



## “Towards Access to Culture for All”

### Concept Note

#### **Culture Sector event for the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development**

Date: 22 May 2018

Time: 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Place: Room IV, UNESCO HQ

Languages: English, French

#### Background:

To celebrate the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, and in honour of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Culture Sector proposes a half-day event centered on a simple question: **How we can ensure that everyone has the right to access culture?** It is a question – and a call to action – that finds its roots in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001).

Culture is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 27, which states that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”. Taking this as its starting point, UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity proclaims: “The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples.” The link between culture and human rights is further highlighted in Article 5, which states that “cultural rights” – the right of all people to access, participate in and enjoy culture – are an “integral part of human rights”. Article 6, entitled “Towards access for all to cultural diversity”, argues that the ability of people from all cultures to express themselves and make themselves known, to have equal access to art and the means of expression and dissemination, are among the most important guarantees of cultural diversity we have. More recently, UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions stated, “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.” Access to culture, therefore, is essential to cultural diversity, as well as the universal achievement of human rights.

Today, culture is more accessible than ever before. Millions – if not billions – of works of art and culture, from paintings to sculptures, music, books and cinema, can be enjoyed anywhere and anytime thanks to the advent of the Internet and smartphones. Cultural institutions such as museums have not only proliferated, they have become more egalitarian, with programming and facilities catered to the interests and needs of the communities they serve, including individuals with disabilities. Museums



are also increasingly recognizing the power of digitization for preserving and increasing access to their collections, as highlighted in UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society. Temporary and permanent public art installations and innovative architecture are now ubiquitous in the world's cities, allowing millions of people to enjoy and experience culture for free. Artists and ordinary people can now easily create, disseminate and profit from their own cultural content through social platforms and online streaming spaces. Streaming services like Netflix are also massively investing in original content and programming.

Yet, while culture has never been more accessible, new challenges have created fresh barriers to access, placing cultural diversity increasingly at risk. A historic refugee crisis, along with mass waves of economic and climate-induced migration, has made it more difficult for individuals and communities to access their cultural heritage and contemporary cultural expressions. Young people are particularly impacted by this crisis, as the cultural and creative industries statistically represent their greatest source of employment. Across the world, artists are suffering from growing censorship, harassment, imprisonment and even death, with women facing the grossest violations. The digital platforms (Instagram, YouTube, SoundCloud, etc.) on which artists publicly display and promote their work also bring with them threats to rights and freedoms, due to online "trolling" and the censorship of individual artwork and accounts.

Compounding these new challenges are more longstanding inequalities in terms of access to culture. Gender norms and stereotypes often prevent women from participating in cultural life, or from being equally compensated and recognized for their work when they do. People of color and individuals with disabilities continue to struggle to see themselves reflected in the media they consume – whether in film, TV or in print. A larger imbalance in trade in cultural goods and services persists between the Global North and Global South, while artists from developing countries face far greater travel restrictions than their developed country counterparts. The "digital divide" between women and men, as well as the Global North and Global South, has actually grown in recent years. The global internet use gender gap grew to 12% in 2016, and was even higher in Least Developed Countries (31%) and Africa (23%). 95% of the app economy is concentrated in only 10 countries, mainly from the Global North, reflecting a persistent lack of digital infrastructure in developing countries. In response, international normative instruments, such as UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, have recently adopted new operational guidelines to help countries adapt to this new digital environment, offering policy recommendations on how to ensure better access to culture and fair remuneration for artists.

What emerges, therefore, when we look at access to culture today is something of a puzzle. While culture is arguably more accessible than ever before, this access remains unequal, with access to a diversity of cultural expressions yet to be fully guaranteed. More worrying, despite its important links with human rights, cultural diversity and artistic freedom is, in many cases, increasingly at risk.



**Format:**

On 22 May, UNESCO will bring together a panel of UN representatives, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, museum directors, artists and private sector actors to discuss how we can move towards access to culture for all. This discussion will aim to offer a way forward in light of the situation facing culture today – one where growing access to culture sits alongside increasing threats to cultural diversity. This panel discussion will take the form of an open conversation (rather than a series of speeches) guided by three discussion questions. Although the opening speeches will be given from a podium, the discussion itself will take place in a more interactive manner, with participants seated together in armchairs.