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VOICES OF COURAGE



**A GLOBAL SURVEY ON WOMEN,
CULTURE AND EMERGENCIES**

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Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as agents of change in emergencies

When bombs fall and earthquakes strike, gender inequalities deepen. When waves surge and bullets fly, heritage is destroyed and creative voices fall silent. Democratic spaces shrink.

In times of emergency, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals face many challenges, from income loss, unsafe work environments, psychological trauma to restricted freedom of expression. While some of these hardships are shared with their male colleagues, emergencies amplify pre-existing gender inequalities in the culture sector. Women shoulder increased unpaid caregiving work, face heightened gender-based violence, remain excluded from decision-making spaces and struggle to access emergency support – often relying on family and friends rather than formal assistance.

Nevertheless, women continue to be agents of change. They safeguard cultural heritage, rebuild damaged sites, transmit traditions and knowledge and raise their creative voices for human rights, social justice and peace, even in the darkest times. Despite their potential often remaining untapped, they also play a crucial role in resilience and recovery, challenging entrenched gender inequalities to rebuild more inclusive societies.

Addressing a critical lack of data on their specific needs and experiences, this report examines how emergencies – from armed conflicts and civil unrest to disasters and health crises – impact women in the culture sector. Drawing on UNESCO's first global survey on women, culture and emergencies, it provides evidence-based insights, good practices and actionable recommendations to support the full participation and leadership of women in preparedness, response and recovery for and beyond culture.

Only

37%

of women surveyed received support to pursue their cultural and creative work during emergencies

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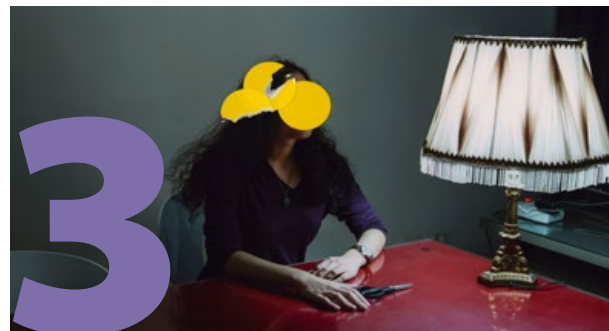
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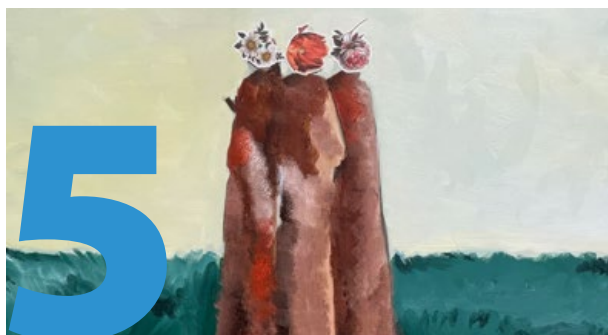
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KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMERGENCIES

- ▶ **Emergencies amplify pre-existing gender inequalities.** Surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals reported facing multiple intersecting barriers during emergencies, including lack of funding and market access (60%), unsafe workspaces (37%), disrupted cultural and creative practices (36%), increased unpaid caregiving work (21%), and restricted freedom of expression and artistic freedom (20%). They also face heightened gender-based violence.
- ▶ **Economic instability and loss of livelihood is the most widespread consequence** for surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in all types of emergencies (69%), followed by **trauma and burnout** (59%), with women reporting significantly higher levels than men (39%).
- ▶ For surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals who identify as belonging to **minority groups, risks intensify.** They face heavier cultural and creative work disruptions, weaker institutional support and higher exposure to unsafe work environments, gender-based violence and trauma.
- ▶ **Only 37%** of surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals having experienced an emergency are able to **fully or significantly continue their cultural and creative work.**
- ▶ **More than one in three surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals (35%) are forced to leave their homes as a result of an emergency** – relocating either within or outside their country.
- ▶ **Shifting to digital and remote work emerges as a coping strategy,** used mainly by independent and freelance women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. Yet, digital barriers, such as limited connectivity, lack of equipment, low online visibility as well as the rise of technology-facilitated gender-based violence remain constraints.

SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND REMAINING GAPS

- ▶ **A gender awareness gap hinders women's rights, safety and voices:** only 25% of surveyed public institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) acknowledge that emergencies significantly exacerbate gender inequalities in the culture sector.
- ▶ **Preparedness in the culture sector remains limited** – only about half of surveyed public institutions (54%) have measures in place, and 63% of CSOs have none. Gender responsive preparedness and overall gender mainstreaming capacities are weak.
- ▶ **Very few emergency response initiatives are centered on the needs of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.** Those identified are small in scale and institutional support is often tied to formal employment, which disproportionately excludes women.
- ▶ **Less than 2 in 5 surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals (37%) receive any support** – usually emotional help from family and friends – while men benefit primarily from public institutions and governments' support.
- ▶ **Women-led cultural initiatives and networks play a crucial role in emergencies,** with 44% of surveyed women respondents aware of or participating in such efforts.

- ▶ While recovery efforts can provide opportunities to address structural inequalities and promote transformative change, **the participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to build back better remains a largely untapped resource**. Among surveyed women artists, cultural and heritage professionals 3 out of 4 report participating to some extent in efforts to recover the loss of cultural heritage and expressions following an emergency, but only about 1 out of 5 women report significant participation (22%). Even fewer (16%) indicate being significantly involved in recovery efforts beyond the culture sector.

PRIORITIES OF WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS IN EMERGENCIES

- ▶ **Policy priorities** include:
 - ensuring the participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency decision-making spaces
 - designing or revising emergency policies and measures to include women's needs and priorities from the outset
 - strengthening protection against gender-based violence, including functioning reporting mechanisms
- ▶ **Operational priorities** include:
 - establishing financial assistance mechanisms targeting women artists, cultural and heritage professionals
 - ensuring access for women to safe cultural and creative spaces and provide them with the materials and equipment they need
 - creating networking platforms connecting women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to emergency resources
- ▶ **Priorities for gender-responsive recovery** include:
 - integrating gender-specific approaches in recovery frameworks and plans
 - including women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in diverse talent pools to lead actions to safeguard cultural heritage and revive cultural life
 - promoting inclusive narratives and diverse content produced by women in the revival of cultural institutions and programming

UNESCO sincerely thanks all respondents to the 2025 Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies, in particular the individuals who had the courage and the time to share their testimonies, hopes, and expectations with us while living in emergency situations that threaten their lives and livelihoods. It is thanks to their contributions that this report was made possible, and we hope that it will amplify their voices and inspire new approaches that better protect women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts.



INTRODUCTION

Rania Matar, *Where Do I Go?* (series), Lebanon, 2024. Part of her series *Where Do I Go?*, Rania Matar's work depicts the difficult choices facing young Lebanese women about their future, between attachment to home and the prospect of leaving. © Rania Matar

Emergencies around the world are at an unprecedented level resulting in attacks on human rights and gender equality, threatening cultural rights, communities' collective memory, history, and identities. They not only impact women and men differently but exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities across economic, political, social and cultural spheres, including limited access to decision-making, education, safe working environments, and sexual and reproductive health services. With the widespread cuts in official development assistance (ODA) and shifts in funding priorities, there are fewer and fewer resources for gender equality and for culture in emergency contexts. In 2022, only 0.3 per cent of ODA reached women's organizations¹ and Country Programmable Aid for culture and recreation accounted for just 0.15 per cent.² By 2025, over 90 per cent of civil society organizations (CSOs) assisting women in emergencies faced even further funding cuts resulting from foreign aid reductions.³

For women and girls, the consequences are dire. As a result of the 185 conflicts underway today, 676 million women and girls are living within 50 km of armed conflict as of 2024, exposing them to significant levels of violence, including gender-based violence and sexual violence used as a war tactic.⁴ The climate crisis is also amplifying existing gender inequalities, and according to recent estimates, could result in pushing up to 158.3 million more women and girls into extreme poverty by 2050.⁵ Shrinking democratic spaces have resulted in the expansion of systemic online and offline attacks against women human rights defenders, journalists, and those in the public eye, silencing their powerful voices and threatening their physical safety. As women retreat from public spaces, media narratives on emergencies continue to underrepresent them: while media coverage of conflicts increased more than six-fold between 2013 and 2023, only 5 per cent of articles focused on women's experiences in war.⁶ Moreover, the expanding uses of new technologies and artificial intelligence in emergencies, whether it be in military applications and early warning systems to monitor natural hazards or to document gender-based violence or collect forensic evidence on sexual violence, opens up opportunities but also poses the risk of reinforcing gender bias and inequalities through biased AI models and datasets and the exclusion of women from technology design.⁷

The growing number and intensity of **emergencies has struck the culture sector hard.** Cultural heritage sites are damaged or destroyed in armed conflicts and are increasingly vulnerable to disasters. Climate change now ranks among the greatest threats to natural heritage endangering one in three natural sites and one in six cultural sites worldwide.⁸ The impact of emergencies on the culture sector however goes beyond damage to built heritage: the collective cultural memory of communities, their history and identities are threatened not only by uprooting and displacement, but also erasure. Artists are losing their livelihoods, a situation often exacerbated by the impact of shrinking democratic spaces, which intensifies threats to artistic freedom and stifles the oxygen out of diverse cultural expressions. Yet, the prevailing perception that, in emergency contexts, areas of work related to basic needs (e.g., food, water, shelter and sanitation) should be given priority, coupled with current cuts in overall international aid funding, negatively impacts the inclusion of culture in humanitarian response. Additionally, while digital technology and AI can provide new tools to safeguard, preserve and protect heritage⁹ during emergencies, and digital platforms often remain the last avenues available for creative voices when public spaces close, women remain significantly underrepresented in technology and digital creative sectors. This is a critical concern compounded by rising gendered disinformation and harassment in digital cultural spaces.¹⁰

In emergency settings, gender inequalities in the culture sector deepen. **Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals face distinct and significant challenges, the consequences of which profoundly shape their livelihoods as well as their cultural rights**, including their fundamental right to create and participate in cultural life. Their ability to continue their cultural and creative work has an impact on the resilience and recovery of society overall. In such contexts, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are not only agents for social, political or cultural change but are also vital actors to preserve collective memories and help communities process trauma. They play a critical role in resisting, denouncing and offering alternative views that often make them targets for violent extremist and religious fundamentalist groups.¹¹ Silencing these powerful voices not only removes role models and leaders as well as their unique visions and narratives from the public sphere but also creates a chilling effect and fear that spreads across society and a new generation of girls.¹²

About this report

Voices of Courage tells a story of culture, resilience and the fundamental role of women in both. This report presents the results of a global survey launched by UNESCO in 2025, at a time of unprecedented levels of armed conflict, a fragmented world political order, a worsening climate crisis and democratic backsliding – trends that are intensifying attacks on human rights, including cultural rights, and gender equality.

The report also comes at a moment of important institutional renewal for UNESCO's crises and emergencies work, as the Organization strengthens its capacity to deliver more integrated and coherent responses across culture, education, sciences and communication, connecting immediate emergency response with longer term recovery and pathways to peace.

The global survey aimed to fill the gap in qualitative and quantitative data at the intersection of culture, gender equality and emergencies. It gathered perspectives from artists, cultural and heritage professionals, policymakers, emergency responders, civil society actors and public institutions worldwide, guided by the following questions:

1. How are women artists, cultural and heritage professionals affected by emergencies, and what are the consequences for their cultural and creative work?
2. What support mechanisms are in place, and what gaps remain?
3. To what extent do current mechanisms take women's specific needs into account, and what should be prioritized to support them more effectively?

The findings presented in this report provide evidence-based analysis of how emergencies impact the rights and livelihoods of women in the culture sector. Testimonies collected through the survey inform this analysis and are presented anonymously to protect the identities of the respondents. Case studies were produced with experts from each region to provide meaningful examples of strategies and actions that have proven to successfully respond to the needs of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency settings. The report concludes with actionable recommendations for policymakers, cultural institutions, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to advance culture-based, people-centered emergency management that commits to gender equality at its core and taps into the potential of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as agents of change.

This report is meant to be read – and also heard. The voices and lived experiences captured in these pages are more than anecdotes; they reflect the realities of millions living in and through emergencies who need urgent attention and action. It is the hoped impact of this report that the insights and proposals shared by women, alongside public institutions and civil society organizations worldwide, will help shape more inclusive emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts in the culture sector.

1.1 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON CULTURE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EMERGENCIES

The United Nations has adopted a number of normative and policy instruments at the intersection of gender equality, culture and emergencies that, taken together, provide important references for this report (Annex 8.1). While this framework is intended to guide governments in translating these commitments into national policies and measures, as well as operational practices, implementation remains uneven and often limited. This section highlights the main instruments available as a call to strengthen their uptake, interlinkage and effective implementation.

UNESCO: A robust international framework to protect culture in emergencies

UNESCO has been engaged in international efforts protecting culture in emergencies, applying a global approach: **inter-temporal engagement** before, during and after the emergency; **inter-sectoral intervention**, so that the protection of culture is closely integrated into humanitarian action, security strategies, peacebuilding processes, and disaster risk reduction frameworks; **comprehensive action** addressing both the normative and operational dimensions, drawing on UNESCO's expertise in culture, education, sciences and communication and information; and **community-centred support**, in which communities are placed at the heart of UNESCO's actions.

Building on its normative instruments, UNESCO engages in international advocacy, coordination, capacity reinforcement, preventive action, rapid response, and long-term rehabilitation and recovery. Its six Culture Conventions¹³ and related Recommendations¹⁴ provide international standards and rules, also applicable in emergency situations, for the protection and safeguarding of culture, and establish mechanisms for international cooperation. In addition, as a UNESCO Global Priority, gender equality is systematically mainstreamed in the implementation of these normative frameworks and related operational efforts. This means that policies, measures, and operational mechanisms are to actively promote the equal participation and leadership of women in culture, while also addressing structural inequalities that may have an impact at different stages of the emergency cycle.

BOX 1: UNESCO'S HERITAGE EMERGENCY FUND (HEF)

The HEF was established in 2015 to offer a lifeline for culture in times of emergencies. This multi-donor account enables UNESCO to support its Member States in preparing for and responding to emergency situations affecting culture resulting from conflicts as well as disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards. Since its creation, the HEF has equipped over 100 countries with the capacities and means to prevent, mitigate and respond to the impact of emergencies on the culture sector and has facilitated the training of over 2,100 women (48 per cent of the trainees) in emergency preparedness and response. Moving beyond gender parity, the HEF embeds the promotion of gender equality into the conceptualization of all its interventions to promote meaningful engagement with women and women's organizations, the assessment of gender-specific needs and the implementation of gender-responsive interventions that address women's specific challenges while tapping into their potential as agents for change.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Culture

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) marked a historic moment: the first formal recognition by the Security Council that peace cannot be achieved without the inclusion, leadership, and experiences of women. Today, its implementation is based on four key pillars: participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery.

The culture sector has an important role to play in implementing the WPS agenda as a pathway to peace, prosperity, sustainable and inclusive development. As the WPS agenda also recognizes the vital role of civil society organizations, cultural networks and communities, including those led by women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, they can be key actors to address inequalities, redefine gender norms and promote transformative change in their immediate environments. In addition, as newly adopted National Action Plans on WPS expand to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, artificial intelligence, climate change, and women's leadership, the culture sector can provide new perspectives and solutions to promoting gender equality to prevent harm, enhance protection, and build resilient communities.

Despite this potential, the lack of data – both in the cultural sector and for the WPS agenda – remains a significant challenge. As a first step, the transformative potential of culture for peace and resilience was reaffirmed by UNESCO's most recent World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025. In its Declaration, peace is not merely understood as the absence of violence, but as a dynamic, lived process rooted in cultural expression, justice, inclusive participation and resilience.¹⁵ Building on long-term efforts at the intersection of gender, culture and development,¹⁶ the Conference also committed to promote gender equality as a strategic and cross-cutting priority for cultural governance, including through emergency preparedness, response and recovery actions.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, its Gender Action Plan and Culture

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) is a landmark global agreement that fundamentally shifts the approach to disasters from reactive response to the proactive prevention and reduction of disaster risks, while strengthening accountability through a coherent, measurable framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action.

Recognizing the importance of gender equality for the culture sector – in particular cultural institutions and natural and cultural heritage – the Framework positions these as vital levers for effective disaster risk reduction. To further accelerate progress, the 2022 Gender Action Plan to Support Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai GAP) supports governments and stakeholders in reducing the negative impacts of gender discrimination and inequality before, during, and after disasters. The Framework and Sendai GAP together encourage inclusive, resilient approaches that empower women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as well as cultural communities to shape and lead disaster response and recovery actions.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) triple nexus

A further framework of direct relevance to this report is the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) triple nexus, which guides the United Nations response to crises and emergencies and shapes UNESCO’s approach. It recognises that humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding must be pursued simultaneously to reinforce one another. UNESCO operationalised this commitment by endorsing the Peace Promise at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. The initiative brought together humanitarian, development and peace actors around shared commitments to ensure conflict sensitivity and address the drivers of violent conflict – marking a shift from principle to practice.

The HDP nexus aligns closely with the emergency cycle that structures this report – preparedness (prevention and development), response (humanitarian action), and recovery (peacebuilding and development). This alignment is not only operational but also analytical. Across each phase, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals encounter distinct yet interconnected barriers, which are often exacerbated by a persistent tendency to marginalise culture. Too frequently, culture and women’s role within it are treated as a secondary concern: a “nice to have” in humanitarian response, a peripheral issue in development programming, and an afterthought in peacebuilding efforts. Addressing this structural blind spot is central to the purpose of this report. By situating culture and gender equality at the heart of the nexus, it seeks to demonstrate how more integrated, inclusive approaches can strengthen resilience, support recovery, and contribute to sustainable peace.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

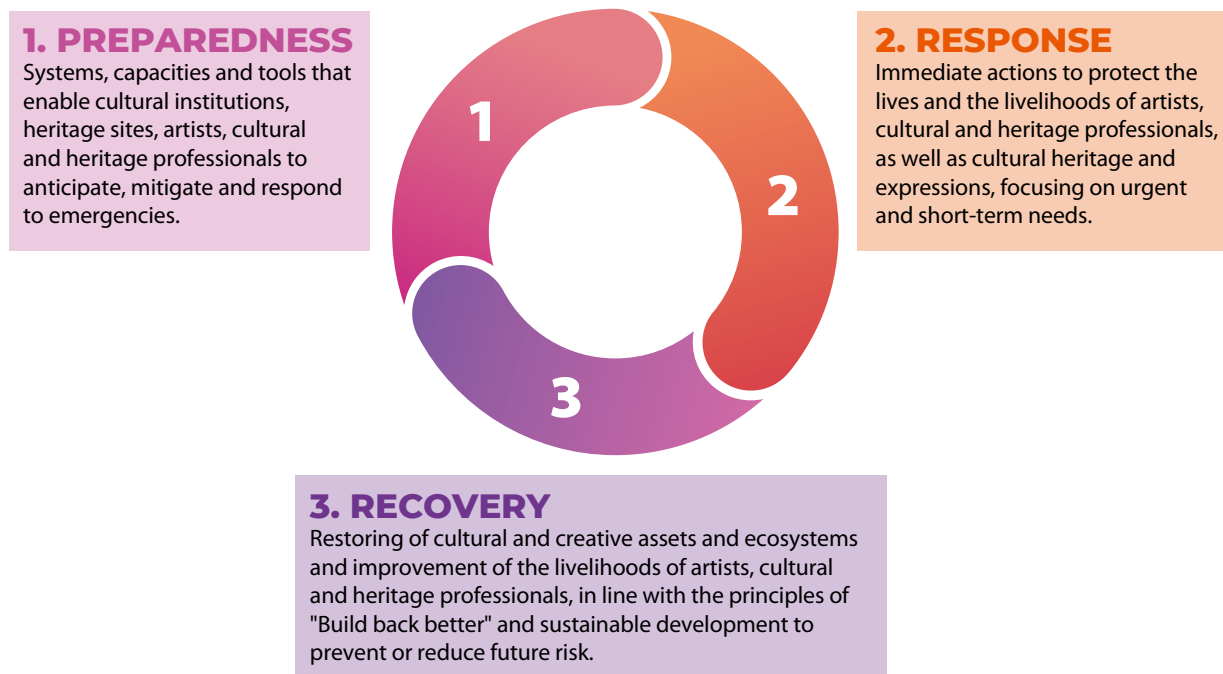
Desk Research

The desk research compiled information and data from UNESCO normative and statutory documents, publications and activity reports related to culture, gender equality and emergencies; frameworks and publications on gender equality, culture, and emergencies from UN agencies, intergovernmental and governmental organizations, and civil society organizations (CSOs); as well as academic research and global reports produced by CSOs.

While much of the literature addresses gender equality in the culture sector, culture and emergencies, or how emergencies interact with gender, few reports examined the intersection of all three dimensions. Gathering facts and statistical data on women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts was, therefore, particularly challenging, especially when aiming to cover different types of emergencies and different stages of the emergency cycle across the entire cultural sector.

Global Survey

With these significant gaps in mind, the global survey aimed at exploring how emergencies impact women working in the culture sector across all three phases of the emergency cycle (Figure 1), identifying their needs, existing support mechanisms and remaining challenges. Recommendations for the future were gathered through the survey to ensure women's meaningful inclusion and leadership in emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts. The online self-selected survey¹⁷ was disseminated to individual artists, cultural and heritage professionals as well as to public institutions and CSOs active in the fields of culture, emergencies and gender equality.

FIGURE 1. THE EMERGENCY CYCLE IN CULTURE

The survey¹⁸ was developed through consultations with CSOs working in the relevant areas.

From 24 June to 3 October 2025, 1,470 valid responses were received from more than 120 countries, of which 1,144 came from individuals, and 326 came from public institutions and CSOs.¹⁹ Individual respondents provided testimonies on their personal and professional experiences, whereas public institutions and CSOs reported on their programmes and experiences on the ground.

The survey was open to both women and men to allow for comparison and analyses of different gender-related trends. However, several factors influenced the number and type of responses received, including the likelihood of a higher response rate from women²⁰ and the possibility that some men may overlook or avoid responding to the survey because they may have believed it was not intended for them. Consequently, the findings primarily inform a **women-focused narrative**. When possible and relevant, comparisons between men and women have been extracted from the data collected.

Case studies

Six case studies were commissioned to highlight initiatives implemented by civil society (e.g. cultural spaces, collectives, etc.), local and international NGOs, UNESCO, and public institutions that support women in the culture sector during emergencies in the following countries: Afghanistan, Argentina, Haiti, Lebanon, Sudan, and Ukraine.

These initiatives were selected because they focus on women in the culture sector and either integrate a gender-responsive approach effectively or highlight impactful women-led work. Policymakers, national and international organizations and civil society may draw inspiration from these case studies, which are well-suited for scaling up and/or replication in different fields, contexts and emergency situations.

