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UNESCO WORLD CONFERENCE ON CULTURE & ARTS EDUCATION

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BACKGROUND NOTE

Context

By [Decision 211/EX 39](#) in April 2021, UNESCO Member States called for the development of a Framework on Culture and Arts Education, building on UNESCO's existing frameworks in arts education, notably the *Road Map on Arts Education*, adopted at the World Conference on Arts Education in Lisbon in 2006, and the *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education*, adopted at the Second World Conference on Arts Education in 2010, both under the auspices of UNESCO, with a view to rethinking how education systems can better respond to contemporary opportunities and challenges *in and through* culture and arts education. The same decision requested UNESCO to convene an interministerial World Conference on Culture and Arts Education.

Culture and education are fundamental pillars of UNESCO's mandate. Since its founding, UNESCO has taken steps to expand knowledge on the role of the arts in general education, and Member States have called for concrete and practical steps to integrate the arts in general education. Seminal world reports on education, including *Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow* in 1972 and *Learning: the treasure within* in 1996, as well as two World Conferences on Cultural Policies in Mexico in 1982 and Stockholm in 1998 following the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997), have contributed to the broadened recognition of the critical impact of culture in fostering inclusive and context-relevant sustainable development. More recently the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative, the Transforming Education Summit (2022), the *Declaration of the World Conference on Cultural Policies - MONDIACULT* (2022), and the UNESCO *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development* (2023) have brought forward Member States call to anchor more firmly the synergies between culture and education towards shaping more inclusive, resilient and transformative societies.

The UNESCO World Conference is an opportunity to bring together a range of stakeholders to share a diversity of practices, but also to chart forward new transformative approaches and pathways in culture and arts education. The World Conference comprises plenary sessions, thematic sessions, and side events, and will culminate in the adoption of a new blueprint for action: the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education - the outcome of an 18-month inclusive and participatory global consultation process involving a range of stakeholders.

Culture and Education: A foundational mandate for UNESCO and the backbone of human development

Culture and education are fundamental pillars of UNESCO's mandate. This power to act on minds is what led, in the aftermath of the Second World War, to the creation of the Organization, whose Constitution affirms that human dignity is contingent on "the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace". These two domains, while often seen as two distinct policy areas and objectives are profoundly interdependent and mutually enriching, notably in the face of current global opportunities and challenges calling for more agile, inclusive and more future-proof societies. Education itself is a life wide process deeply grounded on culture and identity – its contents, sites, practices and ways of teaching and learning are deeply *embedded in* and *shaped by* culture. On the other hand, *how* we learn about culture has a bearing on the ways in which we understand ourselves, our past and our future.

In recent decades, the role of culture and education has broadened in the face of new trends and challenges. A rapidly changing international landscape has given rise to fresh challenges that have called for a re-conceptualization of culture and education and their contribution to development. The recently adopted international Declaration of the World Conference on Cultural Policies - MONDIACULT 2022 clearly recalled that "*Education and culture, whose significance and scope have been considerably extended, are essential for the genuine development of the individual and society.*" Equally, the UNESCO Reports *Learning to Be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (1972), the 'Faure Report', and *Learning: The treasure within* (1996), the 'Delors Report,' opened up new pathways towards a humanistic vision of education as a holistic process, linking the acquisition of knowledge to practice, and balancing individual with collective competence. These frameworks have also reflected the evolving understanding of development, and that economic criteria alone cannot provide a

programme for human dignity and well-being. In parallel, the concept of “quality education” has also expanded, encompassing respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures. Furthermore, the two world conferences on arts education led under UNESCO’s auspices adopted respectively the [Road Map for Arts Education](#), in Lisbon in 2006, and the [Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education](#), in 2010. These landmarks established and guided UNESCO’s concepts and action on arts education aimed at enriching and enhancing the quality of education, promoting the diversity of cultural expressions, and upholding the contribution of arts education to fostering human rights and cultural participation.

A critical juncture: why now a Framework for Culture and Arts Education?

