

ON
THE
MOVE

The Situation of At-risk and Displaced
Artists and Culture Professionals

Campaigning for a UN Plan of Action

on the Safety of Artists
and Cultural Practitioners

Discussion Starter

Volume 4
New Instruments



Co-funded by
the European Union

On the Move is the international information and advocacy network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 84 member organisations from 33 countries, representing the interests of 4,130+ members and affiliated organisations in Europe and the world. Since 2002, On the Move has been working to provide regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and to advocate for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multiannual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

In addition to its open call listings, On the Move regularly creates, updates, and publishes Cultural Mobility Funding Guides. These guides are meant to be a resource for artists and other arts workers looking to finance their cross-border travel to and/or from a specific country, world region, or continent. They also serve as mappings of existing opportunities that can be a useful reference document for policymakers and funders at the local, national, European and international levels.

<http://on-the-move.org>

Editor Yohann Floch (On the Move)

Experts Jordi Baltà Portolés, Laurence Cuny, Lisa Sidambe (Freemuse), Anupama Sekhar

Graphic design and layout Marine Domec

Acknowledgements to Dr Mary Ann DeVlieg, initiator of the research project, as well as the [Advisory Committee members](#).

This publication uses the font Atkinson Hyperlegible – a typeface developed explicitly for visually impaired people.

<https://www.brailleinstitute.org/freefont/>



Creative Commons Licence - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

This publication is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this licence, please visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

Suggested citation format: 'Campaigning for a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners' in Floch, Y. (ed.), *The Situation of At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals – Volume 4 New Instruments*, On the Move, 2026, available at on-the-move.org/resources.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Table of contents

Foreword	4
From Vulnerability to Protection: The Rationale for International Action	7
Background	8
Drawing on the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists	10
International Legal Frameworks on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners	13
Conclusion	17
A Starting Point for Consultation: Drafting a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners	19
Introduction	19
Justification	23
Principles	23
Objective	24
Proposed Actions	24
Follow-up Mechanisms	27
About the experts	28

Foreword

Artists and cultural practitioners are fundamental to the vitality, resilience, and cultural development of societies and individuals. Their ability to create freely and maintain artistic autonomy is essential, not only for their own well-being but for the wider social, cultural, and democratic life of their communities. As creators, living heritage bearers, and holders and transmitters of culture, symbolic identities, and cultural memory, artists and cultural practitioners have historically played a crucial role in promoting social cohesion, dialogue, democracy, freedom, and cultural diversity. They bear witness to social, political, and humanitarian realities, and their work continues to reflect and respond to the crises, injustices, and challenges facing their societies. It is therefore imperative that artists at risk – whether threatened by armed conflict, persecution, political oppression, or other forms of danger – are able to continue their creative practice and contribute to cultural life.

In November 2024, On the Move embarked on a research-action initiative dedicated to the situation of at-risk and displaced artists and culture professionals.¹ The overarching aim of this project was to identify policies and practices across Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States that provide both immediate and longer-term support, accessibility, and professional continuity for displaced artists and cultural practitioners. This analysis enabled the mapping of existing support schemes, the identification of success factors and structural gaps, and the development of recommendations to help support organizations and institutions strengthen monitoring mechanisms, share innovative responses, and adapt policies and programs where necessary.

In this final phase, On the Move presents a set of proposed instruments – whether newly designed, replicated, upscaled, or adapted – aimed at strengthening support for at-risk and displaced artists. Co-designed with relocated artists, researchers, and cultural stakeholders, the publication sets out operational recommendations, identifies avenues for the development of existing support schemes, and lays the groundwork for the establishment of new mechanisms.

With this publication, our intention is to offer a discussion starter: a document to help civil society organizations shape their thinking on what a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners could look like, and to encourage international institutions to seize the current momentum to develop such an instrument. Conceived in two parts, the publication first sets out a rationale that recapitulates the needs, the progress made, and the arguments in favour of a Plan, while mapping the elements of a favourable legal framework within which such an instrument could sit. It then presents a draft zero, modelled directly on the existing UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.²

Back in 2023, UNESCO published its report *Defending Creative Voices*, which rightly observed that despite the similarities in their lived experiences during emergencies, artists and cultural professionals enjoy a markedly lower level of recognition, attention, and protection than journalists. The report methodically built the case for a UN Plan on the Safety of Artists, noting

1 Yohann Floch (ed.), [The Situation of At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals – Volumes 1-4](#), On the Move, 2025 - 2026.

2 UNESCO, [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#).

that even when artists and cultural professionals do not set out to advance a cause or hold power to account, their creative work can still foster public debate, social transformation, and peacebuilding – and that this is often precisely why they are targeted as a group, regardless of political intent. The report further observed that emergency contexts heighten these dangers, yet artists and cultural professionals are rarely recognized as a vulnerable group warranting priority in humanitarian protection programs, evacuations, or refugee frameworks. On this basis, the study proposed that the UN consider adopting a declaration, resolution, or similar instrument recognizing artists and cultural professionals as a group requiring specific attention in humanitarian and emergency responses.³

As part of its 2024-2025 work plan, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions resolved in March 2024 to safeguard cultural diversity in crisis contexts, notably by supporting artists through the consolidation of lessons learned and targeted advocacy highlighting the importance of protecting artists facing emergencies, building on ongoing efforts to advance artistic freedom and the status of the artist worldwide.⁴

The conclusions and recommendations of the 2025 Civil Society Forum highlighted “the protection of artists, cultural operators and cultural facilities in conflict zones by developing new monitoring mechanisms and support systems”⁵ as a key area for the future activities of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and for cooperation with Parties at both national and international levels.

The efforts of the Secretariat of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions helped make even how more visible and urgent this work had become. In June 2025, Parties have pushed this agenda forward, taking a further step toward integrating artist protection into UNESCO's broader policy architecture and building more coordinated global responses for artists and cultural practitioners at risk. One of the strategic orientations adopted is to “enhance international cooperation to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions, including in emergency situations, by, inter alia, ensuring the effective implementation of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity and establishing a comprehensive and strategic reflection process on the diversity of cultural expressions in emergency contexts.”⁶

We see this trajectory as one of institutional alignment: a series of incremental commitments forming part of a longer journey, one that carries with it a genuine promise for the future. *Defending Creative Voices* called on civil society organizations to continue advocating for the protection of

3 Rosario Soraide, [Defending Creative Voices: Artists in Emergencies, Learning from the Safety of Journalists](#), UNESCO, 2023.