1.3 PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Profiles of individual respondents

A total of 1,144 individuals shared their experience through the global survey, three quarters of whom identified as women. Most respondents fall within the 25-54 age group – people in active employment – with a peak of 30 per cent between the ages of 35 and 44 (Figure 2). Among women respondents, 35 per cent self-identified as belonging to a minority or vulnerable group (Figure 3).²¹

FIGURE 2. AGE OF RESPONDENTS

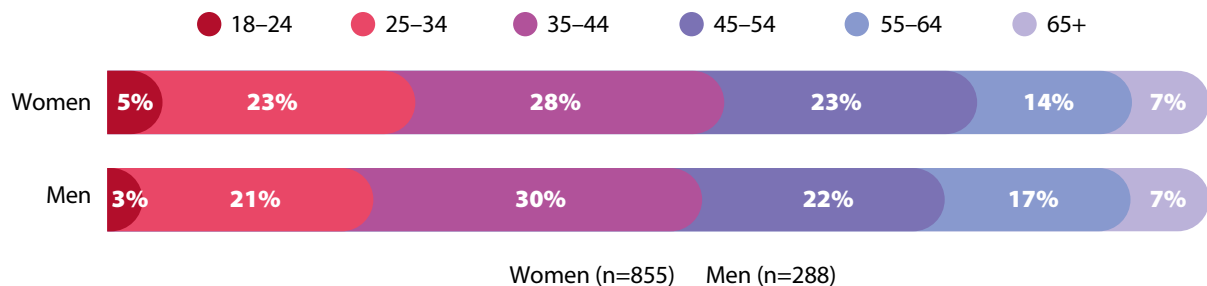
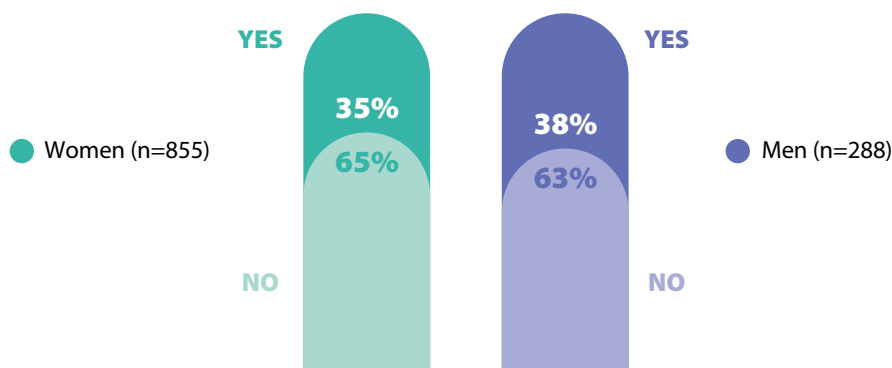


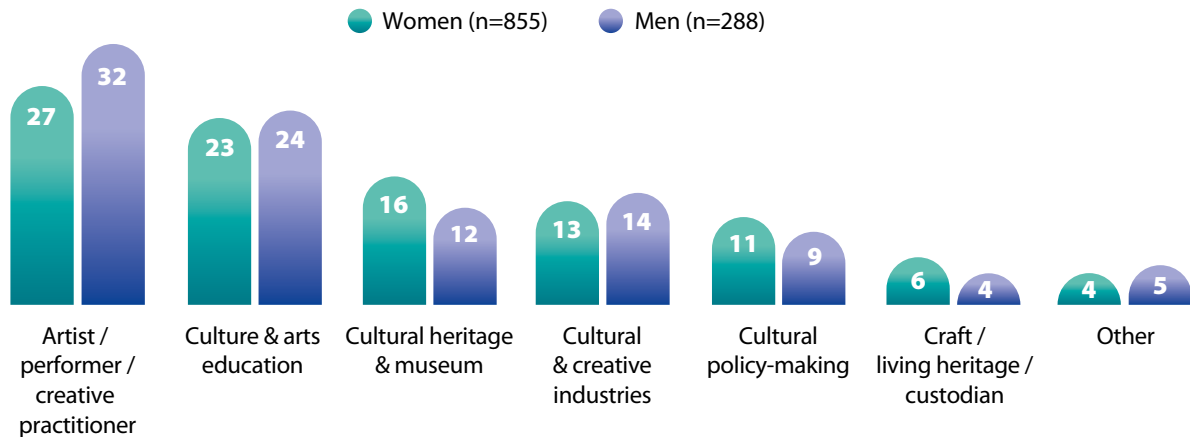
FIGURE 3. RESPONDENTS SELF-IDENTIFIED AS BELONGING TO A MINORITY OR VULNERABLE GROUP



In terms of occupation (Figure 4), 27 per cent of women respondents identified as artists, performers or creative practitioners, and a further 13 per cent reported other jobs in the cultural and creative industries such as sound technician, graphic designer, video editor, etc. This explains the report's focus on creative practitioners. In addition, 23 per cent identified as working in culture and arts education, while 16 per cent described themselves as heritage and museums professionals. The least represented occupations among women respondents were cultural policymakers (11 per cent) and living heritage and crafts practitioners (6 per cent).

As regards their professional status, most women surveyed reported working independently or as freelancers (40 per cent) or in the public sector (33 per cent). Far fewer identified as entrepreneurs and private sector employees (11 per cent). Notably, slightly more women than men (5 per cent versus 2 per cent) identified as volunteers or held temporary contracts in the informal sector.²² This suggests that at least 45 per cent of women respondents do not have the security that formal employment arrangements have (e.g. regular income, social protection and other benefits) and therefore they will have much larger needs for support from both public institutions and CSOs.

FIGURE 4. RESPONDENTS' FIELDS OF WORK (IN %)



The survey captured responses across **several emergency types** (Figure 5):

- ▶ armed conflicts;
- ▶ non armed conflicts (e.g. widespread civil unrest, riots, or large-scale demonstrations, etc.);
- ▶ disasters caused by a natural hazard (e.g. earthquakes, tsunamis, flash floods, etc.);
- ▶ health crises;²³
- ▶ other crises (e.g. economic collapse, political crisis, etc.).

Given their cumulative impact, respondents were asked to select the type of emergency that had the largest impact on their livelihoods. Nearly half of women surveyed (46 per cent) reported experiencing largest impact from a health crisis – primarily COVID-19 – which had a global impact.²⁴ Armed conflict was the second most frequently reported emergency context, affecting nearly 1 in 5 women respondents (18 per cent). This was followed by disasters (14 per cent) and other types of crises (14 per cent). Non-armed conflicts were reported by 8 per cent of women surveyed.

FIGURE 5. TYPE OF EMERGENCY THAT THE INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENTS MAINLY LIVED THROUGH IN THE PAST 10 YEARS (N=1,144, WOMEN AND MEN)



**Percentages may not total exactly 100 per cent due to rounding to the nearest whole number.*

The geographic location of reported emergencies shows a concentration in Latin America and the Caribbean (41 per cent), followed by Asia and the Pacific (22 per cent) and Western Europe and North America (13 per cent). Eastern Europe and Africa each represent 9 per cent, and Arab States account for 6 per cent. It is important to note that this reflects where respondents encountered the emergencies they reported, rather than their overall prevalence across regions. Health crises remain the most frequently reported type of emergency in all regions, except in Eastern Europe and the Arab States, where respondents predominantly reported on armed conflicts.²⁵

Profile of public institutions and civil society organizations

In total, 326 public institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) answered the global survey, with CSOs representing two-thirds of all respondents (66 per cent).

Public institutions are government ministries or agencies, publicly funded cultural institutions, and local governments. CSOs include local and international NGOs, professional organizations, networks working in culture, gender equality and/or emergency management. Both types of stakeholders were asked to answer the global survey from an institutional/organizational standpoint.

Taken together, their primary field of work is the culture sector as a whole (i.e. with no focus on a specific cultural sub-domain, 22 per cent), closely followed by the cultural and creative industries, including support to artists (21 per cent) (Figure 6). Disaggregated data, however, reveals distinct patterns between the types of public institutions and CSO respondents. CSOs were twice as likely than public institutions to work in the cultural and creative industries, while public institutions were twice as likely to address the culture sector as a whole. There are also twice as many public institutions working in cultural heritage and museums and nearly all respondents active in the human rights field are CSOs.

FIGURE 6. PRIMARY FIELD OF WORK OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CSOS (N=326)



Regarding the scope of their work, the vast majority of surveyed public institutions and CSOs (72 per cent) operate at the local or national level. Together, 19 per cent operate globally and only 9 per cent at the regional level. Geographically, this group of respondents are primarily active in Latin America and the Caribbean (28 per cent) and Africa (21 per cent), followed by Western Europe and North America (17 per cent) and Asia-Pacific (16 per cent). Eastern Europe and Arab States accounted for 9 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. Regional disparities among respondents constitute a limitation of the study given the significant impact of emergencies such as armed conflict in the lower represented regions. This report attempts to address these imbalances through the selection of case studies and testimonies.

**ART AS RESISTANCE AND
RESILIENCE: AFGHAN WOMEN
ARTISTS CREATING UNDERCOVER**

CASE STUDY

ART AS RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE: AFGHAN WOMEN ARTISTS CREATING UNDERCOVER

The power shift in Afghanistan (August 2021) triggered a severe human rights and cultural crisis, with women and girls faced with severe repression.²⁶ Women were excluded from public and cultural life, and 2.2 million girls were banned from attending school beyond primary school level. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, the country's long traditions of music, poetry and visual arts were also abruptly banned.²⁷

The Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) reported that Kabul University now has only two degrees and 250 students, compared to 1,000 students and 8 art degrees prior to 2021.²⁸ Arts departments disappeared altogether. As a result of the arts ban, 55 of the university's 60 staff resigned in protest.

Women's cultural lives stopped overnight. Music, sculpting and portrait drawing were banned. Studios and cultural centres were shut down. Women lost their jobs, but also their safe spaces for learning, creating and sharing their work. Aside from the harassment and risk of arrest, many had to destroy their work or go into hiding, leading to isolation, psychological distress and economic burden.²⁹

A number of organizations continue to support Afghan artists. For example, Supporting Resilient Afghan Kaf (SRAKaf)³⁰ enabled more than 200 girls to continue their arts education, and the AFI provides legal help and resettlement assistance to at-risk artists and their families. Through its Afghan Artists Protection Project (AAPP), AFI has offered Afghan artists housing, legal aid and fellowships in the United States and Europe. Although this initiative mainly benefits artists able to leave the country, and therefore fewer women than men, it contributes to broader efforts to safeguard Afghan art and artists.

ArtLords' Art Therapy and Advocacy Programme

With artistic freedom curtailed, the ArtLords collective began a covert programme to support women artists within Afghanistan and in exile. Funded by the Malala Fund, this initiative combines art therapy, skills-building workshops and international advocacy. It aims to provide safe emotional outlets for women, preserve Afghan cultural expressions, and ensure women's creative voices are heard globally through digital and physical exhibitions. Women lead, shape artistic direction, and help implement the programme.

At the start of the crisis, ArtLords discreetly created safe spaces for women artists. When this became too risky, they sent art materials to homes and mentored online. This shift to digital allowed the women to continue painting, while limiting their exposure, and to share their work despite the extreme restrictions and isolation.

At the peak of the crisis, the initiative gave hope to around 1,000 women, while the art therapy sessions helped them cope with the isolation and psychological distress. Training in painting, photography and animation provided them with new forms of expression. Online exhibitions and fellowships showcased their work internationally. Some of the women were able to sell their artworks, but the main goal was to increase visibility, recognition, and gain a sense of dignity.

“ When I paint, I can finally put my worries on the canvas. It makes me feel calm, like a part of me is still alive despite everything. ”

An ArtLords participant

Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and livelihoods in Bamiyan

In 2024-2025, through its Heritage Emergency Fund, UNESCO, together with the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, trained 67 women artisans in traditional carpet weaving to improve their design skills and establish a sustainable income for them and their households. Thanks to the financial support of the Government of Italy, an additional 290 women and girls were trained in 2025 to produce high-quality handwoven kilims and felts, miniatures and calligraphy artworks, with their creations exhibited at the Bamiyan Cultural Centre.

The Bamiyan case shows that combining skills development with business mentoring, product design, innovation and e-commerce access enhances the impact of such initiatives. By empowering women as business leaders, it allows them to take ownership of production and marketing, while safeguarding their traditional skills and living heritage during crises.

“ The materials and guidance gave us courage. We want more encouragement and chances to exhibit our work so we can also earn some income. ”

A woman artist, Herat



CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMERGENCIES FACED BY WOMEN IN CULTURE

Graciela Sacco, *Esperando a los Bárbaros / Entre Nosotros* (Waiting for the Barbarians / Among Us) (series), Argentina, 1995-2024. Eyes emerge from weathered wooden slats, watching and being watched. Through anonymous figures inhabiting public space, Graciela Sacco invites viewers to consider the human consequences of crisis and the importance of empathy and coexistence. © Graciela Sacco

The challenges and consequences that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals face during emergencies are shaped by **pre-existing socio-economic inequalities** and by their degree of exclusion from decision-making spaces across the culture sector,³¹ factors that emergencies further intensify. Cultural and creative work is often informal or precarious, largely freelance and project-based, and offers limited access to social protection and benefits. While these conditions affect all cultural workers, women are disproportionately impacted. This is compounded by the burden of unpaid care work that they largely bear, as well as alarming levels of gender-based violence. Together, these factors contribute to unsafe working environments and reinforce a cycle of precarity and vulnerability.³² In addition, women's contributions to emergency preparedness, response and recovery go largely underreported, partly due to difficulties in documenting them in real time but also because existing systems do not prioritize capturing them.

Drawing on the global survey data and qualitative testimonies, this chapter opens with an overview of the key challenges and consequences of emergencies as reported by women artists, cultural and heritage professionals (Section 2.1). The subsequent sections (2.2, 2.3 and 2.4) build on this overview, examining them more closely across interrelated and mutually reinforcing economic, safety and psychological and mobility dimensions.

When considered together, these dynamics reveal gender-specific vulnerabilities women face during emergencies and underscore the need for tailored, gender-responsive policy and operational approaches that take into account the interaction between specific emergency contexts and pre-existing structural inequalities. Understanding these interconnections is essential for designing solutions that not only provide women with short-term protection but also support their long-term economic and professional stability as well as their inclusion as leaders in decision-making processes.

2.1 IDENTIFYING KEY CONCERNS: WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

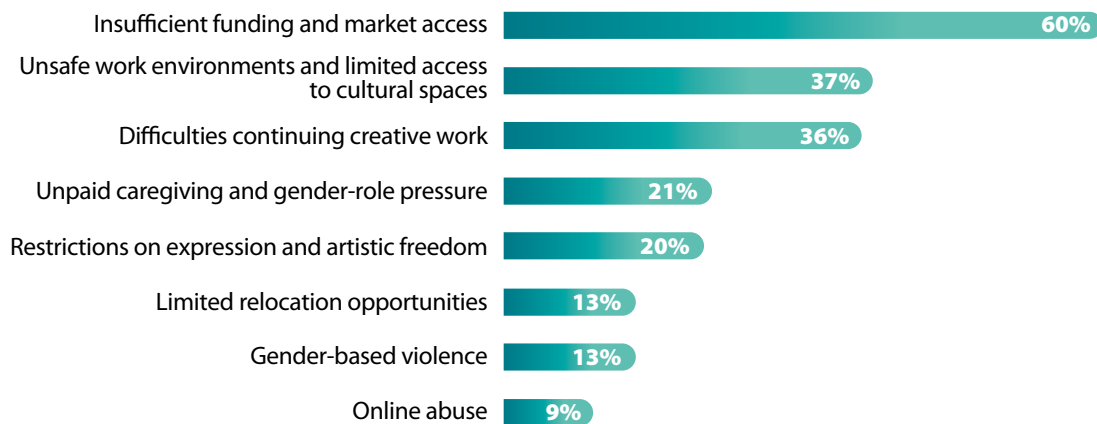
When asked about the biggest challenges experienced during emergencies, 60 per cent of women respondents cited inadequate or inexistent funding and difficulties to access markets, particularly for women working in CSOs or as freelancers/independent workers or volunteers. This was followed by a lack of safe working environments and limited access to cultural spaces (37 per cent) and difficulties to continue their cultural or creative work (36 per cent). Notably, the top three responses are ranked the same whether the health crisis is included in the dataset or not, implying a structural rather than an emergency-specific vulnerability. However, the lack of a safe working environment increased by 6 percentage points when the health crisis was not included and was twice as high during armed conflicts than during any other type of emergency.

Other important challenges cited include increased unpaid care work and pressures to conform to gendered roles (21 per cent) that were more than 2.5 times higher for women respondents than for men (8 per cent), illustrating how emergencies reinforce traditional gendered roles, disproportionately affecting women.

This was followed by restrictions on public expression including artistic freedom (20 per cent), which rank significantly higher in the context of non-armed conflicts (e.g. civil unrest, riots), and limited relocation mechanisms (13 per cent), a challenge particularly noted during armed conflicts.

Additionally, 13 per cent of women identified gender-based violence as one of their biggest challenges (Figure 7), with women belonging to a minority or vulnerable group reporting greater exposure to gender-based violence than those not belonging to these groups.

FIGURE 7. BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS DURING EMERGENCIES (N=842)

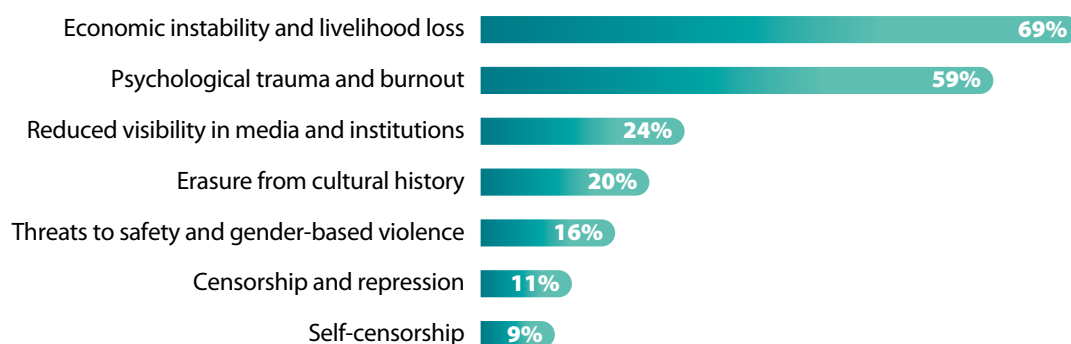


Responses from public institutions and CSOs corroborate women's accounts of the main challenges they face. The survey found that 67 per cent of CSOs and 56 per cent of public institutions perceived that women receive insufficient funding and experience difficulties in accessing markets, among their main challenge. The second challenge perceived was their difficulty to continue cultural and creative work during emergencies (CSOs, 41 per cent; public institutions, 47 per cent). This was followed by increased unpaid caregiving responsibilities (reported by 37 per cent of public institutions) and the lack of a safe working environment (reported by 38 per cent of CSOs).

These challenges have direct consequences on the livelihoods, well-being, and careers of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, namely (Figure 8):

- ▶ **Economic instability** is the most frequently reported consequence for 69 per cent of women respondents. This is closely linked to insufficient funding and limited access to markets, resulting in financial insecurity and unstable livelihoods;
- ▶ **Psychological trauma and burnout**, reported by 59 per cent of women respondents, emerged as the second most significant consequence. Closely linked with unsafe working environments and difficulties continuing cultural and creative work, it contributes to emotional distress and a decline in overall wellbeing;
- ▶ **Reduced visibility in media and representation**, reported by 24 per cent of women respondents, is another significant consequence, resulting in fewer work opportunities and lower levels of professional recognition;
- ▶ **Erasure from cultural history and narratives**, reported by 20 per cent of women respondents, further contributes to the marginalization and lack of recognition of women artists, cultural and heritage

FIGURE 8. MOST SIGNIFICANT CONSEQUENCES OF CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS (N=841)



Across emergency types, findings show that impacts are particularly acute in armed conflicts, with 80 per cent of women reporting economic instability and 76 per cent reporting psychological trauma. Gender-based violence also emerges as a key consequence of emergencies, with the highest levels reported in both armed and non-armed conflict (e.g. civil unrest, riots). Censorship and repression are at least twice as prevalent during non-armed conflict (e.g. civil unrest, riots) as during any other type of emergency.

Responses from public institutions and CSOs mirror those of women respondents, with both groups identifying economic instability and psychological trauma as the two core consequences of emergencies for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. This shared perception reinforces the conclusion that these impacts are widespread.

These findings are further explored in the following sections, which examine how key challenges and consequences manifest across economic (section 2.2), safety (section 2.3) and mobility/displacement (section 2.4) dimensions.

2.2

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL STRAIN: THE COST OF EMERGENCIES

Economic challenges represent the most immediate and acute constraints facing women artists, cultural and heritage professionals during emergencies (Figure 8). They have far-reaching consequences for their livelihoods and their ability to continue their cultural or creative work. Across all types of emergencies, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals consistently report the loss of financial security as their primary concern. This widespread instability stems from the already precarious nature of work in the culture sector, as mentioned earlier, which is more prevalent and has a disproportionate impact on women. Consequently, women are the first to be increasingly destabilized as emergencies unfold.

Many women respondents noted that **cultural funding is often the first to be cut in emergencies**. The result is swift: performances, exhibitions, tours and festivals are cancelled, and public budgets are frozen or diverted to other needs, particularly military or humanitarian. These shifts in priorities underscore the limited recognition of culture's contribution to resilience in emergencies, that hit women immediately through lost income and the collapse of funding streams that sustain their cultural and creative work.

“As a freelancer, it was already hard to find new jobs. So, during the war all funding to culture was redirected to humanitarian aid without taking into consideration people who were not displaced but lost their contracts and were not able to sustain themselves.”

A woman artist, Lebanon

The employment impact of emergencies is also uneven across the culture sector. Women in public-sector roles are more likely to retain stable jobs, while independent workers, freelancers, volunteers, and those working in the informal sector are particularly vulnerable in the event of an emergency.

After losing cultural and creative work, women often shift to jobs outside the sector or into the informal economy, where opportunities are also gendered: higher-paid, so-called 'skilled' jobs in construction and manufacturing tend to go to men, while women are channelled into lower-paid work that often reproduces stereotypes, such as trading goods and producing handicrafts.³³

“We do itinerant theatre to promote gender equality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the performances and activities we had already scheduled were cancelled. We were left without financial resources. Some members of the team had to look for other job options unrelated to culture, while others took on greater responsibilities for caring for their families.”

Ellas en Escena, Mexico

These inequalities are compounded by women's **disproportionate unpaid caregiving responsibilities**. As households reorganize in emergencies – notably during armed conflict when men are called to the frontline – women typically assume even more unpaid care work just as their income declines. The result is deeper income loss, reduced access to social protection, and long-term financial insecurity.

Emergencies also damage or severely **disrupt the physical and digital infrastructure** that cultural and creative work relies on. Studios, cultural centres, museums, community spaces and heritage sites may be destroyed, damaged or become inaccessible. Women respondents reported losing their creative works, materials and equipment and struggling to replace them amid broken transport routes, logistics disruptions and border restrictions.

“As an artist, my sculptures and artworks were destroyed, and I lost the possibility to practice freely. My nationality and gender together have made me especially vulnerable during the ongoing crisis.”

A woman artist, Afghanistan

Cultural and creative work is further strained by blackouts and unreliable connectivity. Looting, the destruction of sites and archives, and interruptions in intangible cultural heritage practices ultimately disrupt access to cultural life and the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage while silencing creative voices, just when communities need them most for resilience, healing and social cohesion. These disruptions deepen the sense of loss and erode the environments in which women artists, cultural and heritage professionals work, create or perform.

“Women are often the primary custodians of intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional weaving, storytelling, singing, and knowledge of medicinal plants. [...] Climate change-related events destroy the natural materials essential for cultural practices, such as specific plants for weaving or dyes. The loss of these resources can make certain art forms impossible to continue.”

A cultural professional from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs, Kiribati

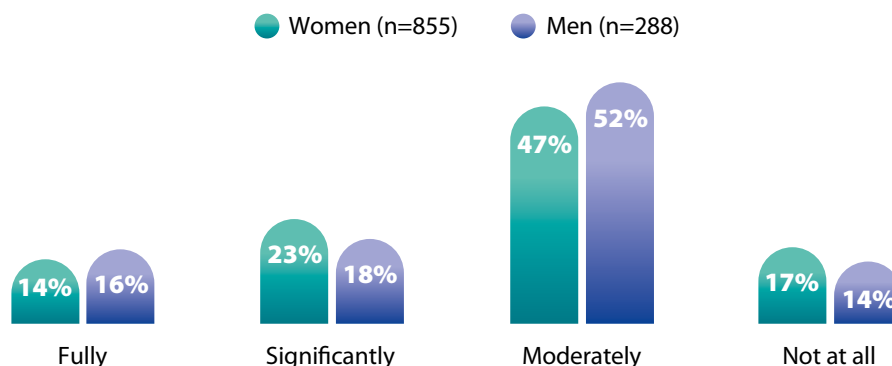
When asked what prevented them from continuing their work, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals identified a combination of overlapping factors. These include project cancellations (30 per cent), the need to prioritize other revenue-generating activities (27 per cent), and the loss of jobs, salaries or funding (23 per cent). Limited access to security and safe spaces (20 per cent), along with the loss of access to adequate equipment (20 per cent), further hampered their ability to work. These **multiple pressures can lead to creative paralysis** – a condition brought about by the disruption of resources, spaces and opportunities, preventing artists, cultural and heritage professionals from practising, experimenting or sustaining their cultural and creative work.

“Due to worsening financial conditions, I was unable to proceed [with the publication of my poetry collection] and stopped. I found no one to help me continue, and as a woman I was afraid to engage in cultural activities in a politically and economically unstable country. However, I continue to engage in closed activities on social media, following and publishing poetry on a limited basis, fearing societal reactions to my activity.”

A woman artist, Syria

When asked to describe the extent to which they were able to continue their cultural and creative work during emergencies, only 37 per cent of women indicated that they were able to continue it either fully or significantly (Figure 9), hence highlighting that the vast majority of women’s activities in the culture sector were negatively affected to some extent by emergencies. The remaining women respondents indicated that they were either moderately able to continue working (47 per cent), or not at all (17 per cent). These outcomes were even more pronounced for women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups, suggesting a greater risk of professional disruption, income loss and reduced visibility that may well persist beyond the emergency itself.

