

**UNESCO-Aschberg
Programme for Artists
and Cultural Professionals**



2025 Call for Projects FUELLING CREATIVE FUTURES

*Support for initiatives that protect and promote the
status of the artist and artistic freedom*

*The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
launches a call open to governments and public institutions, as well as civil
society organizations, to support initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting
the status of the artist and artistic freedom.*

Deadline to apply

23 February 2026 (23:59 UTC+1)

READ ME CAREFULLY BEFORE SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

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I. CONTEXT

As reaffirmed by the [Outcome Document](#) of the **MONDIACULT 2025 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development**, the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are a fundamental driver of inclusive and sustainable economic development. They contribute to 3.39% of global GDP and represent 3.55% of total employment,¹ driving innovation and shaping the future of societies.

Yet, at the heart of the CCIs, **artists and cultural professionals worldwide very often face precarious working conditions**. Many struggle to gain recognition of their status as professionals and to secure fair remuneration, social protection, and freedom of movement. In absence of supportive legal and policy frameworks, their ability to earn a stable living from their creative work remains fragile.

The **accelerating digital transformation** adds new layers of complexity, most notably in connection to the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI). These emerging technologies present both opportunities and challenges. Meanwhile, **threats and attacks against freedom of artistic expression** persist around the world, which in turn contribute to self-censorship among artists and cultural professionals. Those affected by **emergency situations** are confronted with compounded risks, while access to protection and support remains limited. **Deep-set imbalances in cultural exchanges** also hinder mobility and access to global markets, particularly for artists from the Global South.²

“In the wake of key commitments reaffirmed at MONDIACULT 2025, the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme will continue to strengthen the status of artists and cultural professionals worldwide by accompanying governments and civil society organizations in improving working conditions in the cultural and creative sectors, safeguarding artistic freedom, protecting creativity in emergencies, and expanding mobility and international market access for artists from the Global South”.

Ernesto Ottone R.

Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO

Promoting decent working and living conditions for artists and cultural professionals is thus as critical as ever. This includes putting in place robust laws, regulations and policies that guarantee fair remuneration, adequate social protection, adapted fiscal measures, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and ability to unionize. **Expanding opportunities for the mobility of artists**, especially those from the Global South, is also crucial to support professional development, transnational cultural exchange and more equitable access to global markets. In a

¹ [UNESCO global report on cultural policies, Culture: the missing SDG](#), 2025.

² [Empowering Creativity: Implementing the UNESCO 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist; 5th global consultation](#), 2023.

world increasingly affected by multi-faceted crises, strengthening **mechanisms that protect and support artists, cultural professionals and institutions during emergencies** is equally crucial.

In line with the [1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist](#) and the [2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#), the [UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals](#) is UNESCO's main operational tool to advance these goals. Generously supported by Norway and reconceptualized in 2021 in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, **the programme contributes to address structural vulnerabilities and build resilience in times of uncertainty and crises.**

The Programme is structured around **two core, complementary priorities**:

- **PROTECTING AND PROMOTING THE STATUS OF THE ARTIST AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM, including in times of emergency.**
- **FOSTERING A BALANCED FLOW OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES AND ENHANCING THE MOBILITY OF ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH, in line with Article 16 of the 2005 Convention (which is dedicated to “Preferential treatment for developing countries”).³**

To achieve these goals, the Programme operates in **three areas**:

- **ADVOCACY, MONITORING AND RESEARCH**
- **CAPACITY BUILDING**
- **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO GOVERNMENTS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO CSOs**



In this context, UNESCO is opening a call for projects from 18 December 2025 to 23 February 2026.

[Learn more about previous projects supported by the Programme.](#)

³ Article 16 of the 2005 Convention establishes that “Developed countries shall facilitate cultural exchanges with developing countries by granting, through the appropriate institutional and legal frameworks, preferential treatment to artists and other cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as cultural goods and services from developing countries.”

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL FOR PROJECTS

This call for projects aims to support government and civil society-led initiatives that **protect and promote the status of the artist and artistic freedom in its broad sense, as recognised by UNESCO** – that is, encompassing a bundle of rights protected under international law, including:

- *The right to create without censorship or intimidation*
- *The right to have artistic work supported, distributed, and remunerated*
- *Artists' right to freedom of movement*
- *Artists' right to freedom of association*
- *The protection of the social and economic rights of artists*
- *Everyone's right to participate in cultural life*

To advance these rights, the call for projects offers two tracks:

❖ TRACK 1 - FOR GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Technical assistance to revise or design laws, regulations, policies and measures that promote and protect the status of the artist and artistic freedom.