4 UNESCO, *Decisions, Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, 17th Session, Paris, 27 February - 1 March 2024, [DCE/24/17.IGC/Decisions](#).

5 UNESCO, *Report of the Fifth Edition of the Civil Society Forum: Conclusions and Recommendations*, Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 19th Session, Paris, 17 - 20 February 2026, [DCE/26/19.IGC/INF.5](#).

6 UNESCO, *Decisions, Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, 19th Session, Paris, 17 - 20 February 2026, [DCE/26/19.IGC/Decisions](#). And the action foreseen is to “initiate a strategic reflection and discussions with relevant UN Agencies, INGOs, NGOs, cultural institutions, artists, cultural professionals and other key stakeholders on the risks posed to the diversity of cultural expressions amid emergency situations worldwide, as part of the continued work to promote the status of the artist and artistic freedom globally.”

artists and cultural professionals at risk. Alongside the many other CSOs that have been paving the way for years,⁷ we gladly take up that invitation, joining the growing cohort of initiatives and contributing our own building block to the pathway ahead.

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, though drafted with a different emergency in mind, already committed States Parties to the widest possible participation of the communities, groups, and individuals who create, maintain, and transmit their heritage, and its accompanying Ethical Principles affirm their right to continue these practices, including in situations of armed conflict.⁸ In 2019, this recognition was carried further still: the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage endorsed, and the General Assembly of States Parties subsequently adopted, Operational Principles and Modalities that state, without qualification, that the safeguarding of living heritage is indivisible from the protection of the lives and well-being of its bearers.⁹ It is precisely this understanding – that a tradition cannot outlive the safety of those who sustain it – that has guided our decision to extend the scope of this Plan of Action beyond artists and cultural professionals in the narrower sense, to encompass living heritage bearers and practitioners as well: the custodians of oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, craftsmanship, and other forms of intangible cultural heritage, whose creative and cultural role is no less vital, and whose exposure to conflict, displacement, and persecution is no less real.

This *Discussion Starter* is intended to help host conversations with CSOs, consult stakeholders, sustain momentum, and contribute to shaping the instruments that must come to light and be implemented globally. Above all, it is meant to underscore just how vital, fundamental, and urgent it is to act.

We warmly invite you to join this conversation and to contribute to the advocacy process ahead. We hope you enjoy the reading.

Yohann Floch

7 See for example: "Parties, in cooperation with CSOs and UNESCO, should develop a UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Artists and Cultural Professionals, with the goal of assisting countries to develop legislation and mechanisms favourable to artistic freedom and support their efforts to implement existing international rules and principles. The plan should include criteria for an early warning system to ensure that artists and cultural professionals can call for urgent and effective government protection." In UNESCO, *Reports of Civil Society Organisations on Their Activities*, 11th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Paris, 12 - 15 December 2017, [DCE/17/11.IGC/6 REV, ANNEX I. A Civil Society Activity Report](#).

8 UNESCO, [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#), Paris, 17 October 2003, Article 15; and *Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 10th Session, Windhoek, Namibia, 30 November - 4 December 2015, [Decision 10.COM 15.a](#), Principles 2 and 5.

9 UNESCO, *Operational Principles and Modalities for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies*, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 14th Session, Bogotá, Colombia, 9 - 14 December 2019, [Decision 14.COM 13](#); adopted by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention, 8th Session, September 2020, [Resolution 8.GA 9, Principle 1](#).

From Vulnerability to Protection: The Rationale for International Action

The safety and protection of artists and cultural practitioners is a core signifier of the extent to which the indispensable role they play in the construction, reconstruction and sustaining of vibrant and viable societies is recognized and valued, globally. As artists and cultural practitioners can contribute to fostering public debates on contemporary issues, the preservation of culture, and the raising of human rights awareness, threats to their safety have a broader societal impact. These threats undermine, erode or completely erase the place of artists and cultural practitioners in society as creators, living heritage bearers, holders or transmitters of culture, symbolic identities and cultural memory.

Because of this, persistent and compounded threats to psychological and physical security, including those emanating from armed conflict, natural disasters, state-sponsored suppression, organized crime, the unregulated control and power of armed non-state actors as well as various forms of economic, social or political crises, can threaten the preservation and continuity of a multicultural global sphere in which all voices are sufficiently represented and heard. While naturally occurring disasters and the threats they usher, which include destruction and damage

of cultural heritage and the displacement of people,¹ have a degree of unpredictability, the threats that are orchestrated by both state and non-state actors for the purpose of silencing creative, artistic and cultural voices signal a concerning erosion of international human rights law and the normative collapse of international human rights standards.

Several human rights reports and studies, including those by UNESCO and UN special procedures, have consistently drawn attention to the specific threats encountered by artists and cultural practitioners, as well as the conditions that sustain those threats. The derogations of human rights that occur particularly on digital platforms, during emergencies, and in the context of economic or political fragility and destabilization, pose some of the unprecedented threats that are encountered by artists and cultural practitioners worldwide. Their susceptibility to such threats is especially heightened by the systemic conditions under which they advance their creative, artistic and cultural practice, including marginalization, exclusion, extreme poverty, weakened socio-economic protection, entrenched inequalities and minimal involvement in policy-making.

¹ See UNESCO, [Voices of Courage: A global survey on women, culture and emergencies](#), 2026, p. 13.

Background

In a 2008 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion in particular, an observation was made that these challenges “are not confined to countries where the political, social and economic situation is particularly difficult but also concern violations occurring in transitional or long-established democracies”.² The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights has also regularly regretted the diverse ways in which the freedom of artistic expression and creativity recognized in international human rights standards is curtailed.³

While threats are found everywhere and affect artists and cultural practitioners of all conditions, specific groups are frequent targets, including migrants, ethnic minorities and women.⁴ For indigenous peoples whose native territories are attacked, who are subject to forced displacements, whose cultural heritage is damaged by natural disasters, whose cultural artifacts are / have been looted without reparations, and whose heritage is subjected to colonial domination, the safety and security risks encountered are even more grave.