FIGURE 9. EXTENT TO WHICH ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS WERE ABLE TO CONTINUE THEIR CREATIVE WORK DURING AN EMERGENCY (N=1,143)



As highlighted by the former Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennouna, **women’s participation in cultural life, especially in times of emergencies, can be further undermined when they simultaneously face censorship and discrimination** that severely impacts their cultural rights and their freedom of expression, often solely for being women.³⁴

“I’ve witnessed how women colleagues suffer even more. Some have been harassed while seeking support, discriminated when trying to perform, and in some heartbreaking cases, forced to abandon their careers due to exploitation or abuse.”

A man artist, Cameroon

Testimonies from women respondents to the global survey underscore how **these challenges are intertwined**. In Afghanistan, for instance, the prohibition on women's artistic and cultural activities – together with threats against creators and cultural professionals and the need to hide or flee – has led to the complete suspension of work and, in turn, to precarious economic conditions. These gender-specific constraints are compounded in already complex security environments affecting women's cultural and creative work in emergencies: respondents in Ukraine and the State of Palestine, for example, cited continuous shelling, curfews, blackouts, and the destruction or looting of cultural sites as factors disrupting access to workspaces, materials and distribution channels. As emergencies intensify, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals may also be compelled to abandon their cultural and creative work to engage in humanitarian and resilience efforts. In Sudan, for example, the war has severely disrupted the culture sector, forcing many practitioners to leave their work due to displacement, financial hardship and insecurity. As a result, cultural continuity has been significantly weakened, with living heritage and artistic activities interrupted or silenced.

“ I’m particularly thinking of the female artists I know who have completely halted their art practices and have dedicated their time to fundraise, be activists, rebuild the province’s infrastructure, perhaps also looking for ways to leave the country despite being torn that they will leave their family behind. [...] Obviously at this point they were just trying to make sure they’d stay alive and their family too. ”

A woman artist, Syria

Faced with disruptions caused by emergencies, **some women artists, cultural and heritage professionals described adapting to emergency-related challenges by transitioning to digital and remote modes of work**. This included activities such as producing podcasts, hosting webinars, and using online platforms for teaching and collaboration, effectively transforming the way they produce their cultural and creative work. Persistent inequalities in access to technology, digital skills and remuneration models, however, indicate that digital transition is far from a one-size-fits-all solution. Moreover, emergency situations are often characterized by a rise in digital threats,³⁵ by which women are already disproportionately targeted, with consequences that can escalate into physical violence and/or their withdrawal from online and public spaces altogether. Enhanced digital surveillance and “a rise in legal prosecution and criminalisation of online expression”³⁶ were also reported.

2.3

CULTURE UNDER PRESSURE: THREATS TO PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Emergencies expose women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to a combination of interconnected and heightened safety risks and significant psychological strains that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), burnout, exhaustion, and grief.

According to the survey findings, these are particularly acute among women, with **a higher proportion of women (59 per cent) than men (39 per cent) having experienced psychological distress**, which may suggest that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are more exposed to stress factors during emergencies. While the higher levels of psychological distress reported by women cannot be attributed to a single cause, the difference can perhaps be explained by a combination of factors. Embedded gendered bias and norms around emotional expression, for example, may play a role, with women more generally inclined to articulate or acknowledge psychological distress compared to men, who may experience even greater stigma around mental health. However, this factor should not detract from the broader set of structural factors that shape women's experiences, notably the higher risk of job loss and economic insecurity, caretaking burdens based on traditional gender roles, and gender-based violence as discussed in previous sections.

“ I would like to stress the importance of establishing specialized programs to support female artists and women working in culture and heritage on both the psychological and social levels, especially in emergency contexts and their aftermath. The psychological impact greatly affects women's ability to create and continue cultural work, so targeted psychological support and continuous follow-up are essential. ”

A woman cultural professional, State of Palestine (Gaza)

These overall trends become more pronounced when data are disaggregated by emergency types. Rates of psychological stress for women respondents exceeded 50 per cent across all types of emergencies, indicating that it is widespread. However, **women affected by armed conflict were far more likely to experience psychological trauma and burnout, with 76 per cent identifying it as a significant consequence** of the conditions brought about by the emergency (compared to 59 per cent for all types of emergencies combined). This exceptionally high rate reflects the cumulative burden of women's direct exposure to violence and heightened insecurity on their mental health. Respondents exposed to armed conflict reported severe anxiety, depression, exhaustion and trauma, often with somatic symptoms. Many were also unable to sustain creative focus. Women respondents affected by disasters caused by natural hazards reported trauma and burnout at a somewhat lower but still substantial level (51 per cent), often connected to the sudden loss and destruction of homes and workplaces, and the pressure to rebuild without adequate support.

“Daily shelling affects mood and heightens anxiety. It is impossible to concentrate on art, because all the time one fears for one’s life. These are impossible conditions for a healthy state of mind and creativity.”

A woman artist, Ukraine

Threats to personal safety and heightened exposure to gender-based violence also emerge as critical concerns, with 16 per cent of women respondents identifying these as major consequences of the challenges they face during emergencies (Figure 8). These patterns **are even more pronounced for women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups** who reported threats to physical safety and gender-based violence at a higher rate (20 per cent, compared to 14 per cent among non-minority respondents), alongside increased challenges related to the lack of safe working environments and security issues (43 per cent, compared to 34 per cent among non-minority women respondents). These findings confirm the well-documented challenges faced by women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups which are amplified in emergencies contexts.

In addition, **women’s unpaid care for children, elders, relatives or community, intensifies emotional stress and limits the time, space and resources available for their work.** Women tend to bear the lion’s share of family burdens, despite the growing recognition within the new care economy that caregiving responsibilities should be equally shared. Across regions, they reported increased unpaid domestic and community care work during emergencies, further reducing their time for cultural and creative work and contributing to what they described as ‘time poverty’. In their testimonies, women also more often referred to the need to balance unpaid care with paid work. The convergence of safety concerns, caregiving pressures and limited recovery opportunities provides a compelling explanation for the higher levels of psychological trauma and burnout reported by women in times of emergency.

“Being able to focus on a work is already difficult, but under these circumstances is getting harder. I find myself struggling with basic, most superficial problems of everyday life instead of reaching a depth in my creativity and/or work. I am being detached from my inner and true self. This influences everything including my psychology, individuation, creativity and art, work and social life, and all.”

A woman cultural professional, affected by earthquake, Türkiye

Finally, women reported **threats to freedom of expression** in the form of censorship and repression (11 per cent), which compound psychological stress and economic insecurity (Figure 8). Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals living through emergencies under authoritarian regimes, for example, described bans, threats, surveillance and routine intimidation. In such contexts, artistic and cultural practice itself becomes a source of risk. To reduce risk to themselves and their families, many women self-censor, reduce their public presence, or stop producing altogether, leading to further professional isolation. Psychological trauma therefore stems not only from the disruptions caused by the emergency itself, but also from repression and lack of personal security. These pressures are particularly acute for women-headed households, especially those with dependents, further undermining their ability to recover and regain stability.

“ I am a female rapper who was arrested because of my music and artistic activities, which were considered unacceptable for women in my country. Due to the threats, censorship, and legal prosecution I faced, I was forced to leave Iran and have been living in exile in a European country. My relocation was not a choice, but a necessity to protect my safety and continue my artistic work freely. ”

A woman artist, Iran

2.4 STAYING OR LEAVING: CHALLENGES SURROUNDING MOBILITY AND DISPLACEMENT

In the culture sector, it is important to distinguish mobility and displacement, as they both come with their own distinct yet interconnected challenges.³⁷ Mobility refers to the temporary and voluntary movement of artists, cultural and heritage professionals to other countries for work, residencies or training, or to perform in concerts or participate in other cultural or artistic endeavours. In this context, mobility is a key driver of professional development, career advancement, recognition, visibility and financial stability that is specific to the culture sector.

By contrast, displacement in emergency contexts is largely forced, compelling artists, cultural and heritage professionals to relocate under circumstances beyond their control, as they urgently seek safety. In practice, however, displacement and mobility challenges frequently overlap, both shaped by common structural issues – such as access to visas, funding, and restrictive legal, policy and administrative frameworks.³⁸ Mobility and displacement are therefore not just about physical movement, they are also framed by policy, resources and rights.

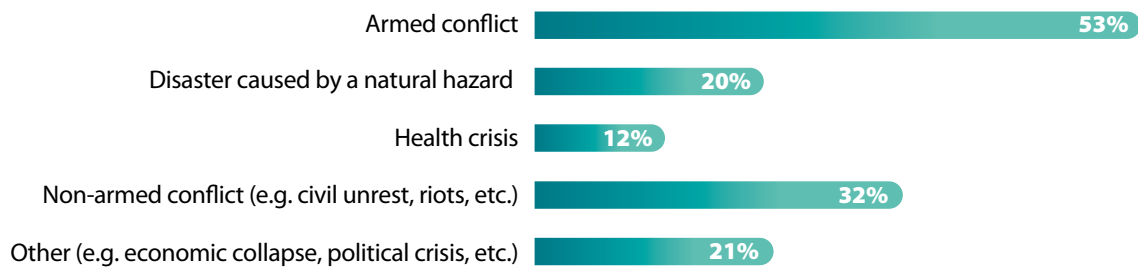
Overall, the survey revealed that **more than one in three women (35 per cent) were forced to leave their homes as a result of an emergency**. Women’s testimonies from the survey offer valuable insight into the main drivers of forced displacement – either within or outside their country. Unsurprisingly, armed conflict, political persecution, targeted repression and gender-based persecution were cited as key factors.

“As an Afghan woman singer, after the Taliban’s return to power, all concerts and public performances were cancelled, and my artistic work was censored and banned. I also lost access to a safe space to practice or perform, which made it impossible for me to continue my professional cultural work. In [a neighbouring host country], my situation remains insecure, and I cannot continue my artistic career freely.”

A woman musician, Afghanistan

Notably, **in the context of armed conflicts, 53 per cent of women respondents reported having to leave their home** – the highest rate across all emergency types – and among those who stayed, 30 per cent indicated that they would have left but were unable to do so (Figure 10). Disasters caused by natural hazards were also responsible for displacements, with 20 per cent of women respondents reporting that damage to housing or inhabitable living conditions had forced them to leave their homes.

FIGURE 10. WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES DUE TO EMERGENCY (N=855)



The survey also revealed a key gender difference regarding displacement patterns. Indeed, **the majority of displaced women were relocated abroad** – as migrants (26 per cent) and as refugees or exiles (30 per cent) – while 40 per cent were internally displaced.³⁹ In comparison, the majority of men were internally displaced (54 per cent). This can be explained by the possible application of martial law, including conscription in some emergencies, with men prohibited from leaving the country.⁴⁰

With regard to minorities, **women belonging to a minority or vulnerable group were twice as likely (35 per cent) to be displaced** compared with non-minority women respondents (17 per cent). This disparity should not be interpreted as indicating fewer structural or gender-specific constraints; rather, it reflects greater insecurity, persecution and fewer options to remain safe at home. Once again, it underscores the disadvantages faced by certain groups and how, in this context, displacement is more a survival response than a supportive or protective pathway.

Artists, cultural and heritage professionals face a paradox: although relocation opportunities for at-risk artists have expanded, reflecting growing recognition of the need for specific, urgent and structured assistance, their ability to access these opportunities is increasingly constrained. Indeed, most host institutions are concentrated in Europe, and evidence shows that entry requirements are becoming more restrictive.⁴¹ Notably, only 38 per cent of countries in Western Europe and North America report having specific visa policies or cross-border measures to support the inward mobility of foreign artists,⁴² the lowest rate globally. This trend exposes a systemic weakness in protection systems and has direct consequences on the lives and livelihoods of artists, cultural and heritage professionals.

While the survey data identifies the main drivers of displacement, women's testimonies and complementary desk research help illuminate other **key barriers artists, cultural and heritage professionals face throughout their displacement journey**. Highlighting these obstacles is essential, as it clarifies where the main bottlenecks lie and points to where targeted solutions are most needed. For example, even after relocating to safety, artists, cultural and heritage professionals face the linguistic and cultural challenges of integration, alongside the need to rebuild professional networks, while coping with the loss of community support systems left behind. While the survey testimonies confirm the need of artists, cultural and heritage professionals to first prioritize the basics of life, such as secured housing, income and legal status, before being able to resume cultural or creative work, the professional and integration challenges that persist underscore why protection efforts must extend beyond immediate safety to include long-term pathways for their professional development and overall physical and mental well-being.⁴³ These pathways into local cultural ecosystems of host countries, including opportunities for collaboration, visibility and income generation, are key to enabling artists, cultural and heritage professionals to continue developing their work despite the challenges of displacement, thus preventing their longer term cultural and social isolation.

“One of the biggest challenges during emergencies has been being far from my home country, culture, and mother tongue, which makes it harder to express myself authentically in my art. Financial instability has also been a constant difficulty, as the sudden displacement disrupted my career and income. In addition, as a migrant artist in a new country, I have had to work hard to prove myself, build a new audience, and earn recognition in a cultural and professional environment that is completely different from my own.”

A woman artist, Iran

Beyond these structural constraints, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals also confront **additional gender-specific barriers**. To apply for visas, emergency relocation grants, programmes and related schemes, women first need access to reliable information about these opportunities – most of which is available online. The digital gender divide limits access to online resources and, in turn, reduces their ability to benefit from them.⁴⁴ In addition, there may be risks and/or restrictions for women travelling unaccompanied that is prohibited in some contexts. In Afghanistan, for example, PEN International noted that women-headed households, which were particularly marginalized, “faced additional threats to their safety, in which their residency status made them more vulnerable to the promises of traffickers.”⁴⁵ Finally, women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities often mean they must relocate with dependant family members. This not only increases travel costs significantly but also requires securing accommodation suitable for families that may not always be available. In such cases, many women choose to remain in their countries despite risks to their safety. These barriers highlight the urgent need for relocation schemes to better address women artists, cultural and heritage professionals' lived realities. As relocation mechanisms remain largely provided by civil society organizations – operating in a context of steadily declining funding – greater support from governments is urgently required.

“ The destruction of my home, studio, and works, combined with the uncertainty of living in exile without legal residency, has caused ongoing anxiety, stress, and burnout. The loss of income and resources has created severe economic instability, forcing me to support my displaced family and my father in Gaza who suffers from chronic illnesses. Additionally, the inability to travel freely, participate in international opportunities, and access institutional platforms has greatly reduced my visibility as an artist and cultural contributor. ”

A woman artist from the State of Palestine (Gaza) displaced in a neighboring country

For women artists, cultural and heritage professionals who remained at home, the decision to stay may also be the result of structural and gender-specific constraints. According to the survey, staying close to family members emerged as a primary reason among women (56 per cent) to remain at home regardless of the particular emergency they faced. While family ties were also the key driver for men, **women respondents placed stronger emphasis on caregiving responsibilities, frequently citing them as a central barrier to leaving.** Family-related reasons were followed by economic constraints, such as dependence on local jobs, public sector positions or informal activities for their income. Women respondents cited **the lack of income, savings or stable employment as major obstacles to relocation.** A large number also reported being the primary income earner in their household, making relocation financially challenging. In some cases, the migration costs, visa requirements and absence of funding or scholarships rendered relocation impossible, compounded by border closures, lockdowns and mobility restrictions that directly prevented travel. Finally, gender-specific challenges, such as limited financial autonomy, discrimination and safety concerns, further constrained women's ability to relocate.

“ I cannot travel outside the Gaza Strip because of the ongoing closure of the only crossing to the outside. During the war, the costs of coordinating travel through the crossing became extremely high, beyond my financial capacity, making participation in any training or professional opportunities outside the Strip, or even escaping the war, almost impossible. ”

A woman cultural professional, State of Palestine (Gaza)

The dynamics of displacement are complex, yet **the possibility of safe return for those who left** remains a key concern. According to the survey, two-thirds of women respondents expressed their desire to return home: they either planned to return home or had already done so.

“ I came back to my home, Ukraine, after the invasion. I come back after living so many years in Europe because I felt I can help my people and community. I cannot stay aside. I take my responsibility and I do everything needed. ”

A woman artist, Ukraine

However, return is not always possible. Temporary relocation – especially in the case of short-term placements – might in fact terminate before conditions in their home country have improved. For many, relocation provides initial safety during emergencies, but it also brings prolonged career uncertainty, separation from established cultural communities, and no guarantee of safe or timely return. Beyond longer-term career challenges for artists, cultural and heritage professionals, relocation can also strain the cultural and creative community left behind, contributing to the broader ‘brain drain’ affecting Global South countries⁴⁶ and unintentionally weakening cultural resilience in emergency-affected regions. When feasible and relevant to women’s needs and priorities, relocation within one’s own country or region can be preferable. It allows for “easier adaptation to a new setting, access to audiences and peer networks, and greater cost-effectiveness”.⁴⁷

“ I am saving money to be able to come back home to promote the arts. [...] I also partnered with small schools to organize art education initiatives [...] and I have just finished a multilingual children book [...] that values indigenous Quechua knowledge. ”

A migrant Quechua woman artist from Peru

**STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE
AND PROFESSIONALIZATION FOR
HAITIAN WOMEN IN CULTURE
AMID CRISIS**

CASE STUDY

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AND PROFESSIONALIZATION FOR HAITIAN WOMEN IN CULTURE AMID CRISIS

Since 2018, Haiti has been marked by severe insecurity, violence and disasters caused by natural hazards (earthquakes and hurricanes) to which the country is particularly prone. The United Nations Security Council Resolution S/RES/2692 condemned the “increasing violence, criminal activities, human rights abuse and violations which undermine the peace, stability, and security of Haiti and the region.”⁴⁸ Human rights violations include kidnappings, sexual and gender-based violence, and human trafficking, to which women, children and migrants, are particularly exposed.⁴⁹ The UN urged the Haitian Government to address the root causes of instability and inequality, and to consult with civil society, youth and the private sector to deliver sustainable solutions with the “full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women.”⁵⁰

Already navigating economic precarity, Haitian women in the cultural and creative sectors confront direct threats, including the destruction of their workspaces and equipment, as a result of which they require support to address both their psychosocial and professional needs.

The CDB-CIIF visual arts incubator

Initiated by the Caribbean Development Bank’s Innovation Fund for Cultural and Creative Industries (CIIF) and implemented by the AfricAmerica Foundation in partnership with local cultural institutions,⁵¹ a visual arts incubator was designed with a core objective of promoting gender equality, empowering women, and combating stereotypes in the visual arts sector. The incubator was held between March and July 2022 in Port-au-Prince and Noailles and achieved the following results:

- ▶ Seventeen self-taught women visual artists received 115 hours of certified professional training in Haitian Creole, covering portfolio presentation and project management.
- ▶ Each artist was equipped with a digital tablet and Internet access for three months to bridge the digital gap that disproportionately affects Haitian women.
- ▶ Two competitions, including a Women’s Visual Arts Award, were held, bringing recognition to the participants. As a result of professional development, two beneficiaries participated in an international seminar in Cuba under the UNESCO/EU Transcultura programme.

While relatively short-term and small in scale, as is often the case with gender-targeted initiatives for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency settings, interviews confirmed that the incubator had significantly strengthened the professional capacity of women participants to communicate their work effectively, network, and develop projects to international standards despite the challenging context. The interviews revealed how the younger artists (under 40 years old) now have an active online presence, with two artists having participated in international artist residencies in Europe and the Caribbean.

“My family home, my father’s shop are located in a lawless area. My family is scattered. We lost everything. Thanks to the visual arts incubator, I stayed connected, I have my digital portfolio, and I have since participated in creative residencies in Germany, Cuba, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Barcelona where I have been living since.”

A visual arts incubator participant

UNESCO's psychosocial support workshops

Women in the culture sector are in the public eye, making them particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. To address this, UNESCO, in partnership with the U.S. State Department, organized a week-long initiative in 2024 to provide structured psychosocial support to 30 women artists, artisans and journalists. The participants were recommended by the Association of Artists and Artisans of the Croix des Bouquets, and by the Association of Women Journalists in Haiti.

The face-to-face sessions were led by qualified psychologists from the Haitian Psychology Association with experience in supporting women as well as vulnerable groups. The workshops focused on discussion groups, breathing and relaxation exercises, and oral and body expression. The aim was to provide the participants with tailored psychosocial support and to help them overcome the psychological impacts of pervasive insecurity, while creating a support network and a safe environment for their artistic expression. As a result, the participants were better able to manage their stress and improve their well-being, as well as form a support network that helped reduce their sense of isolation.

The two initiatives demonstrate the value of integrating capacity-building with dedicated psychosocial care that considers the specific needs of women artists and cultural professionals, while emphasizing the importance of designing and delivering effective, contextually relevant support during crises.

“ After the attack on the artistic village of Noailles, I remained in hiding for three days in a row. I spent a period in a displaced persons camp. UNESCO should continue this type of activity. I learned to manage stress by listening to music and having fun. Thanks to the visual arts incubator, I learned to better present my work and improve my relationships with my clients. ”

An artist from Noailles who participated in both initiatives



PREPAREDNESS: ANTICIPATING AND MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF EMERGENCIES ON WOMEN IN THE CULTURE SECTOR

Newsha Tavakolian, *Roya*, Iran, 2018. As a journalist in Tehran, Newsha Tavakolian reflects on the essential role of women in bearing witness to social change. © Newsha Tavakolian / Magnum Photos

Emergency preparedness in the culture sector refers to **actions taken before the onset of an emergency to reduce and manage potential risks** to cultural and natural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, the cultural and creative industries, cultural property and museums, as well as cultural production and the right to access culture. It includes the adoption of frameworks, the creation of operational mechanisms and systems, the provision of training and capacity-building resources that enable public institutions, CSOs, artists, cultural and heritage professionals to anticipate and mitigate the impact of emergencies on their work, livelihoods and overall safeguarding of culture, heritage and cultural rights. The goal is to identify and manage risks, and ensure mechanisms are in place, not only to protect culture, but also those who create and safeguard it when emergencies unfold.

Advancing gender equality in culture and emergency preparedness contexts – articulated across several international policy frameworks (Annex 8.1) – depends on the leadership opportunities and engagement of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in preparedness strategies that will ensure their later success and sustainability of operations.

Gender-responsive emergency preparedness goes beyond women's representation; it requires engaging their knowledge and expertise – including on the status of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and their specific vulnerabilities in the event of emergencies, to ensure the adoption of relevant targeted measures and mechanisms to address their needs. As a starting point, a gender analysis or gender needs assessment can provide the culture sector with a diagnostic tool for identifying existing inequalities. Gender-responsive emergency preparedness also requires ensuring equitable access to information and resources, while removing structural barriers to them. As such, this approach serves both as a driver of cultural resilience and a mechanism for reducing gender-specific risks before emergencies escalate.

In practical terms, gender-responsive emergency preparedness in the culture sector means:

- ▶ **Registering artists, cultural and heritage professionals** so that they can be identified and reached in the field during emergencies, with particular attention to women, including those working in the informal sector.
- ▶ **Developing or revising preventive and emergency measures and protocols** that address the needs and priorities of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, including the protection of their cultural rights and artistic freedom.
- ▶ **Creating protocols and reporting mechanisms** to protect women artists, cultural and heritage professionals from gender-based violence and harassment at all phases of an emergency.
- ▶ **Developing national inventories of immovable, movable and living heritage** that reflect sites, objects, and practices created, transmitted or safeguarded by, for or with women.
- ▶ **Conducting gender-responsive risk assessments** to identify both the specific impact of emergencies on women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, the contributions they make, and the necessary mechanisms to mitigate and address this impact.

- ▶ **Preparing disaster risk reduction plans and emergency plans** for the safeguarding of cultural property, cultural and natural heritage, living heritage and cultural institutions, with the active participation and leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in their design and implementation.
- ▶ **Designing gender-responsive capacity-building tools** at the intersections of culture, disaster risk reduction, conflict and violence prevention, for governments, cultural institutions and organizations, civil society, as well as humanitarian actors working in or with the culture sector. These tools can raise awareness of gender-specific challenges affecting the culture sector and inform emergency preparedness frameworks and mechanisms, including through national training programmes.
- ▶ **Promoting equitable access to information and resources** to ensure that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals can access existing emergency support mechanisms, and **strengthening their capacity to identify and mitigate risks**.
- ▶ **Establishing up-to-date rosters of culture and gender equality experts** who can be rapidly deployed through multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms and networks when an emergency occurs.
- ▶ **Raising awareness of gender-specific risks**, specifically for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, through communication, advocacy campaigns and resources.
- ▶ **Conducting research and collecting sex-disaggregated data** revealing gender dynamics and inequalities within the culture sector.