We are at a key moment of societal transformation, one in which the world is more culturally diverse and connected, where exchanges of ideas and movements of people, goods and services have reached unimagined levels. Yet at the same time, our plural and diversified world is increasingly volatile, and previous approaches to addressing the challenges faced by societies are no longer apt. Rapid changes around the world have brought about new needs from the broader development perspective, while distinctive policy domains such culture and education have also witnessed transformative dynamics in terms of needs, aspirations, and gaps to be filled. Moreover, many of the challenges confronted by societies today didn’t exist at the same scale even a decade ago.

Around the world, learners are being faced with a context that calls for new skills that will enable them to tackle the challenges they face but also thrive with the opportunities that have been brought about through these rapidly-changing shifts. Creativity, critical thinking and social and emotional learning have come front and centre, as a priority today and in the future.

Moreover, new forms of cultural and artistic expressions have emerged, generated by increased human mobility, the expansion of connectivity and cultural exchange worldwide, also driven by the young generation. The more than one billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the world today are the most informed, active, connected and mobile generation the world has ever seen.

This global context has raised new questions: How can all learners access and benefit from education that is contextual and relevant to their lives? How can learners be better equipped with the skills they need in a rapidly-changing world to contribute to the building of more just, prosperous, sustainable and peaceful societies? How can cultural resources in their rich diversity enhance the quality and relevance of education? How can cooperation be expanded to address gaps and advance learning outcomes through engaging a range of stakeholders, in a lifelong and lifewide approach?

UNESCO has taken decisive steps to respond to this new landscape by engaging education and culture. The report [Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education](#) (2021) of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, articulates the urgency to change course and reimage our futures through an education that is humanistic, perceives learning as a common good, and which is nurtured by an understanding of the multiple “ways of life” and knowledges, cultural practices and traditions, as well as artistic practices and expressions. As underscored by the United Nations Secretary-General in his [Vision Statement on Transforming Education](#) (2022), education is in crisis requiring us to fundamentally rethink its purpose. A new approach is needed towards transformative education that means empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours to be resilient, and prepared for the uncertain future while contributing to human and planetary well-being and sustainable development. The landmark Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT, adopted by ministers of culture in Mexico City in 2022 acknowledged the imperative of context-relevant education, which encompasses cultural heritage, history and traditional knowledge, with a view to expanding learning outcomes and enhancing quality education and the appreciation of cultural diversity, multilingualism, arts education and digital literacy. It also recognized the importance of enhancing synergies between culture and education in fostering the systemic integration of culture into formal, non-formal education and informal, supporting technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the cultural sector and investing in the educational and social role of museums and cultural institutions. The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (2023) underlines the role of education in nurturing respect

for cultural diversity as an intrinsic characteristic of societies, and empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to act as agents of change.

A Call for Action

The need for closer synergies and cooperation between the fields of culture and education, two key pillars of UNESCO’s mandate, has come to the fore as an imperative to foster more inclusive, resilient and agile societies. UNESCO Member States have called for harnessing UNESCO’s multidisciplinary mandate in the fields of culture and education to work together as the backbone of sustainable development and support more integrated actions to respond to current and future opportunities and challenges.

This was the impetus behind the decision by the Executive Board of UNESCO ([Decision 211/EX 39](#)) to request UNESCO to develop a revised Framework for Culture and Arts Education in April 2021, that takes into consideration the broadened scope of culture, including digital transformation, and address the complexity of challenges faced by societies today. By including “culture” and “arts education”, the process prioritizes a holistic point of departure that encompasses the different forms of cultural and artistic education (formal, non-formal and informal learning), as well as their contribution to economic, social and environmental development. The Culture and Education Sectors jointly launched an inclusive and participatory consultation process, encompassing a diversity of perspectives across the fields of culture – from heritage to creativity – and education – from a lifelong learning perspective – and ensuring contributions from a diverse range of stakeholders.

I. Shaping the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education: an inclusive, global discourse

Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace.

Confucius, Chinese philosopher (551-479 BC)

As part of the preparatory steps of the development of the Framework, a global consultation was launched in March 2022, beginning with a questionnaire distributed to all UNESCO Member States and Associate Members, and other stakeholders, including UNESCO Chairs, UNITWIN Networks and partner civil society organizations. Its objective was twofold, to (a) capture the status of culture and arts education at the national level; and (b) gaps, needs, opportunities and priorities. The questionnaire sought to take stock of how existing UNESCO frameworks on arts education (notably the Lisbon Road Map and Seoul Agenda) have been implemented at country level (from both policy and operational perspectives), as well as the challenges and priorities in culture and arts education for countries across different regions of the world, notably since the Seoul Agenda.