In addition to UN mechanisms, the issue of artists’ safety has increasingly been addressed by civil society organizations, who undertake monitoring, advocacy and support tasks, as well as some national governments and related organizations, which have established mechanisms to protect artists and cultural practitioners at risk. Some of the issues that have been raised by these various organizations in relation to the safety and security of artists and cultural

practitioners include the adverse effects brought by cultural boycotts, the territorial assertions by groups operating in the context of organized crime, social censorship, political interferences in the functions of culture institutions and the unfettered control of technology companies, particularly in instances where the aim of such actions is to diminish or erase artistic, creative and cultural voices, as well as cultural memory and heritage.

Further, the disproportionate and discriminate susceptibility of artists and cultural practitioners to harms and safety threats is even more pronounced online or as a result of expressions and opinions shared online. The advent of digital technologies in particular, while encouraging independent thought and facilitating the wider dissemination of views and opinions on a range of issues, has gravely exposed artists and cultural practitioners to compounded intimidation, harassment, surveillance and transnational censorship, with their traceable digital footprint sometimes culminating into the physical violence they encounter offline; the legal action taken against them for views expressed online; the cultural boycotts mobilized against them; and the travel bans issued by countries they openly criticize.

The nature of these threats has been necessitated and facilitated by a range of factors. These include the normalization of surveillance⁵ under the guise of safeguarding national security; the unfettered transfer of intrusive surveillance technologies

2 Ambeyi Ligabo, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, UN Human Rights Council, 4th sess., Agenda Item 2, [A/HRC/4/27](#), 2 January 2007, para. 6.

3 See for example Farida Shaheed, *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights: The Right to Freedom of Artistic Expression and Creativity*, UN Doc. [A/HRC/23/34](#), 14 March 2013.

4 UN Secretary-General, *Cultural Rights*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN Doc. [A/67/287](#), 10 August 2012; UN Secretary-General, *Cultural Rights*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN Doc. [A/72/155](#), 17 July 2017; Alexandra Xanthaki, *Cultural Rights: An Empowering Agenda*, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, UN Doc. [A/HRC/49/54](#), 22 March 2022; and Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, *Cultural Rights and Migration*, UN Doc. [A/HRC/52/35](#), 2 February 2023.

5 Frank La Rue, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/11/4](#), 30 April 2009; Gina Romero, *Unmasking the Chilling Effects of the Digital Surveillance Ecosystem: The Erosion of Assembly and Association Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/62/45](#), 21 April 2026; Frank La Rue, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/17/27](#), 16 May 2011; and David Kaye, *Surveillance and Human Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/41/35](#), 28 May 2019.

to state-actors;⁶ the political misuse of artificial intelligence capabilities⁷ for the purposes of gathering data that justifies investigations or punitive legal actions against targeted artists and cultural practitioners; the posturing of the digital environment as a space of absolute free speech that is not constrained by the limitations articulated in international human rights instruments;⁸ the arbitrary exercise of regulatory control by technology companies outside the confines of human rights and public oversight;⁹ and the derogation of human rights by private companies in the global technology race.¹⁰ Notably, a lack of digital literacy¹¹ by artists and cultural practitioners on the measures they need to take to limit their exposure to safety and security risks, owing to expressions and opinions shared online, is also an important factor that exacerbates their vulnerability.

A combination of some or all these risks that have been highlighted in respect of the digital environment has a number of effects. It poses undue restraints on the use of digital technologies for the reproduction and preservation of culture, heritage, language and traditions,¹² promotes the further entrenchment of oppressive systems that denigrate women, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and other minorities,¹³ and curtails the participation of artists and cultural practitioners in the impartation of ideas and knowledge systems that are of benefit to society.

Although there is some understanding and visibility of the threats encountered by artists and cultural practitioners under varying contexts, the full extent to which they suffer harms and with what implications, remains unknown. This can partly be attributable to limited monitoring capacities, the suppression of human rights organizations documenting and reporting on violations, the adverse restrictions placed on the operations of civil society organizations, the concealment of some of the suppression methodologies employed by human rights violators, and the fear of victims of violations to narrate their experiences for documentation purposes. Within the context of emergencies in particular, there is limited recognition and awareness that the protection of cultural heritage is inextricably connected to the security and safety of the artists and cultural practitioners who create, maintain and transmit knowledge about that heritage. There also is limited public understanding of how natural disasters, including climate change effects, exacerbate the safety risks of artists and cultural practitioners.

Further, although the protection of artists and cultural practitioners at risk has been developed over the past twenty years, it does not appear sufficient to meet the protection needs of those affected. It generally targets individual cases and is constrained by the hosting capacity of programs offering temporary refuge. The evolution towards a system that protects

6 David Kaye, *Surveillance and Human Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/41/35](#), 28 May 2019; and Gina Romero, *Unmasking the Chilling Effects of the Digital Surveillance Ecosystem: The Erosion of Assembly and Association Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/62/45](#), 21 April 2026.

7 Gina Romero, *Unmasking the Chilling Effects of the Digital Surveillance Ecosystem: The Erosion of Assembly and Association Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/62/45](#), 21 April 2026; and Irene Khan, *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN General Assembly, [A/80/341](#), 18 August 2025.

8 Irene Khan, *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN General Assembly, [A/80/341](#), 18 August 2025.

9 David Kaye, *Surveillance and Human Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/41/35](#), 28 May 2019; and Gina Romero, *Unmasking the Chilling Effects of the Digital Surveillance Ecosystem: The Erosion of Assembly and Association Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/62/45](#), 21 April 2026.

10 Gina Romero, *Unmasking the Chilling Effects of the Digital Surveillance Ecosystem: The Erosion of Assembly and Association Rights*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/62/45](#), 21 April 2026.

11 Frank La Rue, *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN General Assembly, [A/66/290](#), 10 August 2011.

12 Ibidem.

13 Irene Khan, *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, Note by the Secretary-General, UN General Assembly, [A/80/341](#), 18 August 2025.

artists and cultural practitioners as a group requires legal analysis regarding the application of the laws of armed conflict, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, international human rights law, and international cultural law, particularly concerning the protection of heritage and the diversity of cultural expressions.