Building on these required actions, this chapter draws on the responses of the global survey to dive deeper into the extent to which the specific needs and priorities of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are currently reflected in emergency preparedness frameworks. It also presents good practices where a gender perspective was integrated into emergency preparedness measures for the culture sector.

3.1

LIMITED AWARENESS ON GENDER INEQUALITIES AFFECTING CULTURE AND EMERGENCIES

Translating international commitments on gender equality, culture and emergencies into practice requires sustained institutional focus, adequate resourcing, intersectoral cooperation, and evidence-based decision-making grounded in robust sex-disaggregated data. When designed and implemented in this way, preparedness frameworks can inform emergency responses by anticipating challenges, identifying structural inequalities and strengthening cultural resilience. Before such systems can function effectively, however, it is important to recognize that emergencies do not affect men and women in the same way.

While emergency preparedness remains an emerging area overall, the survey findings point to a **strikingly limited awareness of the links between gender inequalities and emergencies that impact the culture sector**. Nearly half of public institutions and CSOs (47 per cent) reported either that emergencies had not worsened gender inequalities, or that they could not assess whether inequalities had increased in the culture sector – a gap that risks allowing them to persist.

A closer look suggests that CSOs are generally more attuned to these gender dynamics than public institutions, most likely because they are in closer and more regular contact with women artists, cultural and heritage professionals on the ground.

When institutions and organizations overlook the intersections between gender equality, culture and emergencies, they are less likely to develop the preparedness measures and mechanisms that will be eventually needed to support women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts.

“Through our work in the cultural sector during emergencies, the Afghan Youth Voice Association (AYVA) has observed that crises often exacerbate existing inequalities for women. Women artists and cultural professionals face increased barriers such as limited access to resources, reduced participation in decision-making, and heightened risks of exclusion. While these impacts have been recognized moderately, there is still a need for more systematic assessment and targeted measures to address these inequalities effectively.”

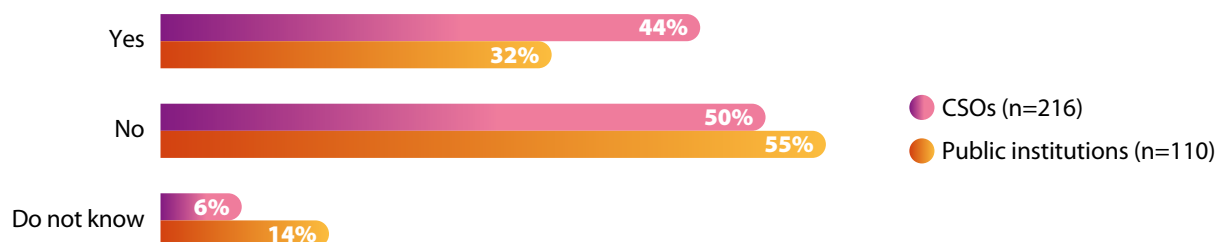
Afghan Youth Voice Association (AYVA), Afghanistan

3.2 LACK OF SYSTEMATIC, GENDER-RESPONSIVE DATA, RESEARCH AND MAPPING

Diminishing this awareness gap requires robust qualitative and quantitative data, which is essential for informing multi-stakeholder dialogue and decision-making. Key data points include employment patterns and income levels, leadership representation, exposure to gender-based violence and harassment, access to digital tools, training, funding and mobility opportunities. However, data collection in the culture sector remains fragmented, with sex-disaggregated data particularly scarce, especially in emergency contexts. The absence of systematic, gender responsive data is not merely a technical gap but a structural barrier to effective preparedness.

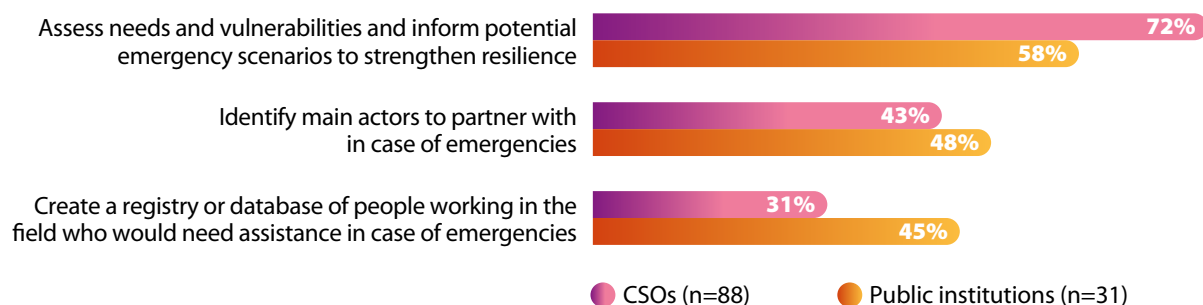
Survey responses from public institutions and CSOs point to the need for a more systemic integration of a gender perspective in research and data collection efforts across the culture sector, especially as regards emergency situations. Indeed, **more than half of surveyed public institutions and CSOs (52 per cent) had not conducted any research, data collection or mapping of the culture sector with a gender perspective** (Figure 11). This gap is particularly pronounced among public institutions, which were significantly less likely than CSOs to have undertaken such initiatives (32 per cent, compared to 44 per cent for CSOs) and more likely to report that they did not know whether they had done so (14 per cent, compared to 6 per cent for CSOs).

FIGURE 11. HAS YOUR PUBLIC INSTITUTION/CSO CONDUCTED RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION OR MAPPING OF THE CULTURE SECTOR WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE? (N=326)



When research, data collection and mapping were conducted, important differences emerge in terms of approach. The majority of CSOs (72 per cent) and more than half of public institutions (58 per cent) conducted **research on needs and vulnerabilities to inform potential emergency scenarios** (Figure 12). A sizeable number of public institutions (48 per cent) and CSOs (43 per cent) identified the main actors to partner with in case of emergencies, and 45 per cent of public institutions created a registry or database of people working in the culture sector who may require assistance in emergencies, compared to 31 per cent of CSOs. Needs assessments are the most common form of research conducted by CSOs, whereas public institutions tend to spread their efforts between mapping key partners in emergencies and registering artists, cultural and heritage professionals at risk.

FIGURE 12. TYPE OF RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION OR MAPPING CONDUCTED BY PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CSOS (N=119)



Despite their low number, the reported research activities fell into several broad categories. Public institutions tended to rely on collecting large-scale quantitative data, such as national cultural statistics, official yearbooks and reports including sex-disaggregated data to map the culture sector as a whole and to investigate trends in cultural participation, employment and/or leadership. **Although many of these initiatives were not specifically designed for emergency preparedness, they generated foundational data on gender inequalities in the culture sector that is critical for planning and readiness when emergencies occur.**

CSOs, by contrast, reported more thematic, qualitative and participatory approaches that often targeted specific communities, and involved interviews, focus groups, community diagnostics and workshops. These initiatives frequently arise after an emergency has taken place or in periods of acute need that are more relevant for emergency-response activities. However, **the data and information generated played a critical role in strengthening future preparedness by revealing gendered vulnerabilities**, identifying groups at risk, and producing insights that could inform more anticipatory measures in subsequent emergencies. For example, the Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) analysed specific forms of persecution experienced by women artists in countries like Afghanistan⁵² and Iran⁵³ that can inform and inspire preparedness strategies in the future and in other contexts.

While quantitative approaches used by public institutions and qualitative approaches of CSOs provide valuable complementary perspectives, both present limitations. Quantitative data may overlook nuanced experiences, while qualitative evidence is less easily comparable across contexts, calling for more integrated and concerted data collection and analysis processes.

BOX 2: ARTISTS AT RISK CONNECTION: GENDER-RESPONSIVE RESEARCH FOR SAFETY SUPPORT TO ARTISTS

The Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) NGO advises on preparedness strategies and provides direct emergency support to artists, including funding, relocation assistance and legal aid. In 2021, ARC published a Safety Guide for Artists aimed at offering practical strategies for artists to understand, navigate, and ultimately overcome risk. Women's perspectives were central in the preparation and implementation of ARC's Safety Guide for Artists.

During the co-development of the Guide, ARC conducted extensive interviews and consultations with women artists from different regions. These discussions shed light on the gender-specific forms of attacks they endure, ranging from online harassment to restrictions on mobility and threats to family members. Their testimonies shaped the Guide's content and ensured that preparedness strategies are not generic but responsive to the lived realities of women artists. The Guide integrates practical advice for navigating challenges, while the accompanying training sessions place a strong emphasis on gender-sensitive risk assessment and preparedness planning, equipping women artists with tools to better protect themselves, their work, and their communities.

Source: UNESCO Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies

The survey findings therefore highlight the **urgent need for more gender-responsive research, mapping and data collection**. Meaningful integration of gender equality into research and data collection initiatives requires several prerequisites beyond sex-disaggregated indicators. It includes the use of gender-responsive methodologies, regular collaboration between experts in gender, culture, statistics and emergency management, adequate resourcing, and mechanisms to ensure safe, ethical and participatory engagement with women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.

3.3

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVES CONSTRAINED IN SCOPE AND IMPACT

The scarcity of gender responsive data has practical consequences. It constrains the informed and targeted design and implementation of emergency preparedness initiatives in the culture sector.

First of all, the survey results show that **fewer than half of surveyed public institutions and CSOs (43 per cent) reported having implemented preparedness initiatives aimed at preventing or mitigating the impact of emergencies on culture** (Figure 13). While the types of emergencies they prepared for are diverse, including disasters caused by natural hazards, armed conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic, overall engagement in preparedness for the culture sector remains limited. Strikingly, while the previous section showed that CSOs were more active than public institutions in conducting research, nearly two-thirds of CSOs (63 per cent) did not implement any preparedness initiatives on the ground, suggesting that the knowledge generated is not necessarily translated into action. This can be explained by a number of factors. CSOs often conduct research targeted at policy action with their implementation falling on decision makers. Access to funding to implement follow-up actions can also be limited in a context where there is a lack of global awareness on the intersections between gender, culture and emergencies, as seen in Section 3.1.

FIGURE 13. PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CSOS THAT HAVE IMPLEMENTED PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVES AIMED AT PREVENTING OR MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF AN EMERGENCY ON CULTURE (N=326)



It is no less concerning to note that **less than one-third of surveyed public institutions and CSOs (31 per cent) reported having significantly included women in decision-making fora or in the preparation of these initiatives**, indicating that equal participation has yet to be achieved. Among respondents who reported significant participation by women, testimonies tended to focus on the high proportion of women within their workforce. More specifically, a significant number of CSOs – particularly NGOs and professional networks – explained that their preparedness initiatives were ‘naturally’ women-led because their organizations are directed and/or staffed primarily by women. While such testimonies are encouraging, equal participation does not alone demonstrate that gender equality is systematically embedded in the design and implementation of preparedness measures nor in their outcomes.

“ Within the government’s coordination efforts, the Gender in Development Department located in the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs (MOCIA) leads the Gender Cluster National Disaster Management Operations. ”

A cultural professional from the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs, Marshall Islands

BOX 3: PROMOTING THE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR THE CULTURE SECTOR IN GUATEMALA

In 2023, UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund supported an initiative to strengthen preparedness and risk management at the World Heritage property "Antigua Guatemala", which faces increasing climate-related hazards (including volcanic and seismic activity, fires and floods). It supported the participatory development of a risk management plan and its integration into the Municipality of Antigua Guatemala's territorial planning.

The process was built on consultations, workshops and joint risk assessments with a wide range of stakeholders, including the National Council for the Protection of Antigua Guatemala, the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction, municipal authorities and cultural heritage professionals. Women represented 50% of the coordination team that led the initiative (4 out of 8 members) and participated on an equal footing in the interinstitutional technical group that helped develop the plan, representing 47 per cent of its members.

Women also made up the majority of the 150 people trained (63 per cent), drawn from fire departments, cultural institutions, government, the private sector and academia, to support implementation of the plan through measures to reduce disaster risks to cultural heritage. Overall, the initiative illustrates good practice by combining women's leadership and representation in preparedness planning and targeted capacity-building, helping to deliver sustainable impact in fields that are often male-dominated.

Gender-responsive planning requires, among other things, conducting a gender analysis, accounting for the needs of women in all their diversity, and applying gender-responsive approaches that fully integrate the specific needs and priorities of women. In practice, however, the extent to which these requirements are integrated in preparedness efforts varies considerably in scale and focus. **Only 27.5 per cent of surveyed public institutions and CSOs implemented preparedness initiatives addressing the specific needs and contributions of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.**

The survey testimonies reveal a clear distinction between two main approaches in terms of preparedness initiatives. Public institutions, particularly national ministries of culture, tend to focus on creating formal strategies and protocols, often involving risk assessment for tangible heritage, safeguarding collections, and coordination with disaster management agencies. Systematic or explicit gender considerations within these frameworks were however not identified. Amongst the CSOs who reported implementing emergency preparedness initiatives, they mostly emphasized a bottom-up approach, centred on the creation of mechanisms providing direct support for artists, cultural and heritage professionals and building community resilience. In these contexts, gender-targeted approaches were more readily identifiable, although they remained insufficiently mainstreamed. Examples of NGO-led gender-responsive preparedness initiatives in culture include targeted support programmes for women-led creative enterprises in Bangladesh that address gender-specific vulnerabilities in emergency settings, such as informal employment, and the loss of workspaces faced by women creatives. In India, tailored livelihood support and economic empowerment was also provided for women artisans in embroidery, terracotta, Indigenous handlooms and scroll painting as part of preparedness initiatives. Gender-sensitive emergency relief included provisions specifically tailored to women's needs, such as health and nutritional support, psychosocial care, or menstrual hygiene kits, and enabled women artisans to continue their cultural work.

“Gender equality is a central and deliberate component of Artists at Risk’s (AR) programme design and organizational culture. We recognize that women and LGBTQIA+ artists and practitioners often face disproportionate levels of marginalization, violence, and underrepresentation, both in their regions of origin and in international cultural spaces. In response, AR has taken a proactive approach to mainstream gender related issues and concerns at every level of our operations. This includes prioritizing residency candidates who identify as women or non-binary and ensuring that public calls for applications are specifically shared within networks and communities that serve these groups. While the overall applicant pool tends to skew male, our selection process is intentionally weighted to correct this imbalance and amplify underrepresented voices.”

Artists at Risk (AR) / Ecologists at Risk (ER) by Perpetuum Mobile (PM), Finland

It remains essential that gender-responsive measures be embedded into institutional frameworks from the outset rather than as an afterthought. This ensures that the disproportionate impact of emergencies on women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are not overlooked, and counters the assumption that equal participation is sufficient.

3.4 SCARCE TARGETED TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

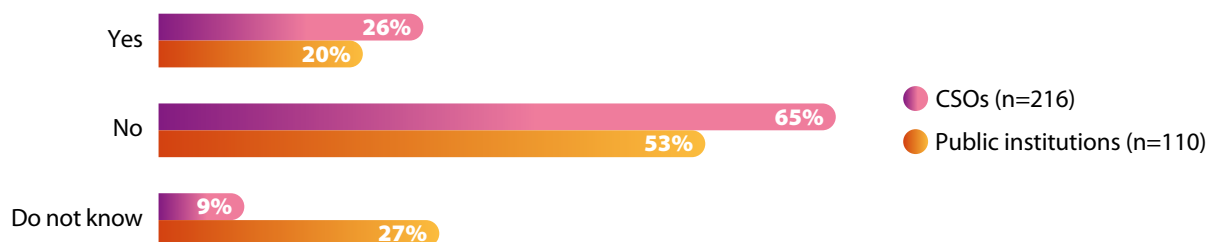
Gender-targeted training and guidance for all actors involved in emergency management are essential to making preparedness a shared responsibility. They build the understanding and capacity needed to identify and address gender inequalities in emergency settings – work that cannot be left to gender experts alone.

Training equips cultural professionals and institutional actors with the skills to recognize and address gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities, ensuring women’s equitable access to information, safety resources, and response support during emergencies. It should aim to translate gender-responsive protocols and decision-making practices into organizational routines, **reducing the risk that gender considerations are overlooked in high-pressure and time-sensitive situations.** Training also enhances mutual understanding of everyone’s roles, streamlines communication pathways, and strengthens collective action, enabling individuals, organizations and institutions to be more intentional in their emergency responses.

However, the survey results found that **only about one-quarter of surveyed public institutions and CSOs (24 per cent) have ever conducted or received training or guidance on integrating gender equality either into emergency preparedness or response plans for culture**, pointing to a capacity gap (Figure 14).

When gender-targeted training did occur, the three dimensions of culture, gender equality and emergency management are rarely integrated into one framework. As a result, **gender-responsive preparedness often depends on ad-hoc and stand-alone initiatives** rather than being systematically embedded in national training programmes on disaster risk reduction or on conflict and violence prevention.

FIGURE 14. HAS YOUR PUBLIC INSTITUTION/CSO EVER CONDUCTED OR RECEIVED TRAINING OR GUIDANCE ON INTEGRATING GENDER INTO EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS OR RESPONSE PLANS FOR THE CULTURE SECTOR? (N=326)



The practical application of trainings and guidance received varies. Some CSOs have translated and integrated gender equality into their formal mandates or in specific projects targeting women, while others acknowledge it as an area requiring further development. Professional organizations and networks, for instance, tend to describe a more direct and project-based application. The Malawi Writers Union provides a good example. It reported that training on gender mainstreaming had provided the organization with a clear mandate to specifically support women writers in disaster-prone areas. Another testimonial by the Colombian NGO Embodying Reconciliation – Cuerpos para la Reconciliación (Box 4) illustrates how adaptive learning is used from different training sources to build integrated gender-responsive preparedness approaches.

BOX 4: GENDER-RESPONSIVE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR PEACEBUILDING AND HERITAGE PROTECTION IN COLOMBIA

Working in contexts shaped by conflict and displacement, the Colombian non-profit organization Embodying Reconciliation – Cuerpos para la Reconciliación promotes intangible cultural heritage for peacebuilding. It advanced gender equality in emergency preparedness and response in the culture sector through three areas of action: internal capacity development, community-based training, and the development of gender-responsive practical tools.

The first line of action focused on strengthening internal capacity through targeted training linked to peacebuilding and heritage protection. This included training delivered by Oxfam Intermón on gender-sensitive humanitarian action and protection of migrant women, as well as consultations convened by UNESCO on gender equality in safeguarding living heritage practices, as part of emergency response. Training on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (1325) further reinforced Embodying Reconciliation's ability to promote women's leadership and embed gender perspectives across preparedness activities, including risk assessment, community mapping, safeguarding protocols and ethical documentation.

The organization translated this learning into practice, delivering gender-targeted community-based trainings, with particular emphasis on the involvement of Indigenous and rural women. It facilitated workshops on ethical safeguarding and digital inventories with modules on women's authorship, consent and representation. It also led sessions addressing gender-based violence, creating safe spaces for women performers to articulate and denounce violence through their art. In addition, capacity-building activities with local women leaders and teachers were organized to promote "care-based and trauma-informed approaches to peace education and cultural preservation". Complementing these training efforts, Embodying Reconciliation also co-developed a set of culturally-sensitive resources and tools to support gender equality and empower women cultural leaders in times of emergency.

Embodying Reconciliation's testimony is particularly noteworthy as it shows how a non-profit organization proactively sought out relevant training opportunities to fill the gap in gender-responsive emergency preparedness training. It developed and delivered training and tools that brought the three dimensions of culture, gender equality and emergencies together, effectively adapting existing knowledge and expertise to meet operational needs.

Source: UNESCO Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies

To conclude, it is important to recognize that emergency preparedness itself remains an emerging area, constrained by structural challenges specific to the culture sector as well as by existing emergency governance frameworks. Within this context, the chapter shows that **gender gaps in awareness, data collection, operational initiatives and training further weakens emergency preparedness in the culture sector.** Because gender considerations are not consistently built into preparedness systems, data and decisions, they rarely function as a guiding principle – leaving women artists, cultural and heritage professionals particularly exposed when emergencies occur. These weaknesses shape not only how emergencies are managed, but also who can access support and how that support is delivered and experienced. Addressing these structural shortcomings at the preparedness stage is therefore essential to improving the effectiveness of response and recovery efforts.

WOMEN SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CREATIVITY AMID WAR IN SUDAN



WOMEN SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CREATIVITY AMID WAR IN SUDAN

The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) quickly engulfed the country and caused a widespread humanitarian crisis. Since April 2023, 7 million people have been internally displaced⁵⁴ and, as of 2025, over 30 million people need humanitarian assistance.⁵⁵

The Sudanese artistic scene has endured severe restrictions and persecution. Between 2023-2024, 55 artists have been killed according to local sources.⁵⁶ With cultural infrastructure also heavily centralized in Khartoum, peripheral regions and their practitioners have been marginalized. This gave rise to forms of cultural resistance expressed through new artistic practices and urgent initiatives to document, safeguard, and sustain culture.

The loss and destruction of museums, libraries, archives, galleries, theatres and personal collections had a direct impact on the livelihoods, creative expression and cultural memory of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. They face discrimination and gender-based violence,⁵⁷ informal job opportunities and limited access to education.⁵⁸

“ I lost my livelihood and live in a country that is not my own. I suffer from illnesses, from poor psychological health, and from the many traumas I experienced during the war. ”

A woman drama producer who now resides in a neighboring host country

Documenting Cultural Damage – Action for Hope and Culture Resource

Action for Hope, a Belgium-based international NGO operating in the cultural sphere, mostly in the Arab region, launched the *Stand for Sudanese Artists* initiative in 2023 to support artists and cultural professionals in collaboration with the regional NGO Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy) and other international and local partners. The UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals provided support to the initiative, notably to produce a study in 2024 aimed at assessing and documenting the damage wrought to Sudan's cultural and artistic assets and spaces in Khartoum, Kordofan, Darfur and Gezira.

Led by four women researchers, the project collected and analysed data concerning 177 damaged or endangered cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres, cinemas, radio and television studios, galleries, cultural centres, libraries and archives, and valuable personal collections. The data revealed the scale of destruction, identified pathways for resilience, called attention to the high risks and challenges faced by Sudanese artists and cultural professionals, and highlighted women's critical role in preserving cultural memory under extreme vulnerabilities. It also highlighted the importance of digitization for rare personal collections and for smaller institutions lacking robust security infrastructure.

Many women artists and cultural professionals operated small studios or personal collections, which were often exposed to looting, vandalism and fire, disrupting livelihoods and artistic practice. But with no institutional safeguards for women in the sector, such as insurance or safety networks, the economic and psychological toll led to extreme stress and fears for their personal safety.

By employing women researchers, the project helped win trust among the communities, and enabled detailed testimonies to emerge, thereby amplifying women's voices. Workshops trained artists and cultural professionals, including women, in safeguarding collections as well as understanding and advocating for cultural rights and the instruments and mechanisms available for their protection at international, regional and national levels. The project also documented the damage on specific women-focused initiatives, such as Radio Al Banat, the Documentation and Women's Studies Unit at Ahfad University for Women, and Al-Fal Cultural Organization's project on the bibliography of women's novels.

The work led by the all-women research team produced a definitive record of wartime losses and created a repository of knowledge for both immediate emergency response and long-term advocacy, while creating vital networks of solidarity across communities. The volunteer-led networks, comprising around 200 participants across activities, supported displaced artists, provided temporary studios, and shared materials and exhibition opportunities. By highlighting women's perspectives, the project challenged traditional hierarchies in cultural documentation, while affirming the central role of women in safeguarding cultural heritage in Sudan.

Providing safe spaces for artists and promoting women-led cultural entrepreneurship - Portive Cultural Centre and Sobajo

Established in 2018 as a woman-led initiative for young artists in eastern Sudan, the Portive Cultural Centre (also known as Portive Youth) has become one of the few recognized cultural institutions outside Khartoum. Its founding mission was to create a space for artists in a region long marginalized by Sudan's centralized cultural policies.

At the outbreak of war in April 2023, thousands of displaced artists and cultural actors found refuge in Port Sudan, with the centre providing them with a safe space and a way to continue their creative practices. This period also saw new initiatives emerge. With initial support from the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme and Action for Hope's *Stand for Sudanese Artists* initiative, the Portive Cultural Centre launched the *Wasil* initiative ('Keep going') in 2024, which offers a platform for artistic expression, professional growth, and networking among almost 300 artists from different regions, of which more than half the beneficiaries are women. Through additional funding from the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme in 2025-2026, the initiative continued to leverage music, crafts and visual arts to support cultural participation and strengthen artists' livelihoods, including through a wide range of capacity-building efforts. Among them was the "Wasili Craft" event, which brought together more than 50 women artists and artisans from diverse backgrounds, including representatives from the hearing-impaired community, with the aim of advancing women's empowerment and promoting women-led entrepreneurship. Additionally, a series of "Creative Labs" led by Portive Cultural Centre strengthened competencies among 117 artists and cultural professionals – including 75 per cent of women – in areas such as artistic production, creative entrepreneurship and the use of digital and AI tools for product marketing. The *Wasil* initiative, implemented with high involvement of women across these areas, facilitated broad-based community re-engagement in cultural life and reinforced social cohesion through artistic expression, notably thanks to a cultural festival organized in February 2026, mobilizing over 80 artists and cultural professionals and attracting more than 1,700 participants.