❖ TRACK 2 - FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Financial assistance for innovative projects that advance the status of the artist and artistic freedom, at the local, national, regional or international level. These may encompass, for example, capacity building, advocacy, monitoring and research, etc.

III. FUNDING TRACKS AND MODALITIES

❖ TRACK 1 – Technical assistance to governments and public institutions

a. WHAT IS TRACK 1 ABOUT?

Track 1 will **provide on-demand technical assistance to governments and public institutions of UNESCO Member States** to revise or design new laws, regulations, policies and measures that protect and promote the status of artists and cultural professionals and artistic freedom.

b. WHAT KIND OF NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND GAPS CAN THE PROPOSED PROJECTS ADDRESS?

The projects proposed could aim to **improve the professional, social and economic status of artists and cultural professionals** through initiatives related to, for example:

- *Training and lifelong learning*
- *Social security and decent work conditions*
- *Fair remuneration and adapted taxation conditions*
- *Mobility of artists and cultural professionals*
- *Freedom of artistic expression*

The projects proposed could also address **cross-cutting challenges** that directly impact the status of the artists and cultural professionals. This includes promoting gender equality and the inclusion of minority artists' participation in the CCIs, their improved living and working conditions and the protection of their freedom of artistic expression. It also involves responding

to new challenges related to digital transformation and the rise of AI, which are reshaping creative practices and the CCIs value chains.

Finally, proposed projects could help **operationalise preferential treatment, as set out in Article 16 of the 2005 Convention**. This principle calls on developed countries to grant artists and cultural professionals from the Global South better access to international markets and mobility opportunities. Support may involve, for instance, initiatives to strengthen knowledge and advocacy skills, among key stakeholders in countries from the Global South, to foster advances in the implementation of preferential treatment measures by countries in the Global North.⁴

c. WHAT DOES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INCLUDE?

Technical assistance is a **non-financial assistance** provided by national and international experts. Depending on context-specific needs, it can involve:

- *Transfer of knowledge and peer-to-peer exchanges,*
- *Skills training and capacity development,*
- *Data collection and analysis,*
- *Tailored consulting services for the development of legal and regulatory frameworks.*

The goal is to strengthen political commitment and institutional and human capacities of UNESCO Member States, through initiatives that are sustainable and nationally owned by the relevant stakeholders.

On-demand assistance is provided based on an interest expressed by governments and public institutions from UNESCO Member States for services to help them meet the needs and challenges facing artists and cultural professionals in their countries. It is offered in the spirit of partnership in order to ensure ownership by national stakeholders and sustainability of results.

Experts and local partners work together to achieve the aims and objectives of the technical assistance requested by applying countries. The provision of expertise is designed as a continuous process that helps in responding to identified needs, obstacles and weaknesses.

d. ELIGIBLE COUNTRIES

Project proposals under track 1 may be submitted by governments and public institutions of **UNESCO Member States**.

Priority will be given to developing countries, those whose governmental and public institutions have not yet been supported under the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme, and projects that respond to **UNESCO's strategic priorities** – Africa, gender equality, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), youth and fostering an inter-sectoral approach.

A project could target several countries. If this is the case, a lead entity will have to be designated to be in charge of administrative and contractual arrangements with UNESCO.

e. WHO CAN APPLY?

Applicants should be **government/public institutions** whose mandate is relevant for the advancement of the status of the artist and cultural professionals and artistic freedom, for example:

- National ministries (Culture, Finance, Labour, Tourism, Communication, Social Affairs, etc.)

⁴ See examples of preferential treatment measures [here](#).

- National arts councils and specialized committees concerned with arts, cultural and creative industries
- National Parliaments and/or their special thematic commissions.

f. REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICATIONS

Applicants must complete all sections of the application form. Particular attention should be given to the following key elements:

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

Proposals should demonstrate the involvement of a multi-stakeholder national team that will steer the project, comprising not only various governmental bodies but also relevant civil society organizations.

REGIONAL OR MULTI-COUNTRY PROJECTS

For proposals covering more than one country or with a regional scope, applicants must provide information on multi-stakeholder teams across concerned countries and clearly identify the person/s responsible for the project's overall coordination.

GENDER EQUALITY

It is important for applicants to also highlight how they will promote gender equality in the course of the implementation of the technical assistance to be provided.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LOGISTICS

While technical assistance offered under track 1 is primarily expert-driven, applicants may request **up to 30,000 USD** in order to support the logistics of the project's implementation (e.g., logistical organization of meetings/consultations/capacity-building activities, funding of communication activities, etc.). Applicants are therefore invited to present a **preliminary budget for the planned activities**, as indicated in the application form.

IMPORTANT NOTE

This proposed budget cannot be used to cover the running costs of the applicant institution. This includes administrative expenses, overheads, or human resources costs such as salaries of permanent staff, or operational costs of the institution's facilities. All requested funds must be directly linked to the implementation of the proposed project activities.