The UN model on the protection of journalists provides sound inspiration for ways of thinking

about the safety and protection of artists and cultural practitioners at risk. It can be completed by a dynamic interpretation of heritage protection in emergencies, extending it to include contemporary artists and forms of expression that build on the notion of cultural rights defenders. This approach achieves practical alignment with the commitment of UNESCO member States to “protect artists and cultural workers, and institutions in situations of conflict, disaster, or forced displacement.”¹⁴

Drawing on the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists

The report *Defending creative voices: artists in emergencies, learning from the safety of journalists* issued within the framework of the 2005 Convention in 2023, examined the possibility of extending the model of journalist protection to artists based on the analogy of the situation, targeting and risks faced by these two categories of actors during conflicts.

UNESCO’s efforts to protect journalists are based on the Organization’s Constitution and were developed earlier than the protection of artists. An observatory for killed journalists was established in 1993, and data is collected annually. This protection was reinforced in 2012 through the adoption of a *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*. Several elements of this plan are of particular interest regarding the protection of artists and cultural practitioners, with a strong replicability. The plan covers both journalists and media workers. The plan includes a preventive component and aims to create a safe environment for journalists with awareness-raising activities, including for military actors. The plan also relies on a coalition of designated organizations for its implementation, encompassing professional bodies and advocacy groups.

This transposition presents certain obstacles and challenges. Media and press freedom are well-established and developed in international law, whereas the institutionalization of the protection of artistic freedom, artists and cultural practitioners is a more recent development. The status of journalists is addressed by international humanitarian law, the law of armed conflict, and international criminal law. For instance, there is a recognized status for war correspondents, and the deliberate targeting of journalists can constitute a war crime under the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Article 79 of Additional Protocol I confirms that journalists are considered civilians and must be respected and protected as long as they do not take a direct part in hostilities. This protection also applies in non-international armed conflicts under customary international humanitarian law.¹⁵

One argument presented as an obstacle is that the definition and identification of artists based on the *1980 Recommendation on the Status of the Artist* remains vague whereas journalists are more strictly defined and hold an international press card. However, international humanitarian law does not define the term “journalist”. In practice, the term is

14 See UNESCO, [Outcome Document: Culture Ministers’ Commitment](#), MONDIAACULT 2025 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, Barcelona, Spain, 29 September–1 October 2025.

15 See Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, [Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I: Rules](#), International Committee of the Red Cross, Cambridge University Press, 2005, Rule 34.

understood broadly to include a wide range of media professionals engaged in gathering, documenting, preparing or reporting information for the public. This may include correspondents, reporters, photographers, camera operators and technical personnel supporting media work across print, radio, television and digital media. Whether a person is considered a journalist depends on the nature of their activities rather than on formal accreditation or affiliation with a particular media organization. As civilians, journalists must be protected against direct attacks and benefit from the general rules governing the conduct of hostilities, as well as safeguards relating to detention and treatment. They lose their protection only if, and for such time as, they directly participate in hostilities. The same reasoning can

apply to artists and cultural practitioners. Direct participation in hostilities should be strictly defined. For instance, writing a peace song should not be considered as participation in hostilities.

If a ‘functional’ protection is granted to journalists based on their role in ensuring public access to information regarding armed conflicts, the same type of protection could be granted to artists and cultural practitioners based on the roles they can play in **conflict prevention**, in **post conflict reconciliation** and in the **preservation of cultural expressions** during conflict. All these roles have been recognized in recent years by United Nations mechanisms¹⁶ and in the context of transitional justice,¹⁷ alongside the recognition of cultural rights defenders.¹⁸

Interesting connections

The protection of journalists involves practical frameworks to secure their physical safety, safeguard confidential sources, and prevent legal intimidation. The following elements could be considered in the case of the protection for artists and cultural practitioners:

- **Early-warning and response mechanisms:** contact points, hotlines, and platforms run by states, international/regional organizations or civil society organizations to offer immediate physical or refuge/shelter when facing direct threats. These mechanisms include identifying the individuals to be protected, sharing protection responsibilities, issuing specific visas and setting up places of refuge – either within the country or in exile – and organizing evacuation as needed.
- **Legal safeguards** such as **anti-SLAPP legislation** to avoid prosecution of artists and culture professionals based on their position during conflict or their involvement in peacebuilding activities.
- **Investigation** procedures in the case of targeting of artists and cultural practitioners, intimidation or other threats physical or online.
- **Investigation** on the intentional destruction of artistic and cultural expressions as an element of proof of international war crimes.
- **Establish support mechanisms** for cultural rights defenders that maintain and protect artistic and cultural expressions during conflicts.
- **Coordination of local / regional / international actors** under UN Country Team or UNESCO regional focal point.
- **Expanding current programs** that provide support and collaborate with civil society initiatives for the protection and safety of artists and cultural practitioners such as the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund and the UNESCO-Archberg Programme.

16 Karima Benounne, *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights*, Note by the Secretariat, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/37/55](#), 4 January 2018.

17 Pablo de Greiff, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence*, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/30/42](#), 7 September 2015.

18 Karima Benounne, *Cultural Rights Defenders*, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/43/50](#), 20 January 2020.

- **The specific case of prisoners of war:** they have the right to pursue their artistic practice in accordance with Article 72 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Regarding the status of the works produced, see in particular the communication from the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights concerning the case of Guantanamo prisoners.¹⁹
- **The ability of artists and cultural practitioners to continue their artistic practice** is a significant issue in contemporary conflicts. Beyond threats faced in their home countries, the possibility of maintaining an artistic practice can also be affected abroad by cultural boycotts. These boycotts may impact all artists and cultural workers, regardless of whether they support or condemn the war – as seen in the case of Russia.²⁰

Key considerations

Beyond considerations of protection and safety during armed conflict, UNESCO's programs²¹ and studies²² on the safeguarding of culture and heritage in situations of emergencies that also include natural disasters and other crises, is a useful point of reference in the designing of protection approaches. They recommend actions that:

- Factor the specific vulnerabilities encountered at each instance of an emergency;
- Are sensitive to local realities;
- Adopt a gendered approach and also take into account the heightened vulnerabilities that are faced by minorities and other vulnerable groups;
- Tailor interventions according to the different phases of an emergency and are clustered into immediate, short-term, medium-term and long-term responses;
- Prioritize the safety and security of artists and cultural practitioners not just based on their exposure to risk but their contribution to the designing, implementation and sustainability of intervention measures that benefit communities affected by emergencies / crises.

