



COVID-19 Response

Search



A-Z Site Index

Home Secretary-General Stories UN News For UN Personnel » For Member States UN System Women Rise for All Youth Resources FAQs



Artists live-stream their music from their homes during a virtual global jazz concert on International Jazz Day. Photo: UNESCO

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

COVID-19: UN harnesses the power of culture to inspire hope and solidarity

“There can be no future without culture... it is through culture that we will forge our collective resilience and it is culture that will bring us closer together.” – UNESCO Assistant Director-General

About the author

Department of Global Communications

The United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC) promotes global awareness and understanding of the work of the United Nations.

When this year’s live jazz concert to celebrate [International Jazz Day](https://www.un.org/en/observances/jazz-day) (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/jazz-day>) was cancelled due to COVID-19, musicians planning to perform at the 30 April event in Cape Town, South Africa, decided to live-stream their music from their homes.

International Jazz Day, first proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2011, is for “people of all ages, ethnicity, genders and beliefs to join forces to prove, without a doubt, our similarities are more powerful than our differences,” said renowned jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, as he opened the virtual concert.

Mr. Hancock, who is also the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue, described jazz as “an encouragement to courage”. Musicians around the world performed in tribute to frontline responders – doctors, nurses, scientists and every single health care worker who have been “working tirelessly day in and day out, risking their own safety for ours.”

Legendary jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who was among the performers, said “music inspires bravery and fearlessness.”

Demonstrating the power of music to inspire global solidarity, the event is among the many UN-supported cultural responses to COVID-19.

According to UNESCO, 128 countries have closed their cultural institutions (<https://en.unesco.org/news/more-130-ministers-call-support-culture-sector-covid-19-crisis-response-2>). An estimated 90 per cent of the world’s 60,000 museums are facing full, partial or eventual closure. Traditional festivals and a wide array of other events also have been cancelled, impacting the cultural life of communities and the income of creative professionals, whose work is often seasonal.

Reading Books

Much-loved children's authors are joining "Read the World (<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-04-2020-ipa-who-and-unicef-launch-read-the-world-on-international-children-s-book-day-to-support-children-and-young-people-in-isolation>)," an initiative to read extracts of their books to millions of children and young people currently living in isolation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a collaboration between the International Publishers Association (IPA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"Children's lives and routines have been turned upside down in just a few short weeks," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. "Even when the outside world is out of bounds for now, reading can remind children and young people that the transportive power of books is unlimited."

Museums

In Lebanon, museums have made virtual tours (<https://en.unesco.org/news/museums-facing-covid-19-challenges-remain-engaged-communities>) and mobile applications available to the public. "We will come through this and we are keeping in mind, for after COVID-19, the reprogramming of activities in our museums," said Anne Marie Afeiche, Executive Director General for the Council of Museums. "By saving culture, we save society, its diversity, its vitality and its creativity."



Bergamo in Italy opens museums virtually in response to confinement. Photo: UNESCO

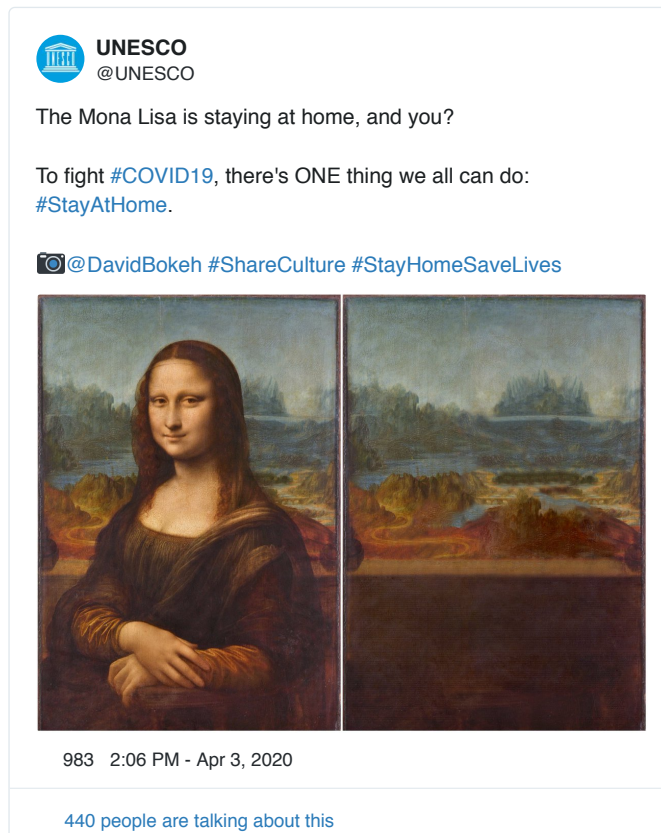
The Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar, Senegal, has also taken quick action. Since the museum closed due to COVID-19, it has engaged its experts to film guided tours of all its exhibitions, said General Manager Hamady Bocoum. "These will be broadcast in segments on Senegalese television, and will also be made available online," he said.

World Heritage Sites

About 90 per cent of countries have closed or partially closed their UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Ngorongoro Conservation Area (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1253>), a World Heritage Site in the United Republic of Tanzania, is one of the greatest natural wonders of the planet, with its stunning Ngorongoro Crater and spectacular concentration of wildlife. While it has remained open during the pandemic, it is hosting virtual visits through web cameras (<https://en.unesco.org/news/coping-covid-19-pandemic-ngorongoro-conservation-area-world-heritage-site>), allowing people to enjoy the view remotely, said Conservation Commissioner Freddy Manongi.

Through #ShareCulture (<https://en.unesco.org/news/exploring-world-heritage-home-unesco>), UNESCO is inviting everyone to communicate their love of art and share it with as many people as possible. The agency's "ResiliArt (<https://en.unesco.org/news/resiliart-artists-and-creativity-beyond-crisis>)" movement, meanwhile, features a series of global virtual debates with renowned artists and professionals, and draws attention to the need to support cultural life.



In an expression of solidarity for the importance of cultural life, more than 130 Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Culture convened (<https://en.unesco.org/news/more-130-ministers-call-support-culture-sector-covid-19-crisis-response-2>) in an online UNESCO discussion on ways to bolster the cultural sector. While one of the first sectors to be affected by this crisis, culture is often the last to receive budgetary support.

Many participants pointed out that culture is a collective experience of shared humanity and it will be important to revitalize human contact when it is safe to do so. Some emphasized the need to support culture that “does not easily translate in the virtual world”.

Supporting Artists

Several Ministers highlighted emergency funding packages put in place in their countries to safeguard the livelihoods of artists and creative professionals in the short-term.

“There can be no future without culture,” said Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture. “It is through culture that we will forge our collective resilience and it is culture that will bring us closer together.”