



President of the General Assembly 79th Session



United Nations General Assembly High-level Interactive Dialogue on Culture and Sustainable Development

“Connecting cultures in the digital era”

Wednesday, 21 May 2025, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Trusteeship Council Chambers, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

Background

In accordance with General Assembly Resolution 78/161, entitled Culture and sustainable development, the President of the General Assembly will convene a one-day high-level interactive dialogue on Culture and Sustainable Development.

The General Assembly has recognized that culture is an essential component of human development, that it represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and the community and that it is an important factor in social inclusion and poverty eradication, providing for sustainable economic growth and ownership of development processes. At the same time, it also recognizes the growing importance of the digital transformation in opening up prospects for broadening access to culture for all, including by creating an enabling environment for the creative economy.

Despite its vast potential, public investment in the cultural and creative sector remains alarmingly low. Research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicates that only 0.23% of global development aid is allocated to culture. In recent years, only 13% of Voluntary National Reviews included culture as part of their review towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. While there is no specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on culture, it is reflected in various sustainable development goals, including sustainable cities (SDG 11), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), gender equality (SDG 5), innovation (SDG 9), and peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16). Furthermore, the Pact for the Future also acknowledges culture’s contribution to sustainable development and calls to integrate culture into economic, social and environmental development policies and strategies. In fact, Member States, in Action 11, have committed to

protect and promote culture and sport as integral components of sustainable development, including through adequate public investment.

In recent years, digitalization has been a critical driver of the creative economy, enhancing opportunities for access, education and creativity. The digital transformation has been reshaping the sector, resulting in a steep increase in the export of creative services, including audiovisual, cultural, recreational, and heritage services, outgrowing the export of creative goods. The United Nations Trade and Development estimates that the total exports of creative services reached a record \$1.4 trillion in 2022, almost double that of creative goods exports, which reached \$713 billion. However, inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and low digital literacy hinder equitable access, particularly in developing countries, thereby deepening the digital divide.

Today, the cultural and creative industries are amongst the fastest-growing sectors. According to UNESCO, this sector generates \$2.3 trillion annually, or 3.1% of global GDP, while employing 6.2% of the global workforce. In 2023, the global music industry alone hit a record \$28.6 billion, with Sub-Saharan Africa leading growth at 24.7%. This growth is fueled by increasing streaming revenues - a testament to how digital technologies are unlocking new opportunities.

The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed the way we interact, share and preserve cultural heritage. As this digital era is navigated, it is essential to explore innovative ways to connect cultures, foster global understanding, and promote cultural diversity. By connecting cultures in a digital era we can bridge cultural divides, promote global understanding and preserve cultural heritage for future generations.

Objectives

This interactive dialogue will provide an opportunity for Member States, Observers and relevant stakeholders to give due consideration to the contribution of culture to the achievement of sustainable development through national, regional and international development policies and international cooperation instruments.

More specifically, this interactive dialogue will allow participants to exchange perspectives on promoting the intersection of culture and digital transformation, in the interest of sustainable development. By identifying key challenges and unresolved issues, the discussion will help refine policy considerations and areas for international cooperation.

Format

The high-level interactive dialogue will consist of an opening segment, a plenary segment, and a panel discussion. The meeting will be open to Member States and Observers, the United Nations system, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations.

Panel Discussion: “Connecting Cultures in the Digital Era”

The panel aims to explore the intersection of culture and technology, by examining how digital technologies are fueling the cultural and creative industries, leading to economic diversification and growth for the achievement of sustainable development.

Guiding questions:

1. How does digital transformation help preserve and promote cultural traditions, and what are challenges they face in doing so?
2. In what ways can digital tools bridge cultural gaps and promote more global understanding, especially in multicultural societies?
3. How does the digital transformation of the cultural and creative industries impact on the way people engage with art, music, and other cultural expressions? And can digital tools support the revitalization of endangered languages and cultural practices?
4. In the age of globalization, is it possible for digital spaces to create a truly global, inclusive culture that can advance international cooperation and cultural and creative economies? And how can Member States tackle the risks such as digital divide and exclusion, misinformation and data privacy and security risks?
5. What kind of national, regional and international development policies and international cooperation instruments are needed to ensure that culture contributes to the achievement of sustainable development?

Logistics:

There will be no pre-established list of speakers for the plenary segment and the panel discussion. Participants wishing to take the floor are invited to press the microphone button. The time limit for statements will be three (3) minutes for individual statements and five (5) minutes for statements on behalf of groups. The meeting will be broadcast live on UN WebTV.

Programme Outline

Time	Session	Venue
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Opening Segment	Trusteeship Council Chamber
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Plenary Segment	Trusteeship Council Chamber
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Lunch break	
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Panel Discussion	Trusteeship Council Chamber