19 Alexandra Xanthaki and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Mandates of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, UN Special Procedures, [AL USA 22/2022](#), 29 November 2022.

20 Andra Matei et al., [Artists Under Boycott: Sanctions Against Russian Artists and Their Work: Their Impact on Artistic Freedom and Other Fundamental Rights](#), Avant-Garde Lawyers, 2022.

21 For example, refer to the model of the UNESCO [Heritage Emergency Fund](#) (HEF) and the initiatives supported by the [UNESCO-Aschberg programme](#) which address safety and security.

22 For example, refer to Rosario Soraide, [Defending Creative Voices: Artists in Emergencies, Learning from the Safety of Journalists](#), UNESCO, 2023; and UNESCO, [Voices of Courage: A Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies](#), 2026.

International Legal Frameworks on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners

To this day, there are no comprehensive and ambitious programs that have been adopted internationally, to adequately address the safety and protection of artists and cultural practitioners through the prioritization of the relevant set of rights and challenges. However, there are important legal references and standards

that underline commitments to the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, which have frequently informed national legislation. This section maps the main references that exist, successively covering international law, regional law and a set of standards and initiatives adopted by UNESCO.

International law

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights²³ recognizes the right to security (art. 3), the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile (art. 9), freedom of expression (art. 19), and the right to participate in cultural life (art. 27), among others. Freedom of expression is further developed in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).²⁴ Article 19(2) thereof recognizes the right to freedom of expression, which “shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds... [including] in the form of art”. Article 19(3) admits that this right “may... be subject to certain restrictions”, but only under limited circumstances.

Meanwhile, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)²⁵ enshrines the right of everyone “to take part in cultural life” (article 15(1)a) and “to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production” (art. 15(1)c). To make this effective, the Covenant establishes that governments should “respect the freedom indispensable for ... creative activity” (art. 15(3)).

In its General Comment N° 21, which interprets the implications of the right to take part in cultural life, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights argued that this participation includes everyone’s “right to seek and develop cultural knowledge and expressions and to share them with others, as well as to act creatively and take part in creative activity.” (para 15(a)). Consequently, States should adopt measures to ensure that everyone can, individually or in association with others, enjoy the freedom to create, which implies that States abolish censorship of cultural activities (para 49(c)).²⁶

Contemporary analyses of artistic freedom have underlined its interconnectedness with several other human rights also recognized in ICCPR, ICESCR and related international standards, including the right to hold opinions, the right of peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of association (which includes the right of artists and creators to form and join trade unions), the right to work, equal pay, fair remuneration and social security, the right to freedom of movement, and the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment, among others.²⁷

23 United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, [Resolution 217 A](#), 10 December 1948.

24 United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, [Resolution 2200A \(XXI\)](#), 16 December 1966.

25 United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, [Resolution 2200A \(XXI\)](#), 16 December 1966.

26 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 21: Right of Everyone to Take Part in Cultural Life (Art. 15, Para. 1(a), of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, [E/C.12/GC/21](#), 21 December 2009.

27 See for example Farida Shaheed, *The Right to Freedom of Artistic Expression and Creativity*, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, UN Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/23/34](#), 14 March 2013; Rosario Soraide, [Defending Creative Voices: Artists in Emergencies, Learning from the Safety of Journalists](#), UNESCO, 2023 ; and Sara Whyatt, [Free to Create: Artistic Freedom in Europe](#), Council of Europe Report on the Freedom of Artistic Expression, 2023.

Also important is the principle that rights are to be exercised without discrimination of any kind, including in terms of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, recognized in article 2 of both ICCPR and ICESCR. Furthermore, article 27 of ICCPR establishes that ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities cannot be denied the right to enjoy their culture or use their language.

In line with this, several international conventions that reinforce the rights of specific social groups have also addressed aspects related to the arts and creative expression:

- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination²⁸ calls States to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination with respect to, among others, the right to freedom of expression and the right to equal participation in cultural activities (Article 5 (d) (v) and 5 (e) (vi)).
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women²⁹ requires States to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in, among others,

the right to participate in all aspects of cultural life (Article 13 (c)).

- The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families³⁰ affirms that migrant workers and their families should enjoy equal treatment in relation, among others, to access and participation in cultural life (Articles 43.1 (g) and 45.1 (d)).
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³¹ calls States to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion (Article 21), as well as to take part in cultural life (Article 30).
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³² establishes that Indigenous Peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to the destruction of their culture (Article 8), as well as the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as related literatures, visual and performing arts (Article 31.1).

Regional law

References to the rights of artists and their protection exist in legal standards adopted by several regional organizations and bodies across the world. Among them are the following:

- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights³³ recognizes freedom of expression (Article 9) and the right to take part in cultural life (Article 17).
- The American Convention on Human Rights³⁴ recognizes everyone's right to freedom of thought and expression (Article 13), as well as their right to associate freely for, among others, cultural purposes (Article 16).
- The Arab Charter on Human Rights³⁵ refers to the right to freedom of opinion and expression

28 United Nations General Assembly, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, [Resolution 2106 \(XX\)](#), 21 December 1965.

29 United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, [Resolution 34/180](#), 18 December 1979.

30 United Nations General Assembly, *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, [Resolution 45/158](#), 18 December 1990.

31 United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, [Resolution 61/106](#), 12 December 2006.

32 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 13 September 2007.

33 African Union, *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*, 27 June 1981.

34 Organization of American States, *American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José)*, San José, Costa Rica, 22 November 1969.

35 League of Arab States, *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, adopted 22 May 2004.

(Article 32) as well as the right to take part in cultural life and States' duty to respect the freedom of creative activity (Article 42).

