

Statement on the Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe

26 June 2017

In the context of the wider debate on the future of the European Union, the European Alliance for Culture and the Arts welcomes the Commission's Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe.

While leaving the analysis of the scenarios proposed for a deeper and wider debate to come, the European Alliance for Culture and the Arts is keen to react on the Reflection Paper by emphasizing the intrinsic value, as well as the role of **culture as an essential player in developing a strong, sustainable and resilient social dimension**. The cultural sector is a powerful driver of employment and the promotion of social integration. Arts and culture are a key element for social cohesion and are key contributors to combating marginalisation and poverty. In this way, culture and the arts have a strong potential to empower the European society for the world in 2025.

This crucial role of culture, arts or heritage cannot be ignored while addressing future trends and challenges mapped by the Reflection Paper. Therefore, while accentuating the intangible value of culture and the arts, we underline the following:

- Cultural engagement empowers the groups at risk of exclusion, such as economically disadvantaged, ageing, disabled people, and minority ethnic groups to become an active part of society.
- Cultural participation is beneficial to the whole community as it strengthens social cohesion, fosters intercultural dialogue, and facilitates integration of displaced people. Art has the potential to break down the simplistic "us against them" discourse and smoothen the tensions, by helping people to accept, embrace and navigate the pluralism of ideas, mentalities, and backgrounds.
- Art practices have the power to foster a real breakthrough in fighting gender inequality by inspiring the thinking outside the norms, habits and obvious binaries, which limit citizens' perception of reality and lead to gender prejudices.
- Access to and participation in culture foster essential soft skills and results in better performance of participation in the labour market. Cultural engagement develops one's creative potential and leads to more motivation to learn via original and innovative vectors and increases well-being.

The Alliance calls on the European Institutions to clearly include the value of culture and the arts in the ongoing reflection and debate on a strong and sustainable social dimension of the EU. Culture has an enormous potential for becoming a unifying and mobilising force in Europe, thus it must be central in the priorities of the Union.

Editor's note:

The Alliance conveys the voice of 35 European associations and networks, and calls for recognising the intrinsic value of culture and the arts for the European society, as well as their role in strengthening the European project, which is facing major political challenges and needs to redefine its global positioning. We believe culture and the arts play an important role in the response to the social, economic and religious tensions existing inside societies, within the EU and outside the European borders. Therefore, we call on the European institutions and Member States to include culture and the arts in the strategic goals of the Union.

Why does culture matter? Find the response in concrete examples on our websites:

<https://allianceforculture.com/>