Another key partner supported by the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme in Sudan was Sobajo, a local NGO composed of approximately 90 per cent women and girls, through which women are leading the transmission of knowledge to young girls, most of whom are internally displaced as a result of the war. In December 2025, Sobajo organized a training of trainers to promote women-led cultural entrepreneurship and the safeguarding of traditional handicrafts, which built capacities among 30 Sudanese women. Beneficiaries were trained on traditional embroidery and handicrafts, with a focus on the traditions and skills related to the use of materials derived from palm, an element inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Additionally, the project supported the establishment of two operational craft production and exhibition spaces, directly linking the safeguarding of living heritage practices with income-generating opportunities, particularly for women.

These initiatives demonstrate the role of regional hubs as safe havens, which can adapt to emergency situations by empowering communities, and the importance of supporting grassroots, women-led projects for gender-responsive rapid response, thereby helping to sustain cultural life, strengthen advocacy, and build resilience for all.



RESPONSE: ENSURING THE INCLUSION AND ADDRESSING THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF WOMEN IN THE CULTURE SECTOR

Pamela Tulizo, *Enfer paradisiaque (Paradisiacal Hell)* (series). Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2021. Conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic, the series uses staged photography and symbolic imagery to reflect on the overlapping crises affecting communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and beyond. Through carefully composed scenes, Pamela Tulizo foregrounds women's experiences and perspectives, inviting viewers to consider the human realities behind moments of uncertainty and upheaval. © Pamela Tulizo

Emergency response in the culture sector refers to **immediate actions taken directly before, during or immediately after an emergency**. The goal is to protect the lives and livelihoods of artists, cultural and heritage professionals, cultural and natural heritage institutions and sites, as well as cultural expressions both tangible and intangible. Focused on urgent and short-term needs, emergency response actions also address early recovery and prepare the ground for an effective exit strategy with sustainable solutions.⁵⁹

Integrating a gender-responsive approach into emergency response strategies and actions for the culture sector is essential to ensure that key measures are designed and implemented in ways that directly address gender-specific vulnerabilities and leverage women's leadership in emergency contexts. Tailoring assistance to the specific needs and risks faced by women already identified in this report – including economic insecurity, psychological trauma, heightened exposure to gender-based violence, and increased caregiving responsibilities – helps ensure that no one is left behind. At the same time, recognizing and strengthening the critical roles that women play in maintaining the continuity of cultural life, social cohesion and community resilience, provides emergency response efforts with greater chances of success.

In practical terms, a gender-responsive approach to emergency response means:

- ▶ **Deploying rapid assessment and advisory missions that explicitly account for the ways in which emergencies affect the livelihoods, safety, mobility, and access to resources of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.** This includes ensuring the participation of women and women's rights organizations throughout the assessment process, analysing their specific needs, collecting sex-disaggregated data, and guaranteeing that assessment teams are adequately trained on gender equality.
- ▶ **Planning and implementing immediate assistance on the ground to protect artists, cultural and heritage professionals** (e.g. through relocation schemes that can extend to their dependents, financial assistance, psychosocial support, access to resources, protection protocols, etc.), while carefully considering the specific needs, vulnerabilities and priorities of women, including those belonging to minority or vulnerable groups, women with diverse professional status and working in different cultural fields.
- ▶ **Enhancing the protection of heritage sites, museums, and other cultural spaces and resources using gender-inclusive identification and monitoring methods** to ensure that sites of particular importance to women's cultural expressions and practices, history or livelihoods are not excluded or overlooked. This also requires engaging women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and women's networks in prioritization processes and ensuring that assessments consider not only the contribution of women to culture but also the specific impact on the capacity of women to access, use or safeguard these cultural sites, spaces and resources.
- ▶ **Providing capacity-building opportunities** to women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, in particular through on-the-job trainings, to align capacity development with livelihood support. Focus can notably be made on traditionally male-dominated fields to contribute to addressing structural barriers for women.

- ▶ **Implementing gender-responsive short-training activities** for staff from public institutions, CSOs, humanitarian actors, and other partners supporting the culture sector and operating in affected areas, to ensure they consider the specific leadership capacities, needs, and impact on, women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, in their response efforts.
- ▶ **Supporting the continuation of cultural life** by ensuring that women's cultural expressions, narratives and leadership are fully integrated into response initiatives. This also includes safeguarding women's cultural rights and supporting their safe access to cultural venues, activities, practices, goods and services, as well as their meaningful participation and leadership within response platforms, resources and decision-making spaces affecting the culture sector both online and offline.
- ▶ **Ensuring rapid access to digital equipment and connectivity** for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, where physical access to workspaces or markets is disrupted, and providing digital training and mentoring activities focused on immediate needs, such as online content production, digital preservation, remote collaboration, online distribution and digital safety, as well as developing digital residencies, remote fellowships and virtual exchanges for professionals.
- ▶ **Integrating gender-responsive mental health and psychosocial support into cultural emergency response measures**, with components tailored to women, recognizing the compounded impacts of conflict and disaster-related trauma, loss, displacement, caregiving burdens and economic insecurity on their mental health, especially for women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups.
- ▶ **Mobilizing gender-responsive multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms and networks** to strengthen coordination and build synergies in emergency interventions. This requires the meaningful inclusion of experts on gender equality, culture and emergency management, including women's rights organizations as well as women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, to ensure that their perspectives inform both strategic planning and operational decision-making.

Drawing on the survey findings, this chapter explores existing emergency support mechanisms within the culture sector, analyses the extent to which they are available to women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, and investigates the extent to which women have contributed to shaping and implementing them.

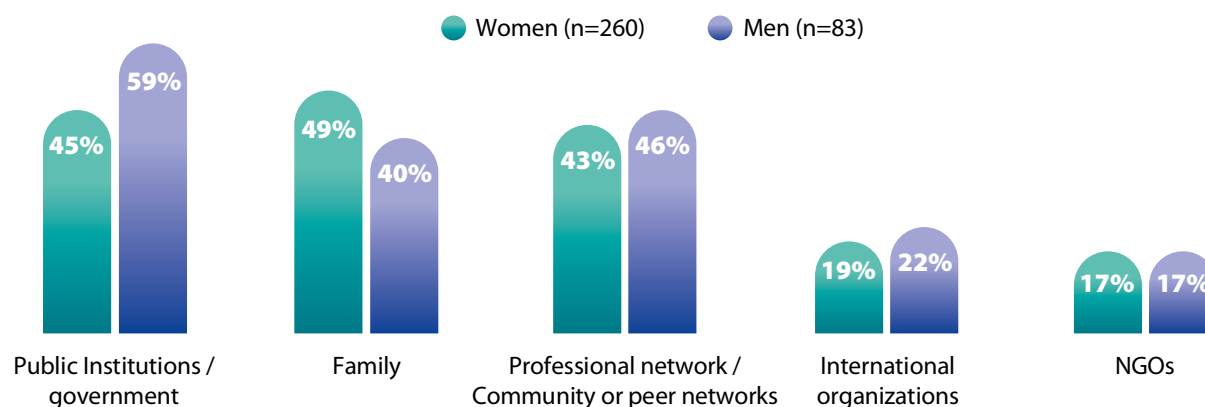
4.1 UNEQUAL ACCESS TO DIFFERENT SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Access to support systems is a critical lifeline for artists, cultural and heritage professionals navigating emergencies. For women in the culture sector, emergency-related challenges intersect with long-standing structural barriers in accessing institutional support for their work in peace time. Overall, **less than 2 in 5 women respondents (37 per cent) reported having accessed some form of support that would help them to continue their professional cultural and creative work.** This figure is similar for men (34 per cent), which highlights continued gaps in the inclusion of artists, cultural and heritage professionals into overall emergency response mechanisms.

However, when delving deeper into the types of sources of support, gender differences in assistance received in emergency situations become clearer. Surveyed **men primarily relied on support from governments or public institutions to continue their professional cultural and creative work** (59 per cent of men surveyed compared to 45 per cent of women surveyed), **while surveyed women primarily relied on family** (Figure 15). Indeed, nearly half of the women respondents (49 per cent) reported relying primarily on family, followed by support from public institutions (45 per cent) and professional or community networks (43 per cent). NGOs and international organizations accounted for a smaller share of the support received by both women and men. Results also highlighted that there were even lower levels of support from government sources for women working in precarious or informal employment and women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups, resulting in an even greater reliance on family and professional or community networks.

In their testimonies, many women respondents confirmed not having received assistance from their governments. In some cases, public aid was available but was either inaccessible to artists, cultural and heritage professionals, or limited to project-based grants rather than providing support for salaries or essential living costs. Even among women who reported receiving government support, assistance was often described as modest or short-term, typically one-off bonuses or stimulus payments provided by ministries of culture. Although helpful, these measures were seen as insufficient to sustain their work and were not followed by long-term solutions.

FIGURE 15. SOURCES OF SUPPORT RECEIVED (N=343)



Furthermore, **patterns of support differed significantly across emergency types**. Women respondents affected by armed conflict reported receiving more support from international organizations, professional/community networks and NGOs than from any other source, and they received the least support from public institutions and governments. During disasters caused by natural hazards, professional/community networks emerged as the greatest source of assistance for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. Health crises – for which respondents mostly referred to the COVID-19 pandemic – stand out as the only type of emergency in which support from public institutions ranks first among women respondents, although largely favouring women in formal employment. This is due to the duration and global scale of the COVID-19 pandemic which had prompted particularly high response from governments.

“ I received several forms of support that helped me continue my professional cultural and creative work during the emergency. This included financial assistance from local arts organizations, access to online training workshops to improve my digital skills, and support from my professional network that provided opportunities for collaboration and project development. This support enabled me to adapt my work to new formats and reach wider audiences despite the challenges. ”

A woman cultural professional, affected by a disaster caused by a natural hazard, Thailand

A range of gender-specific barriers help to explain the reasons for the limited support women receive to maintain their cultural and creative work during emergencies, including their concentration in informal employment and their disproportionate caregiving responsibilities. Additional barriers can actively deter women from seeking help: those who have suffered gender-based violence, for instance, may avoid public support services due to fear of stigma, or because social, cultural or gendered norms restrict their ability to seek assistance. In situations of displacement, these challenges are exacerbated by language barriers, discrimination, and the lack of legal status or proper documentation.

As a result, **emotional and moral support from family and peers were frequently described as the main and, in some cases, the only form of assistance received**, highlighting a critical gap in existing support mechanisms. Many women reported having to self-finance, drawing on personal savings, family support or mutual aid within their communities. Others reported taking on additional jobs outside the culture sector to sustain themselves financially.

Careful consideration of gender-specific accessibility barriers is therefore crucial when designing and implementing support mechanisms, including how assistance is communicated, the administrative requirements involved, and the ability of all women, including the most vulnerable, to access support.

4.2 A DIVERSE YET FRAGMENTED ECOSYSTEM OF AVAILABLE SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Beyond questions of access, it is also important to examine the types of support available to artists, cultural and heritage professionals at risk in emergency contexts.

Drawing on existing typologies, several broad categories can be identified to better understand the scope of available support.⁶⁰ A first category includes **research, advocacy, monitoring and reporting** on threats to artists, cultural and heritage professionals, including artistic freedom. Another, more operational category of support focuses on the **provision of in-country or international shelter**. This includes evacuation and relocation initiatives, including through artistic residencies as well as academic or exchange opportunities. Relocation and residency programmes, whether offering temporary protection or pathways to permanent resettlement, are expanding, but continue to provide limited placement opportunities.⁶¹ Finally, additional forms of support include **financial assistance** (e.g. grants, equipment replacement, visa-related costs), **capacity-building** (e.g. on-the-job training to complement capacity-development workshops generating livelihood support), **legal aid** (e.g. support with immigration procedures or prosecution processes), **medical and psychosocial care**, and referral services (e.g. hotlines).

While there are well-documented CSO-led initiatives across each of these types of support, they also reveal a fragmented protection landscape that would benefit from stronger collaboration with public institutions and governments, international organizations, networks, and transnational CSOs, depending to specific emergency contexts.⁶² Evidence shows that such initiatives are rarely designed to address gender-specific needs and barriers. As a result, **targeted support for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts remains limited, with few and small-scale initiatives explicitly focused on their needs and experiences.** The Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI), which has supported Afghan and Iranian artists to resettle in Europe and the United States, noted that, ‘while [it] has assisted several women artists at risk through these programmes, the number of women reached remains lower than men due to the particular challenges women artists face in fleeing conflict and displacement.’⁶³ International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), another NGO with a relocation programme for artists at risk, reported similar challenges.⁶⁴

Overall, **public institutions and CSOs involved in supporting women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts identified a range of risks and obstacles that undermine their ability to design, deliver and sustain support during emergencies.** Funding instability, especially in a global context of reduced international aid funding, emerged as the main difficulty, with emergencies diverting donor and government priorities away from the culture sector, making it all the more difficult to secure resources for gender-targeted actions. Small NGOs and artist-led groups reported having to rely heavily on short-term project grants that end abruptly, while several public institutions noted that the lack of sex-disaggregated data limited their ability to design or justify new funding proposals. Beyond financial constraints, respondents highlighted restrictions on women’s participation and staff mobility due to safety concerns and gender discrimination (e.g. requirement of a male guardian, gender segregation in public spaces). Respondents also noted the reluctance of local authorities to endorse women-led cultural activities, especially when women’s artistic practice remains stigmatised, restricted or addresses gender-related issues. These challenges are exacerbated by operational constraints, including bureaucratic obstacles, weak coordination between cultural and humanitarian agencies, logistical challenges, and staff burnout, underscoring the cumulative toll of operating in prolonged emergency conditions.

Inspiring examples exist nevertheless and offer guidance for adapting existing programmes or developing new ones (Boxes 5 and 6). While these initiatives provide important building blocks for emergency response, the evidence shows that support remains insufficient in scale and reach. As a result, **most women artists, cultural and heritage professionals continue to lack adequate financial, social or structural support during emergencies.**

BOX 5: RESIDENCY FOR UKRAINIAN FEMINIST WOMEN ARTISTS

The Residency for Ukrainian Feminist Women Artists, implemented by the Martin Roth Initiative was launched in October 2024 and developed as part of a special project linked to Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy.

The initiative involved a six-month hybrid residency designed to support and empower 20 Ukrainian women visual artists, writers, film directors and theatre-makers who remained in the country during the war. The programme included online workshops and expert meetings, with an in-person gathering organized in Germany. Participants discussed feminist art theory, the challenges of war, and the political nature of art in times of conflict. Concluding with a joint publication, the artworks produced in this collaborative project drew on such themes as living through war, trauma and identity, culminating in an exhibition 'Meaning after Loss', which was presented in Ukraine in 2025.

Beyond its artistic outcomes, the Martin Roth Initiative offers a concrete example of how feminist foreign policy⁶⁵ commitments – an approach increasingly adopted by governments worldwide – can translate into practice on the ground by providing flexible, context-sensitive support that addresses both the creative and psychosocial needs of women artists in emergency settings.

*Source: Martin Roth Initiative. Residency for Ukrainian Feminist Women Artists.
<https://www.martin-roth-initiative.de/en/ukrainian-women-artists> (Accessed 28 April 2026)*

BOX 6: WOMEN-CENTRED NETWORKS IN THE CULTURE SECTOR OF KIRIBATI AFFECTED BY CLIMATE-CHANGE-RELATED EMERGENCIES

In Kiribati, women-centred networks are delivering tangible results for gender equality in emergency and climate-related contexts. These networks, often with support from international partners, play a crucial role in supporting women in the cultural sector withstand shocks, recover more quickly and sustain intangible knowledge and practices.

Aia M'aea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK)

As Kiribati's primary national umbrella organization for women's groups, AMAK serves as a vital hub for coordination and support during emergencies. It supports women artists, cultural and heritage professionals through training in areas such as handicrafts and financial literacy that are essential for those who depend on their craft for income. AMAK also contributes to women's economic empowerment by providing spaces where women can sell their products, helping to sustain livelihoods while safeguarding traditional crafts.

Kindling Kiribati (KK)

Kindling Kiribati is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the growth of women-led small businesses. Although its work extends beyond the cultural sector, many of the women it supports are involved in the creation and sale of crafts. During and after emergencies, its role becomes especially important, providing microloans that enable women to start or expand their enterprises. This support is particularly valuable for artists and craftswomen who may have lost materials or tools and need capital to rebuild their livelihoods. The organization also offers training in essential business skills, helping women navigate the economic challenges that emergencies bring.

Source: UNESCO Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies

4.3

DECISIVE YET LARGELY INVISIBLE WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES AND NETWORKS

Given the limited support available to women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, it is unsurprising that **women-led initiatives and networks play a crucial role in emergencies**. To explore this further, the survey asked public institutions and CSOs how such groups emerged or became more active during emergencies to assist women working in culture. Over half of CSOs (52 per cent) reported an increase in activity, compared with 39 per cent of public institutions (Figure 16). This suggests that women-led initiatives and networks tend to mobilize and intensify their work during emergencies, filling gaps left by more formal, institutional response mechanisms.

“During emergencies some women formed support groups to pull resources and initiated a revolving fund to access small loans among themselves.”

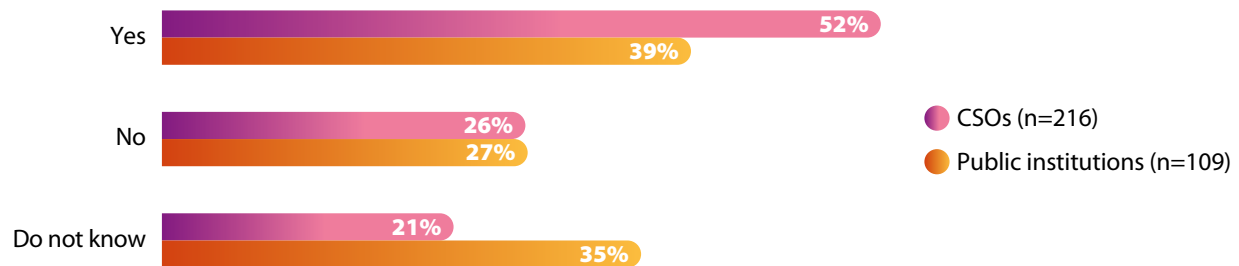
A cultural professional from the Samburu County Government, Kenya

Across regions, testimonies consistently pointed to direct material and emotional support, including micro-grants, equipment sharing, relocation assistance, and mental-health outreach provided by women-led initiatives and networks. In some regions, they also provided alternative infrastructure for exhibition and performance. However, the visibility of these initiatives and networks appear uneven, with a notable proportion of public institutions (35 per cent) and CSO (21 per cent) reporting a lack of awareness of such activities. Several factors may explain this gap: the often-informal nature of these initiatives can make them less visible; persistent gender biases can render women's contributions less recognized or perceived as less legitimate; and resource constraints may lead women-led initiatives and networks to prioritize implementation over communication and advocacy. This visibility gap points to a need for stronger coordination mechanisms and information-sharing channels between informal or grassroots groups and more formal and established actors. Indeed, the central role of and reliance on women-led initiatives and networks underscores the importance of directing resources to strengthen these less formal but essential support pathways.

“Women artists and weavers formed informal support groups to share materials, childcare, and safe workspaces during curfews and transport disruptions, recognizing the urgency of passing down knowledge amid uncertainty.”

A cultural professional from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Cambodia

FIGURE 16. HAVE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CSOS WITNESSED AN EMERGENCE OR INCREASE OF ACTIVITY BY WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES AND NETWORKS SUPPORTING WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS DURING EMERGENCIES? (N=325)



Beyond such initiatives and networks, the survey found that individual **women artists, cultural and heritage professionals themselves frequently assume organizational leadership roles in community-driven cultural initiatives or festivals**. While they still rarely receive formal support, such individuals play a central role in mobilizing, coordinating, and responding to immediate needs of affected communities.

“I volunteered for a celebratory cultural festival, held in the aftermath of Cyclone Freddy. It had over 70 per cent of women as key leaders in the executive with the two top positions being headed by women. It was so amazing to witness these women break stereotypes and pull this huge festival off, without as much financial assistance as well. It was just a wonderful sight.”

A male public sector employee, Malawi

Nearly half of women respondents (44 per cent) reported having witnessed or participated in cultural initiatives led by, designed for, or shaped by the substantial involvement of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals before, during or after emergencies. Participation and visibility were higher among women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups: 50 per cent reported witnessing or taking part in such initiatives, compared with 41 per cent among women who do not belong to these groups. This gap suggests that women belonging to minority or vulnerable groups may rely more heavily on women’s leadership in collective action, peer networks and community-driven responses, reflecting their greater exclusion from other support systems.

“I have participated in cultural initiatives led by women, both before and after emergencies. I have had the opportunity to collaborate on projects where women artists, communicators, and cultural managers have played a key role in creating spaces for support, expression, and emotional reconstruction. These experiences have demonstrated not only women’s organizational capacity but also their sensitivity in connecting with communities through art and heritage. Their participation has been essential in raising awareness of social issues and giving a voice to historically invisible groups.”

A woman professional in the cultural and creative industries, Peru

A diverse range of cultural initiatives led or supported by women artists, cultural and heritage professionals emerge from the survey testimonies and can be highlighted.

- ▶ In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the *Musika na Kipaji*⁶⁶ music festival held annually in Goma, brings together people from different regions of the Great Lakes to celebrate women's art as a call for reconciliation and peace amid alarming levels of conflict-related sexual violence.
- ▶ In Yemen, the *Writing Protects Her*⁶⁷ project trained girls in creative writing, leading to the publication of *Sprouting Wings*. Led by author and activist Ebtesam AL-Qasemi with the support of the Goethe-Institut Jordan, the initiative introduced new voices to the national literary scene and empowered participants with a tool for expression, healing, and resistance in a context of ongoing armed conflict.
- ▶ In Lebanon, the women-led initiative *Silat for Culture*,⁶⁸ launched after the Beirut port blast in 2020, mobilized a network of women artists, heritage professionals, and humanitarian actors to restore the historic Tabbal Building, an important piece of the city's urban fabric. Through an all-women chain of expertise and partnerships, the initiative launched an awareness-raising campaign, secured funding, and developed a comprehensive conservation plan, ultimately saving the building.
- ▶ In a context of disaster caused by a natural hazard, women have led emergency response efforts. One example is the mobilization of the women artists belonging to the Unión de Músicas y Músicos del Sur,⁶⁹ following the floods in Bahía Blanca, Argentina, in 2025. They assessed affected members and coordinated solidarity actions, including benefit concerts and the management of a Solidarity Fund that provided monthly financial support to its members in need.

Another important form of engagement led by women artists, cultural and heritage professionals lies in mobilizing their work to **advocate for social justice, reconciliation, freedom of expression and human rights, including gender equality**, calling for reforms and systemic change as part of broader emergency response efforts. Testimonies from CSOs such as Artists at Risk Connection, Freemuse, and Avant Garde Lawyers illustrate how cultural and creative work intersects with humanitarian aid, relocation mechanisms and international justice processes, highlighting strong synergies with broader rights-based recovery efforts. However, as documented by Freemuse,⁷⁰ women working in culture are also “disproportionately targeted by censorship, harassment and moral restrictions,”⁷¹ which are exacerbated during emergencies. This underscores the need for stronger coordination between cultural, humanitarian and development actors to reinforce protection systems and ensure that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are offered comparable levels of support and protection as other human rights defenders.

As this chapter has shown, **institutions are falling short of proactively creating or supporting spaces for women's leadership in emergency response.** Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as agents of change play a decisive role in sustaining cultural life, mobilizing support for communities, and responding to urgent needs despite the fact that they remain undervalued, under resourced, and largely invisible within formal emergency response frameworks for culture.

“**Women artists were the first to organize community workshops after the earthquake, preserving our oral traditions when formal institutions were destroyed. Yet no one documented their leadership.**”

A woman cultural professional, Haiti

Documenting successful initiatives, particularly at the community and grassroots level, is essential to scale efforts and inform the creation of targeted funding and policy measures that address the needs of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. It is also a key step towards developing measures that can ensure the full participation and leadership of women during emergency contexts.