- The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration³⁶ adopted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognizes the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Article 23), as well as the right to take part in cultural life, enjoy the arts and benefit from the protection of the moral

and material interests resulting from literary and artistic production (Article 32).

- The European Convention on Human Rights³⁷ enshrines the right to freedom of expression (Article 10), whereas the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union³⁸ refers to freedom of expression (Article 11), the freedom of the arts (Article 13) and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity (Article 22).

UNESCO standards and initiatives

As the UN agency responsible for cooperation in the field of culture, UNESCO has addressed the safety of artists under several regulatory frameworks, legal standards and political initiatives.

The 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist³⁹ calls States to protect, defend and assist artists and their freedom of creation, among others by adopting measures to secure greater freedom for artists (General Principle 3). It also requires them to protect artists' freedom of expression and communication, as established in international human rights law (General Principle 6).

The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions⁴⁰ includes the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms among its Guiding Principles, arguing that "Cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural

expressions, are guaranteed." (Article 2.1). The Convention calls Parties to take measures to protect and preserve cultural expressions that are at risk of extinction, under serious threat or in need of urgent safeguarding (Article 8). They may also cooperate to provide mutual assistance in situations of serious threat to cultural expressions (Article 17).

Finally, the safety of artists has been a subject discussed at the two MONDIACULT World Conferences on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development convened by UNESCO in 2022 and 2025. The Final Declaration of MONDIACULT 2022 World Conference⁴¹ identified the protection and promotion of artistic freedom and freedom of expression as a central area in governments' work around cultural rights (para 10). The Outcome Document of MONDIACULT 2025 World Conference⁴² identified a set of priorities for cultural policies and practices, which included, among many others, protecting and safeguarding artistic freedom and freedom of expression; struggling against all forms of racism, discrimination and prejudice that

36 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, [ASEAN Human Rights Declaration](#), Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 18 November 2012.

37 Council of Europe, [Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#), Rome, 4 November 1950.

38 European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, Official Journal of the European Union, [C 326/391](#), 26 October 2012.

39 UNESCO, [Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist](#), adopted by the General Conference at its 21st session, Belgrade, 27 October 1980.

40 UNESCO, [Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#), adopted by the General Conference, Paris, 20 October 2005.

41 UNESCO, *Final Declaration*, MONDIACULT 2022 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, Mexico City, 28-30 September 2022, [MONDIACULT-2022/CPD/6](#).

42 UNESCO, [Outcome Document: Culture Ministers' Commitment](#), MONDIACULT 2025 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, Barcelona, Spain, 29 September - 1 October 2025.

threaten artistic freedom, freedom of expression, as well as cultural diversity and heritage; advancing international cultural policy based on human rights; and protecting artists, cultural workers, and

institutions in situations of conflict, disaster, or forced displacement, by providing support mechanisms that safeguard their security and ensure the continuity of cultural expressions.

Opportunities of Redress

The UN has several human rights mechanisms that assess the extent to which States are upholding their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including ensuring the safety and protection of artists and cultural practitioners. These mechanisms include Treaty Bodies,⁴³ the Universal Periodic Review⁴⁴ and Special Procedures.⁴⁵ Although these mechanisms make recommendations that are non-binding on States, are not legally enforceable and rely on state cooperation, they are important avenues of bringing international visibility to challenges and threats to the safety and protection of artists and cultural practitioners. Nationally, although domestic courts can make decisions that are binding and legally enforceable, there are several challenges that hinder access to justice, which include judicial capture, impunity, corrupt law enforcement officials, intimidation of legal practitioners representing victims of human rights violations, inadequate resourcing of the courts, and the excessive cost of litigation which may be beyond the financial means of those most in need of judicial remedies. For any remedy to provide redress for artists and cultural practitioners who have encountered threats and weakened protection, it must be pursued without impediment, offer prospects of success, must be capable of redressing a complaint⁴⁶ and must, most importantly, be realistic when juxtaposed with the specific circumstances⁴⁷ of artists and cultural practitioners.

In this regard, encouraging States to take the necessary measures to ensure an independent and sufficiently resourced legal system is an important step in facilitating access to justice and the appropriate remedies. Such measures should also be underlined by active steps intended at correcting the structural barriers that make access to justice a practical impossibility, including barriers that are rooted in inequalities and poverty.

Further, international courts and tribunals play an instrumental role in the adjudication of cases on war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. The scope of these crimes has direct implications on the conditions under which the safety and security of artists and cultural practitioners is threatened, particularly within the context of armed conflict and the orchestration of agendas to destroy distinct identity groups. A multilateral system premised on the cooperation of States also has an important role to play. It can mobilize resources that predict risk, minimize exposure to harm and provide protection support. In respect of colonized or previously colonized indigenous people whose cultural rights are threatened, the international community can facilitate access to reparations and other corrective measures.

43 See United Nations, [Human Rights Treaty Bodies](#).

44 See United Nations, [Human Rights Council](#).

45 See United Nations, Human Rights Council, [Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council](#).

46 See African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Sir Dawda K. Jawara v. The Gambia*, [Communications 147/95 and 149/96](#), 11 May 2000.

47 See the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Purohit and Moore v. The Gambia*, [Communication 241/2001](#), 2003, para. 36–38.

Conclusion

Artists and cultural practitioners, as individuals and in community with each other, undoubtedly offer distinct value to society. The various conditions within which they operate, which threaten, undermine or diminish their role in society, requires sustained attention. The measures that are designed and implemented for their safety and security must aim to address the underlying causes of susceptibility to risk, be attentive to the particularities of their practice, and must prioritize their protection not just based on the degree of exposure to harm but the instrumental role they play in the construction of viable societies that hold the continuity of culture and cultural memory in high regard. While a universal and standardized safety and protection plan for artists and cultural practitioners does not currently exist, international and regional human rights frameworks and standards are instructive on the aspects that ought to be addressed.