The questionnaire respondents highlighted several key evolutions in culture and arts education that have taken place over the past decade : (i) greater awareness of cultural diversity, prompted by migration and digital technologies and media (ii) diversification of curricula, through more multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, learning experiences and emerging art forms, including through the use of digital technologies and media; (iii) an increased focus on heritage education, notably on education on and through cultural heritage in its manifold dimensions. and (iv) broadened cooperation with a variety of stakeholders, through formal and non-formal education. Challenges, which often echo across regions, include ministerial buy-in and structural planning, a lack of budget and financing, as well as the low priority of arts and culture education within policy, schools and the community at large.

Building on these findings, the global consultation process was strengthened through the key outcomes of discussions at the *UNESCO International Expert Meeting on Culture and Arts Education*, held on 24 and 25 May 2022 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. The meeting brought together 21

international experts from all regions and various academic and professional disciplines, including arts and heritage education, creative and cultural industries, museums, indigenous cultures, intercultural dialogue, TVET, and media and digital technologies. Participants shared insights on needs, gaps and priorities in the field of culture and arts education, while providing preliminary recommendations for shaping the revised Framework. The experts underlined several key dimensions: (i) strengthen cooperation between ministries, notably cultural and education ministries, and thus the governance of culture and arts education (ii) enhance access to culture and arts education as an integral part to the right to education and the right to culture; (iii) drive forward the potential of cultural and creative processes for strengthening context-relevant and transformative learning, resonating with UNESCO's leading efforts on transforming education; (iv) identify capacity gaps in arts teaching and professional development; (v) ensure culture and arts education that builds skills for employment; (vi) address the challenges and opportunities of digital expansion, including ensuring access to resources, supporting education outcomes, and enhancing creative play and experimentation; (vii) develop evidence-based research and data, as well as mechanisms for knowledge-sharing; and (viii) devise meaningful means of assessment in culture and arts education based on solid criteria, learning objectives and outcomes, as well as the linkages of culture and education with all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably given rise to specific issues in the culture and education sectors, as emerged throughout the regional consultations. A greater focus on advancing a vision of education that factors in health and well-being, social and emotional learning, active and responsible citizenship, including digital citizenship, the importance of the creative economy, environmental preservation, and the critical role of culture and arts education in social cohesion and building resilience in crisis situations assumed greater precedence. As the pandemic impelled digital technologies to the centre of arts, culture, and education domains, issues of digital access were brought to the foreground, which, compounded by underlying inequalities in infrastructure and resources, laid bare a digital divide between rural and urban communities, and for underprivileged groups.

Countries shared the need for strengthened governance and cooperation in the area of culture and arts education. This is particularly the case across ministries, notably ministries of culture and education, where culture and arts education are often distinct and addressed as separate policy areas. Participants noted that even in countries that have culture and arts education policies in place, a lacuna exists between policy and practice calling for more systemic interministerial cooperation. Countries expressed challenges in mainstreaming culture and arts education in general education settings and educational systems or considering a common approach across governance structures that are attributed different responsibilities in education planning, curricula, teacher training, and implementation, including relating to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Promoting alliances between municipalities and local and national governments presents avenues for the continuity of formal and non-formal arts and cultural education policies, programmes and projects, engaging civil society and community organizations. Strengthening informal and non-formal education was signaled as an area requiring increased investment, notably through enhanced TVET, including the transmission of know-how and practices. Countries stressed that this overarching precedence for multidimensional and multistakeholder responses should be supported by streamlined and integrated cooperation and coordination towards more horizontal policy development.

Culture and arts education are increasingly being recognized for their role in nurturing holistic human development and their access and enjoyment contribute to the realization of other human rights such as the right to participate in cultural life or the right to development. In this context, a comprehensive advocacy for culture and arts education should be consolidated bringing forward the fundamental right to culture and arts education as an integral dimension of cultural rights, including through raising awareness on the importance of arts education. Countries called for actions that contribute to the generation of knowledge that builds evidence on the central role of arts and cultural education as an essential element of a humanistic approach to education, in formal and non-formal settings. As a positive resource and an intrinsic feature of today's societies, cultural diversity should be reflected in culture and education programmes, which are underpinned by a rights-based approach in order to foster transformative progress. In this sense, cultural diversity should be harnessed across the education system, as a key factor for the full development of human capacities.