SUSTAINING CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND INTEGRATION FOR DISPLACED WOMEN ARTISTS IN WARTIME UKRAINE



SUSTAINING CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND INTEGRATION FOR DISPLACED WOMEN ARTISTS IN WARTIME UKRAINE

Ukraine has faced a profound humanitarian and security crisis since Russia's invasion in February 2022. The fifth Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA5) noted losses of nearly USD 31.9 billion in the culture and tourism sectors, with the total cost of damages in these sectors estimated at USD 4.5 billion, requiring an estimated USD 11.5 billion for recovery and reconstruction over the next ten years (2026–2035).⁷² As of February 2026, UNESCO has verified damage to over 519 cultural sites, including museums, libraries and monuments.⁷³ Serious disruption was also evident in the creative industries. By 2022, about 37 per cent of jobs were lost, and over 20 per cent of creative professionals had left the country.⁷⁴ Many others are internally displaced, forced to rebuild their careers in new regions and integrate into local art scenes, with heightened competition for limited resources.

Artists, cultural and heritage professionals face significant safety risks, particularly in occupied territories where the destruction of heritage and artworks has been especially severe. Women working in culture are encountering distinct challenges, including increased care responsibilities, sexual and gender-based violence, and economic precarity. Although they constituted the majority of cultural professionals (60 per cent) before the outbreak of war, they still earn, on average, 22 per cent less than men in similar positions⁷⁵ – a persistent gender pay gap that emergency funds for culture have not addressed.

Men artists, cultural and heritage professionals, for their part, face different restrictions. Under martial law and the mobilization system, men aged 18–60 are banned from leaving the country, severely diminishing their opportunities for international exchanges, residencies and training. Even within Ukraine, mobility is restricted, as the threat of military conscription makes long-term professional commitments uncertain.

Grants and residencies for artists at risk in Ukraine

Initiated by international funds, most emergency support has been deployed in partnership with independent cultural networks. Between 2022 and 2024, the NGO Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) received 3,145 requests for emergency and resilience grants and provided direct assistance to 1,261 Ukrainian artists and their dependents. Women accounted for more than half of all beneficiaries.⁷⁶ Artists at Risk (AR), another NGO that is active at the intersection of human rights and the arts, organized 602 fully funded residencies for Ukrainian artists since February 2022, in cooperation with UNESCO and other partners. These included 502 residencies abroad and over 100 residencies in Ukraine.⁷⁷ In 2022, with funding from the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF) and the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals, AR supported 38 women artists and their dependents, who were hosted with 27 cultural institutions across 13 European countries for up to 3 months. During this time, they developed new projects, participated in various cultural events, and helped raise awareness about the situation in Ukraine, thereby contributing to the international visibility of Ukrainian culture at risk.

“Now our family is in a European Union country. Here, in a calm and creative environment, I had the opportunity to develop and create art. I would like to explore the theme of awakening the beauty of life in everything, even in the darkest times. I believe that this is a new stage not only for my creativity but also for our entire family.”

A storyboard artist, photographer, illustrator and set designer who was hosted by the Goethe-Institut thanks to the 2022 UNESCO/Artists at Risk programme

(re)connectionUA

Another grant programme – (re)connectionUA – implemented through two phases in 2022 and 2023/24, provided financial and organizational support to independent cultural institutions and professionals to ensure the continuity of artistic projects during the war. Launched by the 80 per cent women-led NGO Museum of Contemporary Art, with funding from the UNESCO HEF and the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals, the initiative supported 21 projects, including the following:

- ▶ The Totem cultural institution fostered a creative community, drawing inspiration from Ukrainian woman artist Polina Raiko's legacy.
- ▶ Memory Lab presented a multimedia exhibition, 'Lot's Women', highlighting women's voices and bodies in Ukrainian history through stories articulating the significance of preserving Ukraine's cultural diversity and identity.
- ▶ The *Five minutes for Ukrainian Art* project by Artslooker.com included a specific resource, entitled, 5 minutes for Womanhood in Ukrainian Art.
- ▶ The short film *Prelude* by Kinotron explored the objectification of soldiers, highlighting issues of gender stereotypes and inequality. It encouraged reflection on how war influences gender dynamics, and the importance of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all, irrespective of gender.

“Our project intersects research on individual and collective memory, as well as the agency of the female voice. In searching for a way to reclaim it, we simultaneously bring into focus the question of a decolonial perspective on our own corporeality and our own history.”

A woman cultural professional,
Memory Lab

The grant programme helped to document experiences and preserve personal archives, working with memory and restoring lost heritage. Participants trained themselves to immediately respond to an emergency by volunteering, organizing low-budget cultural events, using platforms to speak about their communities, and fundraising. The initiative also enabled Ukrainian artists to connect with national and international audiences, and supported community healing by providing therapeutic spaces to process collective trauma. Efforts to address longer-term resilience focused on securing studios, residencies and platforms that allowed displaced professionals to continue their work.

(re)connectionUA proved effective thanks to its operational flexibility, simplified reporting, and constant communication with grantees. Furthermore, the responsive and flexible funding approach addressed the funding gap left by the state in the culture sector, demonstrating an effective emergency-response mechanism.

The Navigation Programme for internally displaced artists

Hosted by the Jam Factory Art Centre, this women-led initiative supported artists who relocated to Lviv due to the war, with a significant focus on exiled women artists. It facilitated the professional integration of the displaced artists by providing access to professional networks and creating platforms showcasing their work. Participants also engaged with the numerous cultural institutions in Lviv. The initiative consisted of two 8-week editions and combined a structured integration programme with a series of public events. In the first edition in 2022, 7 out of the 17 participants were women, and in the second edition in 2023, 9 out of 11 participants were women.

Looking ahead, this experience suggests that future emergency-mitigation measures could include proactively supporting artists, cultural and heritage professionals who are requesting relocation from at-risk areas and working more closely with government evacuation plans. Although the initiative did not directly inform government policy, it created a scalable model for collaboration and rapid professional support that could be applied in future waves of cultural migration to the city. This model inspired the Lviv Municipal Art Center to implement a similar format, thus amplifying the project's impact at the local governance level.



RECOVERY: ENSURING THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE CULTURE SECTOR AND BEYOND

Shatha Altowai, *Scratched Identities. Yemen*, 2021. Women's experiences of migration, displacement and belonging are central themes in Shatha Altowai's artistic work. Here, three figures crowned with flowers evoke continuity and renewal, suggesting the enduring ties that connect women to their histories, communities and landscapes. © Shatha Altowai

Recovery processes refer to *“the restoring or improving of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities, of [an emergency]-affected community or society, aligning with the principles of sustainable development and “build back better”, to avoid or reduce future risk”*.⁷⁸ In the culture sector, recovery processes focus on **restoring cultural and creative infrastructure and ecosystems and on improving the livelihoods of artists, cultural and heritage professionals**. In the logic of “building back better”, it requires addressing structural and systemic issues that existed prior to the emergency, in order not to reproduce past fragilities and inequalities that could exacerbate risks of future threats. In addition to the sectoral benefits of facilitating the recovery of culture, culture itself plays a significant role in the overall recovery of society: it can support healing by addressing traumas, recovery of memories, heritage and identities, and bringing back a sense of lost normalcy. It can also mend broken ties among communities, promote social cohesion and has the power to revitalize tourism and economies, inform urban reconstruction, and help acknowledge diverse experiences of the past while generating new, inclusive narratives for the future to ensure that no one is left behind.

The full and meaningful inclusion and participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in early and longer term rebuilding and recovery processes offers a chance to embed gender-responsiveness in the very fabric of the sector’s reconstruction and is paramount to ensure that the culture sector – across its governance, infrastructures, practices – can successfully build back better and stronger, unleashing its diverse talents. To achieve this goal, recovery policies, strategies and plans must be intentionally designed with women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, address their specific needs and priorities as well as be monitored to determine the impact of such efforts to close gender gaps and correct their under-representation in the history and memory promoted through the culture sector.

More specifically, gender-responsive recovery in the culture sector requires:

- ▶ **Ensuring the active participation and leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals** in recovery decision-making spaces, within the culture sector and beyond, including in the design and implementation of recovery strategies and initiatives, in transitional justice mechanisms, and in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.
- ▶ **Undertaking gender-responsive policy and institutional reforms in and for the culture sector**, including measures to ensure decent working conditions for artists, cultural and heritage professionals, to strengthen their economic and social status as well as to protect their cultural rights, including freedom of expression and artistic freedom. The UNESCO publications – *Culture for All: A Toolkit for Gender Equality in Policymaking*, and the *Methodological Guide for the Participatory Development of a Law on the Status of the Artist* and its gender-transformative checklist – can provide valuable guidance in this regard.

- ▶ **Integrating women in museum and heritage rehabilitation, restoration, reconstruction and safeguarding plans**, both as part of the professional workforce and in decision-making positions to strengthen governance and ensure equitable and safe access for all to the rehabilitated/restored/rebuilt infrastructures. The UNESCO/World Bank Framework for Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery (CURE Framework) represents a valuable capacity-building tool in this regard (see Box 11).
- ▶ **Strengthening the cultural and creative industries** through investments in infrastructure, equipment and enabling environments, **while ensuring that cultural and creative content is free from gender bias and stereotypes** that can reinforce discrimination and inequalities.
- ▶ **Promoting safe workplaces in the culture sector** that actively prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment, both online and offline.
- ▶ **Rectifying the invisibility of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals** by ensuring that their works are fully integrated in the reconceptualization and redesign of cultural programmes, museum collections, galleries, libraries or archives, leading to more diversified experiences in representations of history, memory and identity and generating inclusive narratives for the future.
- ▶ **Supporting the safe return of forcibly displaced women artists, cultural and heritage professionals**, considering their specific needs and challenges.
- ▶ **Supporting, resourcing and involving women-led cultural initiatives and networks** in recovery efforts at all levels, recognizing their essential role as agents of change in relief, post-disaster and post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding.

This chapter explores the crucial leadership and participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency recovery processes, both within the culture sector and beyond, and provides inspiring examples of public institutions and civil society's initiatives which demonstrate the added value of involving women in rebuilding inclusive, resilient and sustainable culture sectors and societies.

5.1

WOMEN IN RECOVERY EFFORTS FOR CULTURE: AN UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

At the global normative level, the participation of women and their leadership in recovery efforts is articulated in the Gender Action Plan of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as in the Relief and Recovery pillar of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. However, the desk research and the survey findings reveal persistent gaps between these international commitments and their implementation. In particular, the role and value of culture in recovery efforts remains insufficiently recognized and women artists, cultural and heritage professionals continue to represent a largely untapped potential.

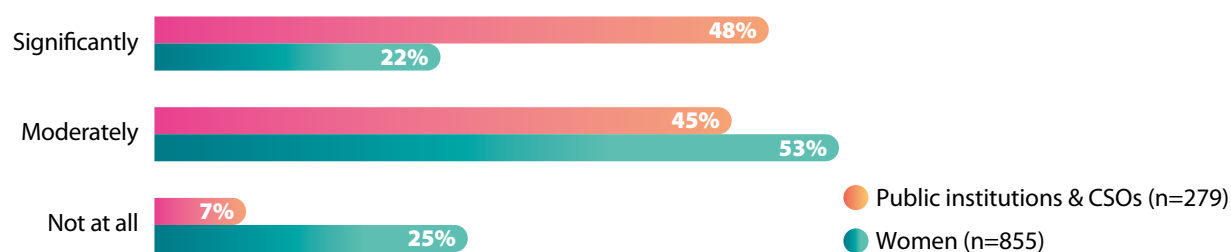
“ I believe it is crucial to strengthen community awareness campaigns about the importance of culture and heritage and the role of women in them, in order to break stereotypes and enable more women to participate effectively in recovery processes. ”

A woman cultural professional, State of Palestine (Gaza)

According to the survey findings, **3 out of 4 women respondents had reported participating in efforts to recover the loss of cultural heritage and expressions** following an emergency. Yet only 22 per cent indicated significant involvement and 25 per cent reported not participating at all (Figure 17). These findings are in stark contrast to the perceptions of public institutions and CSOs that think women significantly participate in recovery actions for culture to a much greater extent (48 per cent) (Figure 17). While the survey findings do not allow for a clear explanation of this discrepancy, several factors could come into play. Women may be more likely to perceive the existence of gender-related barriers preventing them from playing a more active role, or to assess their participation as less significant, especially if ‘significant participation’ is associated with decision making power and influence. This divergence hints at a **perception gap between how participation is assessed institutionally and how women evaluate their own participation**. In addition, evidence from other survey findings (Chapter 3) suggest gaps in institutional awareness of gender dynamics may further contribute to this divergence.

FIGURE 17. EXTENT OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN ACTIONS TO RECOVER THE LOSS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS (N=1134)

NB: Public institutions and CSOs’ responses assessed their perceptions of women’s participation, not their own involvement.



Survey testimonies highlight **numerous examples of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals actively taking part in cultural recovery**. In the aftermath of an armed conflict, such as in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon, women have notably been actively involved in restoring cultural sites and documenting intangible cultural heritage at risk. During health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, women mainly reported on their participation to inventory heritage at risk, fund raising, and developing online training and capacity-building initiatives. In countries that experienced disasters due to natural hazards, women respondents participated in post-disaster recovery workshops on cultural and heritage safety, rescuing museum collections in the wake of floods, and contributing to the design of disaster risk-reduction frameworks for culture, among other initiatives.

“ I have worked to develop a governance structure for dealing with disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the culture sector which involves intersecting work with other sectors. ”

A woman cultural heritage professional from the Caribbean working in a post-disaster context

“ Following the Beirut blast in 2020, I dedicated two years to recovery efforts aimed at protecting Lebanon’s cultural heritage. I was involved in initiatives to rehabilitate damaged cultural sites, support local artists, and document intangible cultural expressions that were at risk. In parallel, my PhD research focuses on a World Heritage Site in the light of geopolitical threats. Through both fieldwork and academic study, I worked to contribute meaningfully to the recovery and safeguarding of Lebanon’s cultural identity in times of crisis. ”

A woman cultural heritage professional, Lebanon

Testimonies from public institutions and CSOs provide additional information on their initiatives and resources to include women in cultural recovery actions. Public institutions, for example, reported on their actions to include women in heritage safeguarding teams and cultural emergency committees, often guided by national gender equality policies – when they exist. In addition, they referenced programmes combining mentorship and leadership development to increase the participation of women in the recovery of creative economy marketplaces. For their part, CSOs reported a range of actions, providing training, legal aid, relocation support, rebuilding studios, restoring materials, and reactivating festivals or community events that were once part of the cultural life of the country but were forced to close during emergencies.

Boxes 7, 8, 9 and 10 provide inspiration for public institutions and civil society actors on initiatives that integrate and value the active participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in recovery processes. They range from cultural strategies that mainstream gender equality, to economic empowerment through the safeguarding of living heritage practices, and heritage preservation and reconstruction efforts that challenge gender stereotypes.

GOOD PRACTICES

BOX 7: WOMEN AT THE FRONT LINES OF YEMEN'S HERITAGE RESTORATION AND CULTURAL RECOVERY

Since 2014, Yemen has experienced a protracted civil conflict, resulting in a widespread humanitarian crisis, the fragmentation of communities, and threats to cultural heritage, including looting and the destruction of sites. In response, UNESCO launched a flagship programme in 2022, in partnership with the European Union, aiming to train young people in the rehabilitation of historic buildings, employing cultural managers and operators, and supporting Yemeni civil society organizations in the culture sector.

To address persistent gender gaps, the programme prioritized women's active participation throughout implementation and monitoring actions. Specific indicators were established to ensure women's inclusion in community consultations and minimum participation quotas were applied in rehabilitation teams and in creative industry activities, including in leadership and supervisory roles. Equitable access to resources (e.g. tools, materials, transportation, pay and funding) was also monitored.

The programme included mapping of potential gender-related risks that could lead to violence against women and girls, such as work and training schedules that conflict with traditional divisions of labour and potentially increase women's risk of domestic violence. The programme integrated mitigation strategies and safeguards into its design, including the establishment of anonymous complaint mechanisms.

Lastly, the programme placed specific emphasis on integrating women's narratives into heritage institutions (e.g. in museum exhibitions) and their contributions to intangible cultural heritage safeguarding (e.g. craft techniques, oral history traditions, etc.).

In total, nearly 800 women were actively involved in the programme, benefitting from capacity-building and employment opportunities while challenging stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated fields. Taken together, these results demonstrate how gender equality, heritage safeguarding and creativity contribute to recovery processes to strengthen social cohesion and support economic empowerment for more resilient communities. Building on this approach, gender-responsive reconstruction could be replicated in post-emergency contexts in the culture sector.

Source: UNESCO. 2024. Social Justice Strategy for Women's Engagement in the Youth Employment Through Heritage and Culture in Yemen.

BOX 8: SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES WHILE ADDRESSING GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH RECOVERY IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

Led by the World Monuments Fund and funded by the British Council, the Syrian stonemasonry project sought to equip Syrian refugees displaced in Jordan and Lebanon, as well as locals, with traditional stonemasonry techniques for cultural rehabilitation. The project provided specialized training to more than eighty individuals, with women representing over 20 per cent of trainees. As stonemasonry has historically been a male-dominated field, the inclusion of women trainees marked a shift toward gender inclusivity in cultural heritage conservation.

Participants developed skills in stone carving, cleaning and repair, masonry conservation, and business planning, which prepared them for employment in the heritage sector, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. All trainees received certification upon completion of the programme.

Despite limited, stable opportunities for stonemasonry in Jordan and Lebanon, the project evaluation showed that several trainees had secured jobs or advanced their careers. Some went on to establish their own businesses in restoration and conservation, others participated in the rehabilitation of buildings damaged by the port explosion in Beirut or found employment in adjacent sectors. Beyond individual career outcomes, the programme generated broader socio-economic benefits, including increased awareness of gender equality and enhanced financial independence for participants, with several trainees reporting salary increases.

Among the lessons learned, women trainees highlighted that ‘having a [woman] in-country project manager made them more comfortable if they needed to be absent from training due to menstrual-related issues and childcare’. Several women also noted that initial anxieties around gender roles had diminished after trainers showed photographs of women working alongside men, suggesting that visible examples of women in similar roles can help challenge assumptions and build confidence. Lastly, feedback from male participants revealed that the presence of women had a positive influence on the programme. These insights suggest that gender-responsive training not only enhances overall learning environments but also contributes to more inclusive professional workplaces in the culture sector.

Sources: British Council. 2024. Cultural Protection Fund Annual Report 2023–2024. London, British Council, p.40. Sweeney, A. 2022. World Monuments Fund Evaluation Grant. London, British Council, pp. 9–27.

BOX 9: REVIVING THE SPIRIT OF MOSUL: URBAN RECOVERY WITH AND FOR WOMEN

Following the 2014 invasion by Daesh of Mosul – an Iraqi city renowned for its rich, well-preserved cultural heritage and a long-standing symbol of multiculturalism – 80% of the Old City was destroyed. In response, UNESCO launched the ambitious reconstruction campaign *Reviving the Spirit of Mosul* (2018-2025), with the support of the European Union. Heritage reconstruction, the resurgence of cultural life and the rehabilitation of education were identified as key drivers for the city's recovery, with gender equality mainstreamed in each of these three pillars.

The reconstruction of major heritage sites – including the iconic Al-Nouri Mosque and its Al-Hadba Minaret, the Convent of our Lady of the Hour and Al-Tahera Church, Al-Aghawat Mosque, as well as Al-Ekhllass school in the Old City – involved UNESCO hiring 30% Iraqi women engineers. An apprenticeship programme was also launched in fields of bricklaying, masonry, electrical installation and carpentry to support the rebuilding of 124 heritage houses in the Old City. More than 937 young men and women received this training. In addition, a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme reached 2,800 trainees, 18% of whom were women, equipping them with construction skills and securing access to local employment. Women's participation in these traditionally male-dominated fields helped challenge gender stereotypes while contributing meaningfully to post-conflict reconstruction.

“My mother didn't like the idea of me working on construction sites, where usually only men work. But she allowed me to do so when she came and saw other young women working here.”

Iman Taha, a woman working on restoration in Mosul

To revive Mosul's vibrant cultural scene, UNESCO and its partners also implemented a comprehensive plan to restore cultural life and institutions. This included a film lab, where students were trained in various aspects of film production. The initiative not only built professional skills but also challenged gender norms and opened new career opportunities for young women.

“I love filming as it reflects the situation of Mosul and to reach all around the world. Our community is a conservative one that objects the appearance of women on TV, this is a major challenge for us young women.”

Kawthar Ahmad Yassin, a woman studying in the film department of the College of Fine Arts

Source: UNESCO. 2025. *Revive the Spirit of Mosul. The rebirth of a city: a people's hope, a story of reconstruction 2018-2025.* Paris, UNESCO, pp. 6-24.

BOX 10: LEVERAGING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR RECOVERY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN EL SALVADOR

El Salvador's Civil War (1980–1992) resulted in mass displacement, economic instability and profound cultural disruption, uprooting local traditions and social networks, and leaving many communities struggling to recover both economically and socially. In the post-war period, various cultural initiatives were introduced to revitalize traditional crafts and restore local heritage as a means of social healing and economic empowerment.

In Guatajiagua, a town with a long tradition of producing black pottery primarily practised by women, a collaborative initiative supported women artisans and revitalized this emblematic craft. By recognizing black pottery as both a cultural symbol and an economic opportunity, the project expanded market access, increased household income and economic independence, and supported the transmission of Indigenous knowledge to younger generations, safeguarding an important intangible cultural heritage. By increasing women's visibility and leadership, it promoted gender-inclusive economic development, strengthened cultural identity and social cohesion, and contributed to post-conflict resilience.

Source: Wrobel, R. 2018. Culture in Post-Crisis Situations: Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Sustainable Recovery. Washington DC, World Bank, p. 15.

These examples demonstrate the positive impacts of implementing targeted measures for the full participation and leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in cultural recovery actions. However, more must be done to ensure that recovery processes are truly inclusive and that the culture sector is rebuilt without reproducing gender inequalities. Indeed, the survey findings **shows that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are far from being systematically and meaningfully involved in decision-making related to cultural recovery.**

Public institutions, who report more systematic participation in decision-making for cultural recovery (60 per cent) than CSOs (44 per cent), play a key role in shaping recovery governance. Yet findings from the survey indicate that public institutions tend to address gender equality less consistently than CSOs (Chapter 3), raising concerns that the priorities of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals may be sidelined. Testimonies further reveal that women's inclusion remains often partial, mostly limited to participation rather than actual decision-making power. When women are engaged through governance structures, such as formal coordination bodies, ministerial task forces or heritage-protection committees, their capacity to shape final decisions remains uneven. CSOs, for their part, described women's participation as largely advocacy-focused or consultative, with little access to formal decision-making. Barriers including limited institutional recognition, insufficient resources, and political constraints persist, with tangible consequences for gender-responsive recovery.

“Our organization, despite being actively involved on the ground through artistic, civic, and community projects, has not been included in the decision-making processes related to the cultural sector's recovery. This exclusion reflects a centralization of decisions, often far removed from the realities of rural areas like Dame-Marie, where we work. Yet, our local knowledge and our work with youth and women could enrich these processes and ensure a more inclusive and representative recovery.”

Eritye Wozo Ayiti (EWAYITI), Haiti

5.2 WOMEN IN RECOVERY EFFORTS BEYOND CULTURE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals play important roles in recovery efforts that extend well beyond the culture sector. Through artistic practice, cultural events and community-based activities, they advocate for social justice, preventing violence and promoting peace. They also bring critical perspectives to policy-making and governance, that not only shape more inclusive and sustainable approaches to recovery efforts but can raise awareness and advocate against practises and traditions that violate the human rights of women and girls that are justified on cultural grounds. In this sense, they are active agents of transformative recovery, challenging the structures and power dynamics that sustain gender inequalities to rebuild a more equal society.

“Women artists and cultural heritage professionals are engaged in overall recovery efforts in Kiribati, but their involvement is largely indirect. It stems from their roles as community leaders, their participation in broader women’s networks, and the government’s push for gender-inclusive policies. However, their specific skills and needs as cultural professionals are often not explicitly recognized or prioritized in these broader reconstruction, governance, or peace processes. Their significant contributions, particularly as custodians of crucial knowledge for resilience, are often integrated into recovery efforts on an informal level, but they are not yet fully empowered as a distinct professional group to influence and lead.”