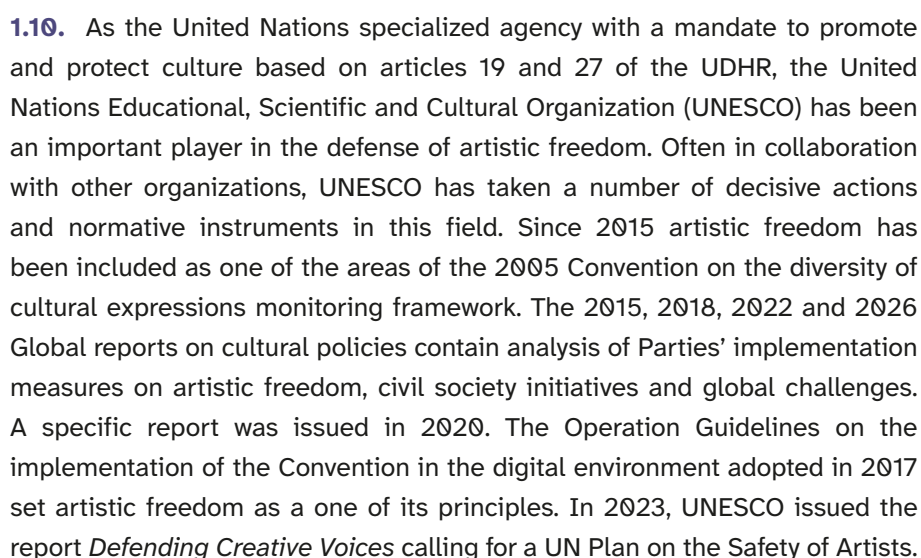
The well-established safety and protection framework of journalists whose human rights are threatened under varying contexts but in similar circumstances as artists and cultural practitioners, provides an important reference point in the development of a measure that can find replication in the arts and culture space. Equally significant is UNESCO's recommended frameworks on ensuring the safety and security of artists, cultural practitioners and journalists in situations of emergencies. It is on these grounds therefore that a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Artists and Cultural Practitioners is modeled on the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.



comments & suggestions



1.7. Exposure to safety risks has also increased with the presence and visibility of artists and cultural practitioners and their works on digital platforms. The harassment, surveillance and intimidation to which they are subjected online, has unprecedentedly translated to them being victims of physical violence, killings, legal action, abductions and other forms of human rights violations. The lack of digital literacy on the safety and security measures they need to





1.16. While investigating crimes against artists and cultural practitioners remains the responsibility of the State, the threats posed by non-state actors such as terrorist organizations or military groups in armed conflicts are growing. This merits a careful, context-sensitive consideration of the differing needs of artists in conflict and non-conflict zones, as well as of the different legal instruments available to ensure their protection. It also necessitates an



3.3. A results-based approach, prioritizing actions and interventions for maximum impact;

comments & suggestions



- 3.4.** A human rights-based approach;
- 3.5.** A gender-sensitive approach;
- 3.6.** A disability-sensitive approach;
- 3.7.** Incorporation of the safety of artists and cultural practitioners and the struggle against impunity into the United Nation's broader developmental objectives;
- 3.8.** Implementation of the principles of the February 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (ownership, alignment, harmonization, results and mutual accountability);
- 3.9.** Strategic partnerships beyond the UN system, harnessing the initiatives of various international, regional and local organizations dedicated to the safety of artists and cultural practitioners;
- 3.10.** A context-sensitive, multi-disciplinary approach to the root causes of threats to artists and cultural practitioners, and impunity;
- 3.11.** Robust mechanisms (indicators) for monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions and strategies reflecting the UN's core values.

4. Objective

- 4.1.** Working toward the creation of a free and safe environment for artists and cultural practitioners in both conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide.

5. Proposed Actions

Strengthening UN Mechanisms

- 5.1.** Identify the role of UN agencies, funds and programs in combating impunity surrounding attacks against artists and cultural practitioners, as well as its wider causes, with a view toward establishing focal points that strengthen the specific contribution of each relevant UN actor by creating effective forms of intervention to achieve the goals set out in the Plan of Action beginning with regular inter-agency meetings, for example;
- 5.2.** In order to enhance UN system-wide coherence, establish a coordinated inter-agency mechanism for follow-up and evaluating matters of concern

on the issue of the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and impunity, including regular reviews of progress at the national and international level and continuing to address the issue by supporting a joint message on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on the situation of artistic freedom around the world, for example;

5.3. Incorporate the issues of the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and of the impunity of attacks against them, into UN strategies at country level. This would mean, for example, encouraging the inclusion of an indicator on the safety of artists and cultural practitioners based on the UNESCO Media Development Indicators in country analysis and taking the findings into consideration in programming;

5.4. More generally, promote the inclusion of freedom of expression, artistic freedom and cultural rights goals, in particular the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and impunity, within the wider UN development agenda;

5.5. Work toward strengthening the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the mandate and resources of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and of the Special Rapporteurs on cultural rights and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

Cooperating with Member States

5.6. Assist Member States to develop legislation and mechanisms guaranteeing artistic freedom, including, for example, requirements that States effectively monitor, investigate and prosecute crimes against artistic freedom, and offer sufficient remedies for victims of violations;

5.7. Assist Member States to fully implement existing international rules and principles, as well as to improve, where needed, national legislation on safeguarding artists and cultural practitioners in conflict and non-conflict situations;

5.8. Encourage Member States to take an active role in the prevention of attacks against artists and cultural practitioners, and take prompt action in response to attacks by establishing national emergency mechanisms, which different stakeholders can adopt, for example:

5.9. Encourage Member States to adopt a UNESCO General Conference *Resolution* entitled ‘Condemnation of Violence against Artists and Cultural Practitioners,’ to call upon Member States to adopt the principle that there should be no statute of limitations on persons guilty of crimes against artistic freedom; to refine and promote legislation in this field.

comments & suggestions



comments & suggestions



Partnering with Other Organizations and Institutions

5.10. Reinforce collaboration between UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations, at both international and regional levels, and encourage the incorporation of the safety of artists and cultural practitioners into their strategies;

5.11. Strengthen partnerships between the UN and civil society organizations and professional associations dedicated to monitoring the safety of artists and cultural practitioners at national, regional and international levels. This could include sharing up-to-date information and best practices with partner organizations and field offices and conducting joint missions and investigations into particular cases.