Despite emerging awareness of the broader benefits of culture and arts education, across all regions, culture and arts education remains on the margins of policies, education systems and

communities, thus hindering cross-cutting approaches in culture and arts education. In formal education, culture and arts education are often viewed as offering limited opportunities for meaningful employment when compared with STEM subjects. This reinforces barriers in the provision of and access to TVET, equipment and resources, funding, quality education and training opportunities, and causes issues for teacher recruitment and retention, programme consistency and continuity, and marginalization of teachers and learners. Moreover, it curbs the potential of culture and arts education to provide quality learning experiences and outcomes, together with sustainable livelihoods and skilled employment. Non-formal education also faces particular challenges in terms of visibility, the validation and certification of educators, cultural professionals and artists, and overall sustainability. Media has a notable stake in raising awareness about the importance of teaching culture and arts, starting from early childhood. This, coupled with awareness-raising among individuals and societies, families in particular, supports the social appreciation of arts and cultural education as an integral component of lifelong learning, and in maximizing its potential for sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Ensuring inclusion and access to culture and arts education stand as foundational needs highlighted by all regions. Social inclusion was considered one of the positive outcomes of culture and arts education. Culture and arts education presents innovative pathways to support strategies for learners to access formal education, to foster collaboration, intercultural understanding, gender equality, and help overcome social exclusion, building self-confidence, and individual and collective empowerment. As underlined across all regions – and notably Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean – linguistic diversity and recognizing the right of children to learn in their mother tongue can provide a vehicle for improved learning outcomes, and to promote societal integration, cultural diversity and the transmission of cultural legacy and collective memory. Access to culture and arts education is also impacted by deficits in infrastructure, availability of resources (including digital resources) and connectivity that affect a significant share of educational institutions and social and community creative spaces, thereby undermining learning and development progress. Countries also underlined that inclusion is not only about access, but also the representation of – and engagement with – diversity through art, curatorial practice and museum interpretation, in which culture and arts education play an undisputed role.

Teacher education and teacher retention in culture and arts education remain a common challenge faced by countries in all regions. The need for greater investment in pre-service and in-service teacher training was underlined, which should include continuous updating in accordance with professional development strategies, for both culture and arts education and generalist teachers. Countries highlighted how teachers also play a powerful role in communicating the importance of culture and arts education and in promoting inclusion through teaching pedagogies; a contribution that is often neglected or undervalued in training and pedagogy. In the digital realm, many teachers don't have the level of expertise needed to integrate digital technologies in learning, and learners often have higher competences. Furthermore, partnering with cultural institutions, cultural civil society organizations, and artistic groups could provide much-needed training in specialized art fields, and innovative learning pedagogies to engage both teachers and students and to attract new talents while expanding opportunities in culture-related employment.

Harnessing the benefits of the digital transformation is critical to expand and enrich literacy in culture and arts education, while addressing the digital learning divide and infrastructure risks. Digital technologies have expanded horizons for learning and knowledge on culture, arts education, heritage safeguarding, creating and sharing creativity, as well as accessing a wide range of interactive and dynamic learning resources in the digital environment. However, fragmentation within the industry, a lack of training opportunities and inadequate funding worsened by financial constraints restrict access and pose challenges to the formalization and expansion of the sector through technology. Countries reported that digital infrastructure is often deficient in disadvantaged and rural areas, and programmes to create digital content are often expensive, subsequently increasing the cost of culture and arts education. Critical-thinking, digital and media literacies and copyright, which are part of a responsible use of digital technologies, were equally highlighted as increasingly crucial issues that need to be addressed and integrated in future action in culture and arts education.

