suspension of regular life. Live encounters are regulated and limited. Some people are experiencing unexpected financial difficulties, others are suffering from health-related issues and anxieties. All these, combined with a great uncertainty about the future, is creating an enormous social distress, which will leave an indelible mark on our societies.

As often in times of turmoil, people are resorting to culture: literature, music, films, photography, virtual museums, dance and theatre performances transferred online or initiated in outdoor settings, respecting the social distance rules. The arts continue to carry a tremendous power of uniting people, even in times when it is impossible to be together physically. Culture enhances people's well-being, inspires creative solutions, and empowers those who lack hope. The arts help to put the reality into perspective, to look at it through a critical prism and imagine a better future, even amidst the seemingly insurmountable uncertainty. We are at the threshold of a new reality, and it is up to us to find individual strength and collective resources to turn the crisis into a doorway to a better future. Culture is, undoubtedly, part of the solution.

At the same time, the cultural sector, in particular the performing arts, has been the first to suffer from the early wave of national measures taken in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. Moreover, they most probably will be the last ones to be able to resume their regular activities, once governments start softening their containment measures. Thus, the current crisis, which is only a few weeks old, has already put millions of independent artists and small companies under existential threat.

The corona-crisis had a detrimental effect on the already extremely vulnerable ecosystem of the performing arts sector, which is characterised by a high number of freelance and self-employed professionals, part-time contracts, flexible jobs, combined with limited access to social benefits. Moreover, for many art organisations, festivals and professionals, the crisis fell on the crucial time of the year when a substantial part of their annual income was supposed to be gained.

The global artistic community has been showing enormous solidarity and creativity dealing with the new reality. However, it is evident that it is up to national governments to rescue the cultural sector, which represents a vibrant social resource, carries tremendous intrinsic value and contributes to the economy.

Therefore, we call on the national governments to take the following measures, considering the urgency of the current moment and aiming at the long-term viability of the sector:

- Grant artists and cultural professionals access to unemployment payments and social benefits, and compensate their losses caused by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Support culture and the arts through the *EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative*<sup>1</sup>.
- Create emergency and hardship funds for the cultural sector, outside of existing budgets of cultural ministries and art councils. Such instruments must be formed of finances from other budget lines specially dedicated to mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Apply flexibility to all existing funding schemes, allowing beneficiaries to decide whether they should postpone, cancel or transform activities, or extend the cycle of the funded project.
- Augment investment in culture and the arts in 2020 and beyond, aiming at their revival and sustainability.
- Preserve the internationalisation budgets, as they are crucial for the capacity-building and development of the local artistic scene.
- Initiate a far-reaching debate on the current nature of the status of the artist with a view of ensuring sustainability of artists' careers, practices and activities, as well as artists' freedom of expression, social and financial recognition, and individual well-being.
- Explore the possibility of introducing a universal basic income to protect people from future crises and force-majeure situations.
- Integrate culture and the arts in economic and social regeneration and future-transformation strategies, recognising their tremendous value for the well-being of citizens, as well as their power to unite people, even in times when it is impossible to commune.

We demand that the above measures and other steps towards designing a long-term strategy for strengthening the sector, as well as for reviving societies and economy at large, are taken along with an inclusive and continuous dialogue with artists and cultural operators.

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<sup>1</sup> For EU member states (including the UK)

IETM, International network for contemporary performing arts, is one of the oldest and largest cultural networks, which represents the voice of over 500 performing arts organisations and institutions, including theatres and arts centres, festivals, performing companies, curators and programmers, producers, art councils and associations from about 50 countries. IETM advocates for the value of the arts and culture in a changing world and empowers performing arts professionals through access to international connections, knowledge and a dynamic forum for exchange.

[www.ietm.org](http://www.ietm.org)

For more than 15 years, Circostrada has been working to develop and empower the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. It supports professionals and cultural stakeholders at large by boosting professional exchanges, collecting data, fostering training, knowledge sharing and promoting innovation in both sectors. With more than 100 members from over 35 countries, Circostrada acts as a bridge between all field players and EU policy makers, relaying their needs and advocating for greater means and more structured cultural policies. Circostrada is coordinated by ARTCENA – French National Centre for Circus Arts, Street Arts and Theatre, and is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture.

[www.circostrada.org](http://www.circostrada.org)

IN SITU is the European platform for artistic creation in public space. Since 2003, it has supported more than 200 artists working outside conventional venues and contributing to the transformation of our territories. IN SITU is an ecosystem connecting a new generation of artists with audiences, programmers, and key-players involved in the economic, political and social realities around Europe. IN SITU develops an ecology of creation based on transnational artistic workshops and laboratories, European and international residencies and collective mentoring for pilot artistic projects. IN SITU also designs tailored consulting and expertise for European cities, online training modules (MOOC) and a Think Tank dedicated to artistic creation in public space.

IN SITU ACT 2016 - 2020 is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

[www.in-situ.info](http://www.in-situ.info)

EDN, European Dancehouse Network, formed in 2004, is an association of more than 36 dance houses connecting across Europe and beyond, with a shared ambition: strengthening professional practice, developing audiences and enhancing public engagement and progressing the network. In pursuit of this mission EDN's purpose is to champion, strengthen and communicate the dance house model as providing the optimum conditions and most effective means necessary for the structural development of dance as contemporary art form, at all levels of engagement. EDN is the dance house network of Europe, where each member subscribes to cooperating, sharing resources, capacity building and intelligence gathering. Confronted with the challenges of the world today we stay for connectedness, identity and empathy building, resilience and the vital impact of the performing arts in society.

[www.ednetwork.eu](http://www.ednetwork.eu)

The European Theatre Convention (ETC) is an artistic platform for creation, innovation and collaboration. As the largest network of public theatres in Europe, the ETC has more than forty European Theatre Members from over twenty countries, reflecting the diversity of Europe's vibrant cultural sector. Founded in 1988, the ETC promotes European theatre as a vital social platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies. ETC fosters a socially-engaged, inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities everywhere. Powerful and professional ETC governance ensures that the network will strive and grow taking into consideration latest trends and developments.

[www.europeantheatre.eu](http://www.europeantheatre.eu)

The European Festivals Association (EFA) is a community dedicated to the arts, the artists and the audiences. EFA's main role in the permanently developing world of digitisation and globalisation is to connect festival makers so to inform, inspire and enrich the festival landscape. In this perspective, EFA is a festivals' service, knowledge and training provider; the oldest cultural network of European festivals! It was established to bridge the distance between organisations and all kinds of stakeholders and to create connections internationally. All this in function of the enrichment of a festival's own artistic offer and its organisational opportunities. EFA guides the discourse on the value of arts festivals. A sector that is so unique and that shares a myriad of concerns on intellectual, artistic, material and organisational level deserves a strong umbrella organisation that supports local initiatives and gives arts festivals a unified voice.

[www.efa-aef.eu](http://www.efa-aef.eu)

Trans Europe Halles (TEH) is one of the oldest and most dynamic cultural networks in Europe. Based in Sweden, it has been at the forefront of repurposing abandoned buildings for arts, culture and activism since 1983 and currently counts 129 members in 37 different countries across Europe.

[www.teh.net](http://www.teh.net)