Raising Awareness

5.12. Sensitize Member States on the importance of artistic freedom and the dangers that impunity for crimes against artists and cultural practitioners represents for freedom and democracy;

5.13. Sensitize artists, cultural practitioners, cultural institutions, CSOs, professional organizations and policy-makers on existing international instruments and conventions, as well as various existing practical guides on safeguarding safety and security;

5.14. Sensitize artists and cultural practitioners on the importance of internet safety and security, to reduce their exposure to harm online and their physical identification based on personal information shared online;

5.15. Sensitize all the above parties to the growing dangers posed by all actors, including non-state actors, and work against forms of punishment and other emerging threats such as harassment or threats online;

5.16. Sensitize the general public on the importance of the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and the fight against impunity, through promoting global awareness campaigns that align with commemorative events such as UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day and Music Freedom Day;

5.17. Encourage cooperation of cultural education institutions, artists, cultural practitioners, professional organizations and CSOs to develop curricula, which include material relevant to the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and impunity;

5.18. Disseminate best practices on the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and counteracting impunity.

[illegible]

Fostering Safety Initiatives

5.19. Urge all stakeholders, and in particular the cultural sector and their professional associations, to establish general safety provisions for artists and cultural practitioners, including but not limited to safety training courses, health care and life insurance, access to social protection and adequate remuneration for independent workers and employees;

5.20. Develop accessible, real-time emergency response mechanisms for artists and cultural practitioners, including contacting and engaging available UN resources and missions and other groups working in the field;

5.21. Strengthen provisions for the safety of artists and cultural practitioners in situations of emergencies, for example by encouraging the creation of refuges or safe havens corridors in close cooperation with UN staff on the ground.

6. Follow-up Mechanisms

6.1. Establishment of a network of focal points on issues about the safety of artists and cultural practitioners in all relevant UN agencies, funds and programs in order to develop effective measures to promote the safety of artists and cultural practitioners, and combat impunity, coordinate actions and exchange information and whenever possible also to publicize it:

6.2. Scheduling regular meetings of relevant UN agencies, funds and programs at international level and also at national level in cooperation with the UN Country Teams (UNCT), with participation of relevant professional associations, NGOs and other stakeholders:

6.3. Entrust overall coordination of UN efforts on the safety of artists and cultural practitioners to UNESCO, in cooperation with other UN agencies, in particular with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Secretariat in NY:

6.4. Present a finalized UN Plan of Action to the relevant UNESCO and UN bodies.

comments & suggestions



About the experts

Jordi Baltà Portolés is a researcher, consultant, and trainer specializing in cultural policies, international relations, and sustainability. His work has focused particularly on local cultural policies, cultural diversity, cultural rights, and cultural cooperation. He is an adviser to the Culture Committee of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and a member of UNESCO's Expert Facility for the implementation of the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. He collaborates regularly with other organizations, including On the Move and Trànsit Projectes.

Jordi holds a doctorate from the University of Girona and the University of Melbourne, with a thesis focused on reviewing governance models for local cultural policies from a sustainability perspective. He is a lecturer in the MA in Cultural Management at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) and the University of Girona (UdG) and regularly contributes to other university programs.

Laurence Cuny is a human rights researcher specializing in cultural rights and artistic freedom. She began her career at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, where she earned a postgraduate degree in international law. She subsequently worked with civil society organizations and the United Nations on the protection of human rights defenders and the implementation of cultural rights. She holds a PhD from Université Laval and Université Paris I Sorbonne, where her research examined the legal foundations of artistic freedom under international human rights law from the perspective of economic, social and cultural rights and the mechanisms available to protect it.

In 2018, she joined UNESCO's group of experts on the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and has conducted several missions to provide support on the drafting of legislation on the status of the artist. She has collaborated with the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on reports addressing artistic freedom, the impact of advertising on the enjoyment of cultural rights, and public space.

Her current research topics are the impact of technologies on cultural rights, cultural diversity and migration, and the protection of artists in armed conflicts. In 2024 she published a monograph on the evolution of international protection for musicians based on the experience and legacy of Pau Casals.

Anupama Sekhar is an expert in transnational cultural relations and public policy related to the arts, culture, and heritage. She is currently the Director of Bangalore International Centre. Previously, she served as Director for Culture at the Asia-Europe Foundation and as Director for Policy and Engagement at IFACCA, the global network of ministries of culture.

Since 2015, Anupama has been a member of UNESCO's Expert Facility for the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and currently serves on the selection committee of UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD). She is a member of the Research Advisory Council of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Germany. Anupama is also a member of the Advisory Committee for On the Move's research-action project on the situation of artists and cultural practitioners at risk and those who have been forcibly displaced.

She has served on the boards of ArtsEquator, which promotes critical writing about arts practices in Southeast Asia, and Res Artis, a global network of arts residency operators.

Lisa Sidambe is Freemuse's Sub-Saharan Africa researcher. She monitors artistic freedom trends and developments across 46 Sub-Saharan Africa countries, and reports on the same notably through UPR and QPR submissions, and Freemuse's annual State of Artistic Freedom (SAF) report. She is also the coordinator of Freemuse's Building Bridges project, an initiative that builds on existing initiatives and experiences to analyse threats to artistic freedom and respond to threats through joint documentation, monitoring and advocacy. She was a co-author of a flagship resolution on artistic freedom passed by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in early 2026 and is presently part of an expert team developing the Model Law on Artistic Freedom in Africa. Previously, she served as Cultural Governance and Democracy Programme Officer at Nhimbe Trust, and coordinated projects on artistic freedom, international cultural cooperation, the integration of culture in sustainable development strategies, and election monitoring. Lisa is also the founder of Canvas of my Identity, an initiative that uses mixed-media visual art to engage post-conflict narratives of contested spaces, discourses and identities.

A Mandela Rhodes Scholar, Canon Collins Scholar, Beit Scholar and Sir John Monash Medallist, Lisa holds a summa cum laude honours in Philosophy and International Studies from Monash University, a Masters in Conflict, Development and Security from the University of Leeds, and is currently a Political Studies doctoral candidate at the University of Johannesburg. Her doctoral research examines post-colonial state-building practices through the lens of state-building (dis)continuities, armed non-state actors' technologies of violence and the role of African spirituality in the context of intrastate armed conflicts.

ON
THE
MOVE



Co-funded by
the European Union