In the provision of content and context-relevant education, culture and the arts play an essential role. Throughout all regions, educational strategies anchored in local contexts and the promotion of cultural diversity were underlined as requisite elements to strengthen quality education. Countries reported that learning gains can be achieved through enhancing linkages with the local environment –

cultural and natural – by providing education that is meaningful and relevant to learners. Such approaches that explore and engage the connections between culture and education, and with tangible and intangible cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, enhance knowledge and skills acquisition while anchoring the nexus between culture and arts education in its broader societal context. Countries underlined the need for national educational policies to integrate frameworks for developing culture and arts curricula in a manner that fosters interdisciplinarity across the curriculum.

The role of culture and arts education has gained precedence in conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies across regions. Experiences in multidimensional approaches that incorporate culture and arts education demonstrate their relevance in advancing national strategies in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation contexts notably to foster the return to peace and to contribute to strengthening social cohesion. Countries stressed that this dimension is especially pertinent in today's multicultural societies towards overcoming cultural divides resulting from the potential instrumentalization of culture. While rising tensions, xenophobia, violence and hate speech have exacerbated existing drivers of conflict proving detrimental to social and economic resilience – investing in culture and the arts has proven decisive in strengthening the foundations for more peaceful and sustainable societies.

Enhancing synergies between formal and non-formal culture and arts education to engage a variety of stakeholders and learning spaces resonated across all regions. Countries supported building a broadened understanding of education, while strengthening culture and arts education in lifelong and life wide learning systems with the learner at the centre. Formal educational systems are often fixed in rigid and outdated concepts that are not adapted to the needs and diversity of learners, nor address the current challenges of sustainable development and communities. While countries noted that this intersectoral cooperation is more challenging in formal education settings, non-formal education can provide inroads towards improving current learning conditions worldwide. Across all regions, experts advocated for the value of enhancing synergies between formal and informal actors in pedagogy and curriculum for quality teaching and learning, including schools, cultural institutions, the private sector, local communities, scholars, artists and artisans, as well as public spaces. This also connects to enabling organizational cultures that are flexible and open to working in collaboration with cultural managers, professionals and other mediators in the non-formal sphere, including at the city and community levels.

II. The UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education: laying out future paths for culture and education

We ought to think that we are one of the leaves of a tree, and the tree is all of humanity. We cannot live without others, without the tree.

Pablo Casals, Spanish cellist and conductor

The UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education will be the occasion to adopt the UNESCO Framework on Culture and Education. More than this, it is a unique opportunity to bring to the forefront a joint vision that engages the distinct strengths of – and synergies between – culture and education to inspire new pathways for innovation, to equip learners of all ages with the skills they need today, including in the cultural and creative industries. The Conference intends to reaffirm the international commitment towards more integrated and systemic cooperation across culture and education within and across countries, as well as at regional and global levels.

The Conference is structured around plenary sessions and seven ministerial thematic sessions, which are based on the priorities that stemmed from the consultation process. These are as follows:

1. Equitable access to culture and arts education;
2. Quality and relevant lifelong and life-wide learning in and through culture and arts education;
3. Skills to shape resilient, just and sustainable futures;
4. Institutionalization and valorization of culture and arts education ecosystems;

5. Culture and arts education through digital technologies and artificial intelligence;
6. Partnerships and financing in support of culture and arts education; and
7. Monitoring, research and data.

To ensure the inclusive and active engagement of a diversity of stakeholders in the Conference, **17 side events are to be held to share practices and innovative approaches, as well as strengthen a global alliance for culture and arts education.**

The World Conference will provide a promising steppingstone for laying out future paths for culture and education across the world. It is a platform to take forward new cooperation at local, national, regional and international levels. Looking forward, the implementation of the UNESCO Framework aims to open up new pathways for equitable and transformative culture and arts education. Implementation will focus on several areas: governance and policies, learning environments and experiences, as well as skills and competencies for educators and learners to better respond to today's challenges and opportunities, including in the digital era. These actions will be supported through establishing and formalizing mechanisms to ensure regular cooperation between and across ministries and co-creation between various actors, institutions and stakeholders to support education delivery, broadening partnerships and cooperation, mobilize financing at the national, regional and international levels, and interdisciplinary and long-term research that supports evidence-based data and knowledge-sharing.

UNESCO reiterates its gratitude to the authorities of the United Arab Emirates for hosting the UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education and appeals to all its Member States and to the wider international community to anchor the outcomes of this Conference within and across sustainable development prospects worldwide.