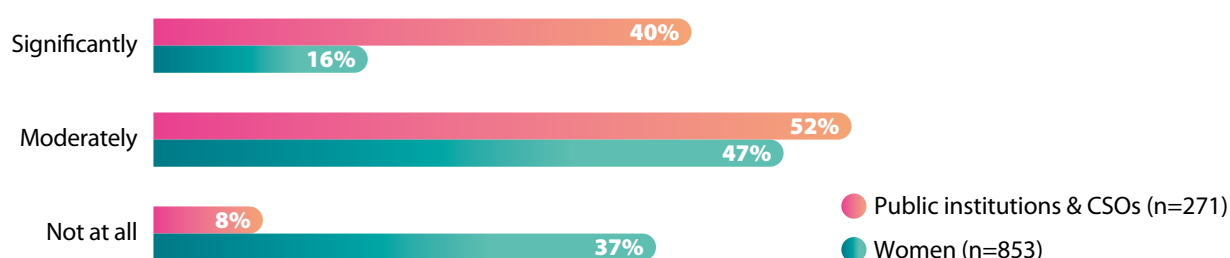
A cultural professional from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs, Kiribati

According to the survey results, **47 per cent of women respondents described their involvement in reconstruction, governance structures, peace processes, and other broad recovery efforts as moderate** and slightly less than 2 in 5 women did not participate in such efforts at all (37 per cent), revealing a substantial untapped opportunity. (Figure 18).

The survey data also reveals pronounced differences between the actual participation of women in recovery efforts beyond culture and the perceptions of their participation by public institutions and CSOs. Public institutions and CSOs (40 per cent) report more than twice the level of significant participation by women in reconstruction, governance structures, and peace processes than women report themselves (16 per cent). This perception gap requires attention: if the inclusion of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in overall recovery efforts is overestimated by public institutions and CSOs, they will be less likely to adopt and implement corrective measures.

FIGURE 18. EXTENT OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN RECOVERY EFFORTS BEYOND THE CULTURE SECTOR (N=1124)

NB: Public institutions and CSOs’ responses assessed their perceptions of women’s participation, not their own involvement.



Survey results indicate that, although women artists, cultural and heritage professionals had limited participation in culture-sector recovery efforts, their involvement in broader recovery actions was even more limited. Among the barriers most cited by surveyed women are a lack of time and energy as they prioritized survival, alongside the risk of displacement, restricted mobility and gender-based discrimination. For their part, public institutions and CSOs pointed to structural barriers limiting women’s participation in recovery processes, such as limited funding, the undervalued contribution of the overall culture sector, and the failure to formally recognize the contribution of women across different sectors of society.

For women artists, cultural and heritage professionals who did participate in broader recovery efforts, they most often use their cultural and creative work to help raise awareness of emergencies and ongoing recovery efforts, as a vehicle to support the most affected communities, rather than through formal roles in governance mechanisms.

Public institutions and CSOs corroborated these testimonies, describing women's contributions as cross-sectoral and community-driven. They highlighted how women artists, cultural and heritage professionals use their cultural expertise in areas such as education, health, and environmental restoration, often acting as facilitators who use creative methods for **psychosocial healing, community rebuilding and livelihood recovery** in the aftermath of emergencies. Many public institutions, for example, referred to initiatives in which women working in the culture sector were engaged with ministries of education and social welfare to deliver arts-based therapy, trauma-informed workshops and skills training for affected communities. While the role of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as facilitators of social cohesion and community resilience is invaluable, it should not come at the expense of their recognition as decision makers with institutional influence over recovery processes.

Public institutions and CSOs respondents emphasized the value of multi-sector partnerships that integrate cultural recovery within the fields of **urban regeneration and climate adaptation**, while ensuring the leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in both the design and implementation of reconstruction efforts (Box 11). Drawing on their expertise as architects, heritage and creative professionals, women contribute to rebuilding and preserving infrastructures, both in the immediate aftermath of an emergency and throughout longer-term recovery processes. Respondents also noted collaborations with environmental and agricultural initiatives, where intangible heritage, performance and cultural activities are used to promote sustainability, adaptation and collective recovery.

BOX 11: FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURE IN CITY RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY (CURE FRAMEWORK)

Elaborated by the World Bank and UNESCO, the CURE Framework is a culture-based approach to the process of city reconstruction and recovery in post conflict, post disaster and urban distress situations that accounts for the needs, values and priorities of all people. It emphasizes the role of culture not only in post-emergency city reconstruction and recovery, integrating people-centered and place-based policies, but also in strengthening a community's sense of belonging, the liveability of the built environment as well as reconciliation, through the (re)construction of cultural landmarks, monuments and other places of significance to communities. The CURE Framework notably highlights that people-centered strategies embedding gender equality are critical to strengthen community ownership and to accelerate the socio-economic recovery of cities leaving no one behind. In this context, ensuring the leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in city reconstruction and recovery is paramount not only to address their specific needs but also to meaningfully engage with them as agents of transformative change capable of harnessing the power of culture and creativity to address the roots of gender inequalities and build back better inclusive societies that are livable and enjoyable for all.

Source: UNESCO and World Bank. 2018. Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery.

“As a cultural heritage professional and architect, I have been indirectly involved in broader recovery efforts by linking heritage projects to developmental and community initiatives. Through a project on a heritage library, I documented and reimagined damaged buildings, which helped encourage some organizations to fund restoration projects. These efforts have also raised residents’ awareness of heritage as a bridge between physical reconstruction and social stability. I anticipate that the project will have a tangible impact on local development and community governance in the near future, even though its primary focus remains on cultural heritage.”

A woman cultural heritage professional, Syria

Lastly, the role of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals is also essential in **peacebuilding processes**. As recalled by the UN Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda,⁷⁹ which recognizes the central role played by women in conflict prevention and resolution, they are also agents of change needed to negotiate and implement inclusive peace agreements.⁸⁰ Testimonies collected through the survey support this claim and go further by attesting to the important role of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in advancing dialogue, reconciliation and collective healing through cultural and creative activities.

“I worked as a research anthropologist in the construction of a social network focused on populations with special constitutional protection, within the framework of one of the points of the Peace Process in Colombia.”

A woman artist and anthropologist, Colombia

“Through interactive theatre, I produced work aimed at collecting weapons and raising awareness about the necessity of peace.”

A woman artist from Sudan, displaced in a neighbouring country

This chapter demonstrates that while women artists, cultural and heritage professionals make substantial contributions to recovery, their work remains invisible, undervalued and marginalized, in times when all talents need to be mobilized for the reconstruction of resilient societies. The persistent gap between policy commitments and the actual participation and leadership of women in decision-making and governance mechanisms highlights structural barriers that continue to hamper recovery efforts. While it is encouraging that 112 countries have adopted a National Action Plan aligned with the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, including its Relief and Recovery pillar,⁸¹ these commitments have yet to be meaningfully translated into practice. UN Women’s Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub similarly pointed to limited progress in disaster risk reduction: though 92 countries have developed frameworks which include gender progress, only 16 countries highlight within their national-level frameworks that women and/or women’s organisations have meaningfully participated in policy, strategy, or plan development.⁸² These findings underscore the urgent need for governments to take concrete, enforceable steps to institutionalize and systematize women’s leadership and participation in cultural recovery and post-emergency governance, but also to mainstream gender equality across all recovery frameworks and actions, within and beyond the culture sector.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a light-colored top, sits alone in the center of a large, empty theater. The theater has rows of red upholstered seats and a wooden ceiling with recessed lights. The scene is dimly lit, with the focus on the woman.

NAVIGATING A MULTIFACETED CRISIS: WOMEN ARTISTS TAKE THE LEAD IN LEBANON

CASE STUDY

NAVIGATING A MULTIFACETED CRISIS: WOMEN ARTISTS TAKE THE LEAD IN LEBANON

Since 2019, Lebanon has faced an unprecedented multifaceted crisis, exacerbated by the Beirut port explosion in 2020. Total damage and economic losses are estimated at USD 14 billion.⁸³ Amid the escalation of hostilities in the Middle East and Lebanon in 2026, over 1.1 million people have been displaced⁸⁴ and 252 women were reported killed between March and April alone.⁸⁵

In the culture sector, many art spaces, particularly theatres and galleries, have closed, repurposed as shelters and distribution points for food and essential aid. The country's cultural heritage and urban fabric have been severely affected.

The Lebanese arts and cultural scene, encompassing music, visual arts, cinema and theatre, has remained resilient. Artists and cultural workers have adapted their practices to new realities, launched new initiatives and collectives, decentralized the art scene, and extended cultural activities beyond Beirut.⁸⁶ Following the appointment of a Minister of Culture in 2025, an unprecedented consultation process was launched with cultural and artistic organizations to develop a national cultural strategy, opening new avenues for recovery.

Women artists, cultural and heritage professionals have played a particularly important role during this period, echoing their pioneering contributions before, during and after the Civil War.

Li Beirut and women-centered initiatives for cultural recovery

In response to this multi-layered crisis, many women-led cultural initiatives have emerged. Largely driven for humanitarian and social support, they highlight the vital contribution of women during crises.

The initiative *Li Beirut* ('For Beirut') has been central to recovery efforts. This UNESCO-led international campaign, launched after the 2020 explosion, supports the recovery of educational institutions, cultural sites, creative industries and heritage buildings. *Li Beirut* included women-targeted initiatives, such as *Girls for Change*, a project led by the Beirut Film Society, which provided audiovisual training to 100 girls from the Beirut suburbs. The *BERYT* project, funded by the World Bank and implemented by UNESCO, helped revive cultural life in Beirut, recognizing the disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of youth, women and marginalized groups in the cultural and creative industries. Consequently, 139 cultural production projects were supported, with more than 5,200 direct beneficiaries, 47 per cent of whom were women, across all cultural sectors. Women accounted for 52 per cent of the beneficiaries in more traditional sectors, including crafts.

Equally noteworthy is the UNESCO and Baalbek International Festival collaboration launched in 2025 to empower women and girls through art education, costume design and capacity-building in festival management and production. This initiative supported the development of a gender-responsive strategy for the festival's management, that will promote gender equality and women's leadership in the performing arts.

“In Lebanon, women played and continue to play a significant role during recovery phases. Most of the active cultural NGOs (if not all) are women-led, and we have witnessed the impact of their contribution following the Beirut post-explosions and the recent conflict.”

Silat for Culture

Amalgam Studio engaging women in contemporary creativity

Established in 2015, Amalgam Studio, a non-profit organization, is the only alternative dance and movement space of its kind in Beirut. It addresses the lack of accessible, independent spaces for dance in Lebanon, offering a hub for experimentation and community-building. Women make up the majority of its core team, and around 80 per cent of its participants are women between the ages of 22 and 55. Amalgam is a transformative place, a safe space to release stress, to reconnect with one's body, and engage in collective healing. Here, dance is an essential means of empowerment and recovery amidst instability and limited infrastructure.

Amalgam launched its first initiative in 2024 in Karantina, a neighbourhood that was severely impacted by the blast. Over a three-month period, the studio collaborated with eight emerging artists and local residents, mainly women, culminating in a performance on 27 April 2024. This project brought art directly to the streets of Karantina, with women and children managing, hosting and participating in the performances. The initiative opened up a dialogue between the artists and the community, adopting more inclusive approaches to creation and participation.

Building on this experience, Amalgam is preparing new residencies that focus on themes of gender and care, while hosting weekly classes, monthly workshops and annual residencies. In June 2025, the studio marked its 10th anniversary, reaffirming its role as a vital hub for dance, artistic experimentation, and socially engaged performance in Beirut.

Feminist cultural space – Hunna

Founded in 2022, Hunna (Arabic: 'they' in the feminine form) is a feminist cultural space dedicated to supporting women artists, particularly those who are mothers. The initiative was founded by Flavia Juska Bechara, a visual artist and single mother of two daughters who, confronted with a lack of community support, decided to create a space where women could reconcile motherhood with their artistic practice.

Hunna's mission is to provide residencies, workshops and training, allowing mothers to develop their artistic projects in the presence of their children. It empowers women through creativity, networking and increased visibility. Based in Okaibeh, a coastal town where independent cultural spaces are rare, Hunna has become an accepted space within the local community.

In 2024, Hunna became an emergency centre for women: a collection point for donations and food distribution, offering volunteer support for displaced families. This brought together women from different communities, long separated by civil conflict. Hunna has contributed to social solidarity and intergenerational transmission of artistic and cultural activities. From this experience, a documentary film was produced, exploring the feelings of displaced women, and a visual research and archival project on the role of women during crisis over the past 100 years is under development.

This initiative supports the creation of more safe spaces for women artists, while highlighting women artists' leadership in recovery efforts, calling on policymakers to strengthen their support for community-level, women-led initiatives for culture.



PATHWAYS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN EMERGENCY EFFORTS

Zhanna Kadyrova, *Second Hand (series)*, Ukraine, 2019. Working from fragments of architectural environments, Zhanna Kadyrova reconfigures broken materials into sculptural forms. Tile garments assembled from discarded elements evoke urban and industrial memory, tracing cycles of decay and transformation in abandoned spaces.
© Zhanna Kadyrova

Drawing directly from the survey findings, this chapter presents priorities identified by the respondents to advance gender equality in culture and in emergency preparedness, response and recovery actions.

The survey data shows that advancing gender equality in emergencies cannot be achieved through single, standalone interventions. Instead, it relies on a set of connected pathways that work together across the different emergency phases and reflect the shared responsibilities of key stakeholders. These pathways highlight that women should not only be recognized as victims or beneficiaries of support but as active participants and leaders in decision-making and emergency management to ensure that interventions are effective, inclusive and sustainable.

As the chapter unfolds, it becomes evident that while perceptions are not always aligned between women respondents, public institutions and CSOs, there is strong convergence on future priorities. At the same time, the specific required actions vary depending on the type of emergency and the specific roles of the stakeholders involved. To explore these priorities, the chapter is structured around three sections. The first examines policy pathways that address structural and governance priorities, integrating the leadership and participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, and adopting gender-responsive emergency frameworks. The second focuses on operational pathways including immediate measures to support the livelihoods of women in the culture sector, address their safety concerns, and ensure their ability to continue their cultural and creative work during emergencies. These policy and operational pathways are complementary, reflecting two distinct but mutually reinforcing modes of interventions. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a thematic focus on recovery pathways, opening the discussion on how to build back better. It highlights the importance of women's meaningful participation and leadership in rebuilding processes by integrating their needs and contributions into recovery frameworks and amplifying their voices and narratives post-emergency.

6.1 POLICY PATHWAYS

Policy pathways to gender equality in emergency contexts focus on addressing structural and governance barriers that limit women's participation and leadership in the culture sector. When asked to identify the most urgent policy actions and reforms needed to support women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, women respondents ranked **ensuring their significant participation in decision-making spaces for emergency preparedness, response and recovery** (57 per cent) as the top priority (8 percentage points more than men), (Figure 19). This priority remained consistent across all types of emergencies.

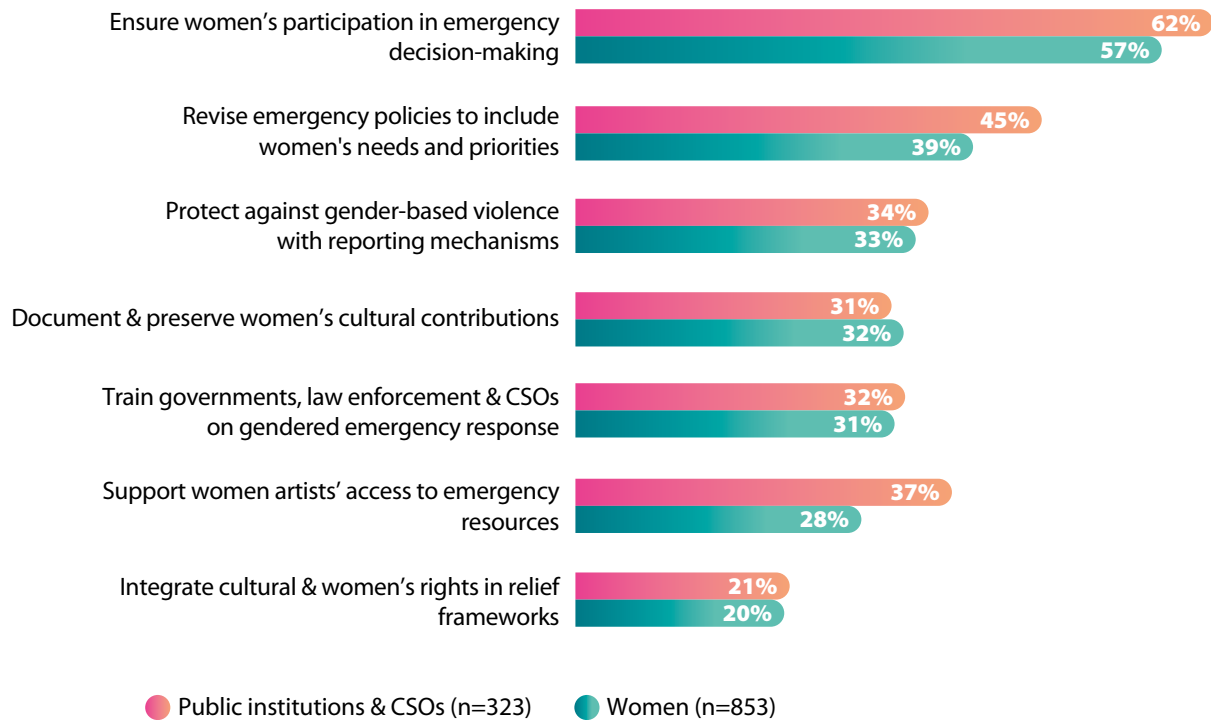
Closely linked to this, the second-ranked priority identified by women artists, cultural and heritage professionals was the **revision of emergency policies and measures to better include their needs and priorities upstream** (39 per cent). This indicates that women respondents perceived current emergency frameworks, including those for culture, as not sufficiently reflecting their lived realities.

The third-ranked priority among women respondents was identified as **strengthening protection against gender-based violence and harassment**, including functioning reporting mechanisms (33 per cent). This finding echoes broader survey results showing that emergencies significantly expose women to violence, harassment and insecurity, directly affecting their ability to work, participate in public and cultural life, and survive in emergency contexts (Chapter 2, section 2.3). The survey further revealed that protection against gender-based violence becomes even more crucial during specific emergencies, with almost two in five women respondents reporting it as the top priority in situations of non-armed conflict (e.g. civil unrest, riots, etc.), closely followed with armed conflicts and health crises. While heightened risks of gender-based violence affect all women, those who are more politically engaged, as well as those from minority or vulnerable groups, are likely to face even greater risks in emergency settings.

Following this third priority are two additional actions ranked at almost identical levels of importance by women respondents. One is **documenting and preserving their contributions to culture** e.g. oral history projects, digital archives, exhibitions (32 per cent), which women rated as twice as important as men, suggesting their awareness of their own invisibility and the challenges it creates. The other is the need to **train governments, law enforcement and civil society organizations in gender-responsive emergency preparedness** (31 per cent), ensuring that these actors duly address the specific needs and contributions of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. This finding is particularly noteworthy given the pressing need to strengthen institutional gender awareness (Chapter 3).

There is strong alignment among the top two priorities identified by women respondents and those highlighted by public institutions and CSOs. Public institutions and CSOs emphasized the need to significantly upscale the participation and leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in decision-making spaces for emergency management (62 per cent), as well as the revision of emergency frameworks to make them gender-responsive (45 per cent) (Figure 19). However, the third-ranked priority differed between public institutions and CSOs, likely reflecting the different roles they play in emergency contexts. For public institutions, supporting women's access to emergency resources alongside targeted gender-responsive training for governments, law enforcement and CSOs were viewed as most important. CSOs, by contrast, prioritized protection against gender-based violence and access for women to emergency resources, pointing to their focus on immediate protection and frontline response.

FIGURE 19. MOST URGENT POLICY ACTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS IN EMERGENCY CONTEXTS (N=1176)



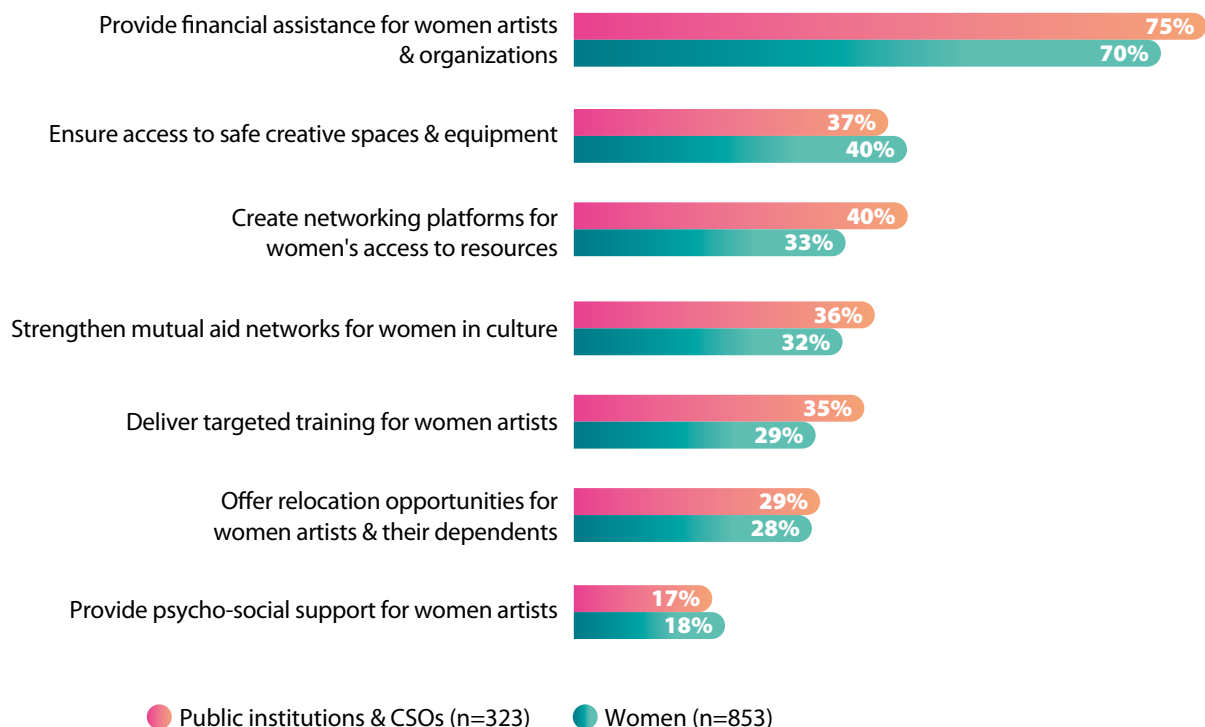
6.2 OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS

As was the case with policy pathways, survey responses revealed strong alignment between women respondents, public institutions and CSOs regarding the most urgent operational action required in emergency contexts. Both respondent groups identified **financial assistance mechanisms targeting women artists, cultural and heritage professionals**, including for women-led organizations and networks in the culture sector, as the main priority (70 per cent for women respondents, 75 per cent for public institutions and CSOs) (Figure 20). As discussed in Chapter 2, emergencies severely impact income, resulting in financial precarity and affecting the ability of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to continue their creative work and participate in cultural life. Economic support is therefore prioritized above all other forms of assistance.

As the second-ranked priority, women respondents emphasized the need to **ensure their access to safe spaces, materials and equipment for creation and performance** (40 per cent), suggesting that their work environments are not only disrupted but unsafe.

The four following priorities each account for roughly 30 per cent, suggesting that they hold a similar level of importance for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. These include the **creation of networking platforms** to improve their access to emergency resources, **strengthened mutual aid networks**, targeted **training opportunities**, and **relocation options** for them and their dependents. It should be noted that while financial assistance mechanisms and access to safe workspaces consistently ranked as the top priorities during armed conflicts, the provision of relocation opportunities clearly emerged as the third priority, in response to the immediate threats to women's personal safety and mobility constraints. Targeted **psycho-social support** is the lowest ranked priority (18 per cent) across all types of emergencies, even though trauma and burnout were identified by women respondents as the second major consequence of emergencies (Chapter 2, section 2.3). This suggests a possible de prioritization of psycho-social support during emergencies, with women perceiving it as less urgent than economic and physical security. However, this does not imply that it is any less important; rather, it is likely postponed under emergency conditions.

FIGURE 20. MOST URGENT OPERATIONAL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS IN EMERGENCY CONTEXTS (N=1176)



Public institutions diverged from CSOs regarding their second-ranked priority. Public institutions tended to view strengthening mutual aid networks and providing targeted training for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals as important, while CSOs assessed the need to prioritize networking platforms to connect women to emergency resources and ensuring their access to safe spaces, materials and equipment. In this regard, relevant local, community-based initiatives cited by respondents include the work of the grassroots, women-led organization HOPDEV in Malawi, the Afghan Youth Voice Association in Afghanistan, and the civil society organization Contenedor de Arte A.C. in Mexico. Their **interventions span the entire emergency cycle** to empower women artists and artisans, an approach that is particularly important to ensure sustained support and transformative results.

“Through our programs, women artisans have been trained and supported to produce traditional crafts, which safeguard cultural heritage and provide income opportunities. During emergencies, we facilitated mutual aid groups that allowed women to share materials, skills, and market information, helping them sustain their creative livelihoods despite challenging conditions. After crises, we organized workshops and community events that revived cultural traditions and encouraged women’s leadership in cultural preservation.”

Hope of Refugee Women Against Poverty for the Social Wellbeing (HOPDEV), Malawi

“In 2019, we organized workshops and community programmes focused on preserving traditional cultural practices, where many women artists actively contributed by sharing their knowledge and skills. During emergencies, AYVA worked to provide safe spaces and resources for women to continue their artistic work despite challenges. After crises, we facilitated cultural recovery activities, including exhibitions and storytelling events that highlighted women’s roles and experiences.”

Afghan Youth Voice Association (AYVA), Afghanistan

“Prior to emergencies, we worked on capacity-building programmes aimed at empowering women in the cultural sector with skills in heritage safeguarding and preservation, digital archiving, and advocacy. During emergencies, we coordinated rapid response efforts to support women artists and cultural workers affected by crises. This included providing safe spaces for artistic expression, facilitating access to emergency funding, and organizing virtual platforms to maintain community connections and cultural activities despite physical restrictions. In the recovery phase, we have focused on inclusive cultural revitalization projects that centre women’s experiences and contributions. Our initiatives promote the documentation and celebration of women’s roles in safeguarding cultural heritage, ensuring their voices are represented in exhibitions, archives, and public narratives.”

Contenedor de Arte A.C., Mexico

6.3

PATHWAYS FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE RECOVERY

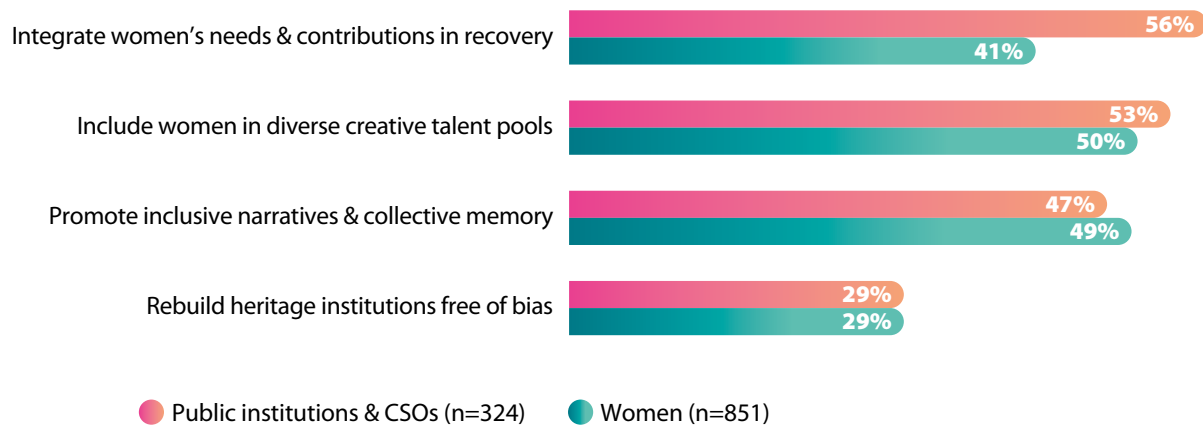
Recovery as a transformative phase is an opportunity to rebuild the culture sector in a more inclusive and sustainable way. The integration of all voices and perspectives from women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in early and longer term rebuilding and recovery processes thus offers a chance to embed gender-responsiveness in the very fabric of the sector's reconstruction.

Women respondents prioritized **their inclusion in diverse creative talent pools** to fully participate in the rebuilding of heritage sites, the production, exhibition and curation of cultural expressions in their country (50 per cent, Figure 21). This reflects their concerns of exclusion from work opportunities and sustaining their creative livelihoods. Another priority was to fully participate in the **development and promotion of inclusive narratives and collective memories** that are reflected not only in the programmes but also the collections of cultural institutions (49 per cent). Finally, **the integration of their own needs in the design and implementation of recovery frameworks** (41 per cent) was identified as the third most important avenue to ensure their access to leadership positions, decision making spaces, resources and long-term opportunities to pursue their cultural and creative work, bringing real change and not just symbolic representation after the fact. These three priorities point to a clear demand for a more visible and participatory approach to recovery that would enable women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to actively shape their immediate present and future, rather than merely restoring pre-emergency structures that once excluded them.

Interestingly, the results show some **differences depending on the type of emergency experienced**. In armed and non-armed conflicts (e.g. civil unrest, riots), developing and promoting inclusive narratives and collective memories became the number one priority of women respondents. This suggests that women view recovery as deeply connected to how their contributions and experiences are documented and influence the future, memories, heritage and identities of their communities. They expressed concern that their voices might be marginalized or erased during reconstruction and recovery processes, a phenomenon that is particularly acute during situations of conflict where official cultural memory projects tend to focus on male-dominated narratives of nation building. Such exclusions not only erase women's stories but also weaken the collective memory of communities. As a result, future generations may be left with an incomplete picture of their history, perpetuating gender stereotypes and inequalities. For women respondents experiencing disasters caused by natural hazards, their inclusion in diverse creative talent pools was the most important. These patterns suggest that recovery priorities should be assessed in relation to the specific nature of the emergency experienced.

When asked about priority actions to support women artists, cultural and heritage professionals after an emergency, most public institutions and CSOs identified as their top priority the integration of women's specific needs and contributions into recovery frameworks. When viewed separately, public institutions were even more likely to emphasize this, with 63 per cent selecting it as the main required action. By contrast, CSOs ranked the inclusion of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in diverse creative talent pools as their first priority (56 per cent). One could argue that this divergence occurs because public institutions are agents of long-term structural change, responsible for the policy integration of women in recovery frameworks, whereas CSOs provide for more direct, operational opportunities for women leaders to participate in rebuilding efforts. Together, they represent complementary ways of including women's needs and contributions in recovery efforts, while ensuring their active leadership and participation.

FIGURE 21. PRIORITY ACTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS AFTER AN EMERGENCY (RECOVERY PHASE) (N=1175)



Overall, the general alignment among respondents on policy, operational, and recovery pathways underscores the need to strengthen cooperation for their effective implementation, **combining immediate protective measures with longer-term institutional reforms**. This alignment must be understood in light of the uneven distribution of resources, scope and decision-making authority among stakeholders. Addressing these disparities calls for building on existing networks, resources and proven, replicable initiatives. Taken together, these different pathways can prevent the reproduction of pre-existing inequalities and foster a more inclusive and resilient culture sector. They emphasize that advancing gender equality depends on **coordinated action across all phases of emergency**: policy pathways focus on inclusive governance, operational pathways address women's safety and livelihoods during emergencies, while recovery pathways consolidate rebuilding processes by integrating women's knowledge, expertise and narratives. This integrated approach can only be sustained through the institutionalization and **mainstreaming of the participation and leadership of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals at all levels**, enabling them to have equal access to governance, resources, protection, and accountability mechanisms that can be enforced, monitored and evaluated.



PILOTING A GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACH IN THE POST-DISASTER ASSESSMENT OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS IN BAHÍA BLANCA, ARGENTINA

As a result of the devastating floods that struck the city of Bahía Blanca in Argentina in March 2025, causing unprecedented human and material losses, including to cultural infrastructure, UNESCO deployed a mission to assess the impact on the culture sector, with a focus on gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors.⁸⁷ In addition to standard site inspections, stakeholder interviews and data collection, the mission employed a qualitative approach, enhanced with specific questions and indicators on gender dynamics to understand how the floods and their aftermath had disproportionately impacted women artists and cultural professionals.

The mission revealed that pre-existing gender inequalities were exacerbated by the disaster. With women making up the majority of staff in libraries, arts schools and many cultural spaces, they played a key role during the emergency and in recovery efforts, leading the logistics and operations and ensuring the continuity of services. For example, women working at the Municipal Theatre, the librarians of the José Hernández Popular Library, and the teachers of Motor Colectivo continued their work and supported the students. Their leading role resulted in work overload combined with emotional exhaustion, as they frequently assumed additional caregiving and social support responsibilities towards community members. This extra burden on women, described by participants as ‘mothering’ the institution, came on top of their regular work duties and family responsibilities, and was observed in mixed-gender settings, not only in women-dominated teams.

In contrast to women’s leading role in cultural production and community resilience efforts, the mission noted their historical under-representation in certain cultural narratives and domains (e.g. in museum collections).

The emergency was also found to have a disproportionate impact on women artists, particularly among those living in economic precarity, and who have family and care responsibilities. These structural barriers limited their ability to participate in recovery measures or resume their artistic practices.

Finally, the investigation found a critical lack of sex-disaggregated data in most of the institutions surveyed, including on the representation and participation of women in cultural life, as well as an absence of local support programmes for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and a gap in institutional mechanisms for integrating a gender lens into disaster-response efforts, calling for more targeted policy interventions.

The Bahía Blanca mission demonstrated how vital it is to include a gender perspective in post-disaster assessments of the cultural and creative sectors. More than quantifying physical damage, it reveals how emergencies intensify social vulnerabilities and existing gender dynamics, and it highlights the instrumental role that cultural workers – particularly women – play in community resilience.

It also confirms the usefulness of integrating gender indicators in risk needs assessment (RNA) and post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) processes. A contextualized online survey for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals – or selected context-specific gender questions – can be embedded as a standard component of all rapid assessment missions. These gender questions can notably be included in interviews with partners and beneficiaries of recovery and reconstruction projects or programmes, or in assessment focus groups. The findings can help develop emergency response and recovery measures that specifically address the needs of women working in the culture and creative sector. To ensure this process is fully effective, it would also be important to equip cultural and emergency officers conducting such missions with training on gender equality – an essential foundation for developing more equitable and impactful cultural recovery strategies.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Maryam Firuzi, *Reading for Tehran streets (series)*. Iran, 2014. By staging herself reading in the streets of Tehran, Maryam Firuzi proposes the street as a space to project individual imagination, suggesting that personal experiences can intersect to create a collective memory of place. © Maryam Firuzi

As the first UNESCO report to examine the gender dynamics in the culture sector in emergency contexts, *Voices of Courage* draws on data from a global survey that provides concrete evidence of the lived experiences and testimonies of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals. It is further informed by the expertise of public institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) operating at the critical intersection of gender equality, culture and emergency management. In this sense, the report provides a global overview of the situation of women working in culture across a diversity of emergency settings.

One finding emerges clearly: **women artists, cultural and heritage professionals play a central yet persistently undervalued role across all phases of an emergency.** Despite their significant contributions to preparedness, response and recovery – within and beyond the culture sector – women remain largely excluded from formal decision-making processes, institutional mechanisms, and governance structures. Moreover, support models too often fail to meaningfully take into account their specific needs, priorities, and experiences. Women in the culture sector carry the double burden of a sector that is sidelined in humanitarian response, underfunded in development, and marginalised in recovery processes and they remain underrepresented in decision-making at every level.

This gap between women's contributions and their recognition and influence in emergencies represents **a critically missed opportunity for culture, and for societies at large.** Emergencies present opportunities for transformative change. Recovering from a conflict or a disaster can open the door to new ways of working, thinking, and imagining the future. To rebuild enabling and vibrant cultural environments that benefit all, key questions must be addressed:

What does an inclusive and resilient culture sector for all look like when it is built *for* and *with* women?

Have women artists, cultural and heritage professionals been actively involved in the design and implementation of solutions for the culture sector from the very beginning?

Have women's specific needs, roles and contributions been fully recognized and incorporated into said solutions?

As a first step towards an answer, *Voices of Courage* points to the **urgent need for a more comprehensive, flexible, and well-resourced support landscape for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.** Emergency management in the culture sector should be conceived as an interconnected ecosystem, activated across preparedness, response and recovery phases, and powered by the strengths of all stakeholders – from women's organizations and networks, local and international NGOs, professional organizations from the culture sector, as well as cultural and other public institutions. This approach includes breaking down structural barriers and gender stereotypes, allowing women to actively participate and lead in emergencies, and to systematically mainstream a gender perspective in all interventions and governance frameworks. Falling short at any stage risks reinforcing existing inequalities, whereas progress on one pathway can strengthen others.

Advancing gender equality in emergencies is therefore not only a matter of responding to emergencies. **It is a prerequisite for building back better.** It strengthens cultural resilience and relief, safeguards cultural rights, traditional practices and living heritage, fosters creativity, including through the protection of artistic freedom and, ultimately, shapes more inclusive societies in the long term.

Building on the report's key findings, and drawing on the pathways put forward by respondents to the global survey (Chapter 6), *Voices of Courage* calls on all stakeholders involved in emergency management in and for the culture sector to implement the following recommendations.

Recommendations for policymakers

For policymakers, advancing gender equality in emergencies means ensuring that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals are systematically included as leaders and experts in governance and decision-making processes. This includes institutionalizing women's participation and adopting gender-responsive emergency frameworks that address the specific concerns of women around safety and livelihoods and includes their contributions in support of long-term transformations rather than reproducing existing inequalities.

- ▶ **Strengthen participation in decision-making** spaces for emergency management within and beyond culture, by embedding the perspectives of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and by addressing structural barriers to their leadership at all levels.
- ▶ **Adopt and/or revise emergency frameworks** that integrate the needs and priorities of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals across preparedness, response and recovery, reflecting their lived realities and contributions.
- ▶ **Develop and/or strengthen gender-responsive support mechanisms** – including financial, psychosocial, legal and mobility assistance, and access to safe spaces and equipment – based on a gender needs assessment.
- ▶ **Support and enhance civil society's initiatives in the field** for women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and build comprehensive and coordinated protection systems for the culture sector in collaboration with, *inter alia*, cultural institutions, CSOs, women's organizations and networks.
- ▶ **Ensure protection and accountability** by addressing the heightened risks of gender-based violence and safety concerns during emergencies – both online and offline – through policy safeguards, reporting mechanisms and coordination with all relevant stakeholders.
- ▶ **Systematically collect and monitor data** on the culture sector, including sex-disaggregated data and information on gender inequalities with particular attention to minority and vulnerable groups, before, during and after emergencies, to close evidence gaps, inform evidence-based policy-making and track progress.
- ▶ **Establish evaluation and accountability mechanisms to assess the implementation of gender-responsive emergency actions** in the culture sector, including leadership and meaningful participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.
- ▶ **Raise awareness and build capacities on gender equality** among decision-makers in the public sector working at the intersections of culture, disaster risk reduction, conflict and violence prevention.

Recommendations for public cultural institutions

Public cultural institutions play a vital role in translating policy into practice. They ensure that women artists, cultural and heritage professionals feel safe, supported and able to sustain their livelihoods during and after emergencies by offering financial assistance, access to creative spaces, inclusion in diverse creative talent pools, and possibilities to continue to create, safeguard and rebuild heritage and culture. They also play a key role in ensuring that women's narratives are documented, reflecting women's experiences and strengthening the collective memory for a more inclusive future.

- ▶ **Support women's livelihoods and participation in cultural life** by establishing sustainable and flexible emergency funding mechanisms, ensuring safe and enabling working environments for the continuity of cultural and creative work, and systematically including women in talent pools and recovery initiatives to revive cultural expressions, safeguard living heritage and rebuild heritage sites, museums and cultural institutions.
- ▶ **Rectify the invisibility of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals** by ensuring that their creative voices and experiences are documented, represented and visible in post-emergency cultural narratives and cultural programming, leading to more diversified representation of history, memory and identities.
- ▶ **Strengthen institutional preparedness** by building capacity to respond to emergencies in ways that recognize the specific needs, expertise and contributions of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals.

Recommendations for civil society organizations (CSOs)

CSOs play a crucial role in bridging the lived experiences of women and institutional responses in emergency contexts. By strengthening networking platforms, supporting mutual aid, and coordinating advocacy, training, monitoring and research, they help women artists, cultural and heritage professionals access essential resources and ensure their needs, expertise and contributions remain visible throughout preparedness, response and recovery.

- ▶ **Facilitate access and connection** by creating networking platforms linking women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to emergency resources, opportunities and information.
- ▶ **Strengthen mutual aid and collective support** by implementing emergency protection mechanisms that support women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, complementing institutional responses and promoting joint action with humanitarian actors and human rights defenders.
- ▶ **Provide gender-responsive training and capacity-building** that address the need for skills, mobility and resilience of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals before, during and after emergencies.
- ▶ **Advocate for gender-responsive emergency frameworks and policies** that are informed by the experiences of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, and reflect the realities they face across emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

Recommendations for the United Nations

Among the main conclusions of this study is that advancing gender equality in the culture sector before, during and after emergencies cannot be achieved through single, standalone interventions whether at the local, regional or global level. It requires a set of interconnected pathways, with stakeholders at all levels that work together across the different emergency phases. This means stronger coordination and engagement between all cultural, gender equality, humanitarian and development actors at the international level.

The United Nations system provides an international normative and policy framework addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus as well as various standard setting instruments that, taken together, can address the intersections of gender equality and culture at each stage of the emergency cycle on preparedness, response and recovery (see Annex 1).

Beyond their standard-setting role, UN entities – particularly UNESCO – also play a critical part in research and advocacy to inform policy change and to support the design and implementation of operational programmes and interventions on the ground to protect the rights and livelihoods of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and to promote their participation and leadership in emergency settings.

- ▶ **Advocate for culture in the Pact for the Future and in the global development agenda** beyond 2030 as a lever to advance gender equality within the culture sector and beyond.
- ▶ **Integrate culture into the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**, including the rights, priorities, and contributions of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in conflict and emergencies prevention, response, and peacebuilding.
- ▶ **Further strengthen gender-responsive approaches for culture in emergency settings** by systematically integrating gender equality considerations from the outset in all programmes and interventions, by promoting women-led initiatives and networks, by assessing and addressing the specific needs of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals, and by developing innovative pathways to ensure the leadership and participation of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals at all stages of the emergency cycle.
- ▶ **Support the capacity-building of Member States** on how to translate international commitments at the intersections of culture, gender equality and emergencies into concrete policies, frameworks and support mechanisms at the preparedness, response and recovery levels that both address the needs of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals and favor their meaningful engagement and leadership.



ANNEXES

Foteini Zaglara, *Not every house is a home*. Greece, 2025. A woman stands within a house traced in barbed wire, where symbols of shelter and confinement collide. Through this juxtaposition, Foteini Zaglara reflects on the spaces women are expected to call home and on the fragile balance between protection, autonomy and control. © Foteini Zaglara

8.1

INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS ADDRESSING THE INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY, EMERGENCIES AND CULTURE

The case for advancing gender equality in culture and emergency contexts is articulated across several international standard-setting and policy frameworks as well as strategies and action plans progressively developed by the international community in the areas of human rights and gender equality, humanitarian action, and culture. Together, these various instruments underscore a firm commitment to protecting and promoting women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency settings, supporting their inclusion in the elaboration of solutions for the culture sector and enhancing the role of culture and heritage for peace and resilience backed by a normative and policy landscape.

Among the key human rights instruments:

- ▶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- ▶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- ▶ International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- ▶ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- ▶ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), resulting from the UN World Conference on Women
- ▶ General Comment No.21 of the Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the Right to take place in cultural life (2009)
- ▶ General Comment No.34 of the Human Rights Committee on Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on Freedoms of opinion and expression (2011)

Among the key instruments in the field of culture:

- ▶ Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999)
- ▶ Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970)
- ▶ Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)
- ▶ Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist (1980)
- ▶ Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001)
- ▶ Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)
- ▶ Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)
- ▶ Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011)
- ▶ Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society (2015)
- ▶ Strategy for Reinforcing UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict (2015) and its Addendum (2017) on disasters and its associated Action Plan

Among the key instruments in the field of emergencies and humanitarian action:

- ▶ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda (2000)
- ▶ General Recommendation No. 30 of the CEDAW Committee on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (2013)
- ▶ UN Security Council Resolution 2347 on the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict (2017)
- ▶ General Recommendation No. 37 of the CEDAW Committee on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (2018)
- ▶ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework (Sendai GAP) (2024)

8.2

TEMPLATE OF THE UNESCO GLOBAL SURVEY

The template reproduces the questions included in the global survey “Women, Culture & Emergencies” distributed to individuals as well as public institutions and CSOs. It is presented as a tool for interested stakeholders to help them develop their own questionnaires tailored to specific contexts and/or to incorporate specific themes into other information-gathering methods (focus groups, interviews, etc.) used to contribute to comprehensive needs assessments including a gender equality dimension and to support more informed decision-making in the design, implementation, and evaluation of preparedness, response and/or recovery actions for the culture sector.

To access the template, scan the QR code or visit the following link:

https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2026/06/UNESCO_WOMEN_21x27_ANNEXE_EN.pdf



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13. 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.
14. Such as the 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist, the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, and the 2015 Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society.
15. See UNESCO, Outcome Document MONDIACULT 2025; UNESCO, Final Declaration, MONDIACULT 2022.
16. Including notably the 1994 UN World Conference on Women and the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity* (1995) and the 1998 Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development resulting in the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan as well as the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.
17. Self-selection refers to a sampling method in which respondents voluntary participate in the survey.
18. The survey was available in the six official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Some of the responses were submitted in Italian, Portuguese, Thai or Ukrainian. In total, responses were submitted in 10 different languages.
19. The survey yielded 2,839 responses, of which 1,470 were usable. The data cleaning process excluded responses of participants under 18 years old, who reported not being affected by an emergency, or submitted duplicate or invalid information. Respondents who did not identify as a man or a woman were also excluded, as the sample size was too small to allow for meaningful trend analysis (n=22).
20. Becker, R. 2022. *Gender and Survey Participation: An Event History Analysis of the Gender Effects of Survey Participation in a Probability-Based Multi-Wave Panel Study with a Sequential Mixed-Mode Design*, Methods, Data, Analyses. Vol. 16, No. 1. Bern, University of Bern, p. 4.
21. The self-defined minorities according to ethnic and Indigenous groups, racial groups, immigration status (e.g. refugees, immigrants, diasporas), disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, and other intersecting minority identities.
22. The informal cultural sector refers to cultural and creative work not covered or insufficiently covered by formal employment contracts or social security coverage and constitutes a widespread and persistent feature of cultural labour markets in both developing and advanced economies. Cultural and creative occupations tend to be disproportionately affected by informal employment. See ILO. 2023. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A statistical update*. Geneva, ILO. Additional sources indicate that "informal volunteers are more likely to be women".

See also UN Volunteers. 2026. *Gender and Volunteering*, Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism. <https://knowledge.unv.org/theme/gender-and-volunteering> (Accessed 20 April 2026).

23. Health crises covered mostly the COVID-19 pandemic, and responses were reviewed on a case-by-case basis. When the health crisis is removed from the dataset, different trends emerge. Where necessary for analytical clarity, responses pertaining to health crises were excluded to obtain more a more accurate analysis. Otherwise, when trends aligned, health-crisis responses were included to increase the sample size for analysis.

24. UNESCO actively supported the culture sector during the COVID-19 pandemic while researching and monitoring its impact on artists, cultural and heritage professionals. As a result, this dimension is not the primary focus of the present report. For more detailed information, reference can be made to UNESCO's global response to the COVID-19 pandemic including the global Resiliart movement, the #ShareOurHeritage global campaign and the monitoring tools, data, policy guidance and specific UNESCO publications developed to inform decision-making and strengthen international cooperation for COVID-19 response and recovery in culture.

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UNESCO sincerely thanks all respondents to the 2025 Global Survey on Women, Culture and Emergencies, in particular the individuals who had the courage and the time to share their testimonies, hopes, and expectations with us while living in emergency situations that threaten their lives and livelihoods. It is thanks to their contributions that this report was made possible, and we hope that it will amplify their voices and inspire new approaches that better protect women artists, cultural and heritage professionals in emergency contexts.

From armed conflicts and civil unrest to disasters and health crises, emergencies hit women harder – and the culture sector is no exception. At the same time, the contributions of women artists, cultural and heritage professionals to cultural life and safeguarding heritage in emergency settings remain overlooked, and their creative voices are far too often absent from spaces where cultural and emergency decisions are made.

To shed light on their realities, UNESCO invited artists, cultural and heritage professionals, policymakers, emergency responders and civil society actors worldwide to participate in its first global survey on women, culture and emergencies. Drawing on testimonies, case studies, and new data, this report serves as a sounding board for the experiences of women in the culture sector across the emergency cycle.

It offers unique evidence, practical guidance and recommendations to policymakers, public cultural institutions, and civil society to design inclusive emergency frameworks and support mechanisms – ones that protect women's human rights, including their cultural rights, respond to their specific needs, and provide them with access to leadership, decision-making spaces, networks and targeted resources.



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