❖ TRACK 2 – Financial assistance to civil society initiatives

a. WHAT IS TRACK 2 ABOUT?

Track 2 will provide **financial assistance** to civil society organizations for the implementation of innovative projects aimed at advancing the status of the artist and artistic freedom at the local, national, regional or international level.

b. WHAT KIND OF NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND GAPS CAN THE PROPOSED PROJECTS ADDRESS?

The projects proposed should address needs identified first-hand by CSOs engaged in protecting and supporting artists and cultural professionals. They should propose original, impactful approaches that help them unlock their full creative potential and flourish in their work. Examples include:

CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES

- *Trainings for artists and cultural professionals to understand their rights, protect and monetise their work, and adapt to technological challenges such as AI;*
- *Developing tools and networks of experts specialized in defending artistic freedom at the legal and policy level in different countries and regions;*
- *Enhancing the protection of artists at risk through training, tools development and assistance networks;*
- *Equipping artists and cultural professionals from the Global South to better access mobility opportunities – especially those offered by countries in the Global North – and international markets through guidance, resources and advocacy.*

ADVOCACY, MONITORING AND RESEARCH

- *Raising awareness among diverse audiences (artists and cultural professionals, government bodies, media actors, the general public, academia, the private sector, etc.) about the importance of protecting and promoting the Status of the Artist and artistic freedom, but also for a better recognition of artists and cultural professionals' contribution to sustainable development and pressing global issues (climate action, peace-building, etc.); through communication campaigns, publications, tools and resources;*
- *Monitoring artistic freedom at local, national, regional or international level. Projects could focus on shedding light on the situation of artists and cultural professionals affected by crises and fostering their increased recognition as a vulnerable group in need of attention during emergencies;*
- *Awareness-raising, advocacy, research and good practice exchange supporting the transnational mobility of artists and cultural professionals from the Global South and their access to international markets, particularly through the improved implementation of preferential treatment measures as per Article 16 of the 2005 Convention.⁵*

DIRECT SUPPORT TO ARTISTS, CULTURAL PROFESSIONALS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AFFECTED BY EMERGENCIES

- *Provide artists with access to temporary relocation opportunities and artistic residencies, facilitate legal and psychological assistance, offer support for artists in exile, and set-up cultural hubs offering displaced artists safe working, networking and training spaces;*
- *Enable cultural institutions to continue their activities or implement new projects despite disruptions caused by emergency situations.*

Applicants are invited, when designing initiatives as all the above, to **pay particular attention to the needs of artists who are women or part of vulnerable groups.**

⁵ Ibid.

c. WHAT DOES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE INCLUDE?

Applicants may request financial support for **up to USD 50,000** to implement their proposed project. This funding can cover costs directly related to project delivery, such as:

- *Organizing training sessions, workshops, capacity-building activities*
- *Developing tools, resources, communication materials*
- *Conducting advocacy campaigns, research and monitoring activities*
- *Providing emergency support to artists and cultural professionals and institutions, including relocation, residencies, or safe working space.*
- *Covering other logistical expenses necessary for the project's implementation.*

IMPORTANT NOTE

Financial assistance under Track 2 cannot be used to cover the running costs of the applicant organization. This includes administrative expenses, overheads, or human resources costs such as salaries of permanent staff, or operational costs of the organization's facilities. All requested funds must be directly linked to the implementation of the proposed project activities.

d. WHO CAN SUBMIT A PROJECT PROPOSAL TO TRACK 2?

Applicants should be local, national, regional or international civil society organizations that operate on a not-for-profit basis.

Applicants may include:

- Non-governmental organizations that promote the status of the artist and artistic freedom, and associations and foundations active in the cultural and creative industries, including cultural and professional associations,
- Networks or unions of artists and cultural professionals,
- Academic institutions and research centres.

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Have at least two (02) years of legal existence (proof of legal registration required);
- Have directly implemented, over the past two years, at least one project in the cultural and creative sector (provide activity reports and financial statements for the past two years, 2023-2024).

Priority will be given to:

- CSOs that have not previously received support under the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme,
- Projects that benefit artists and cultural professionals from developing countries and that respond to UNESCO's strategic priorities – Africa, gender equality, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), youth, and fostering an inter-sectoral approach.

IV. SELECTION CRITERIA

Project proposals under both tracks will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

RELEVANCE	Relevance of the proposal to the advancement of the status of artists and cultural professionals and artistic freedom, in alignment with the objectives of the UNESCO 2005 Convention and the 1980 Recommendation
CLARITY OF THE PROPOSAL	Clarity of its objectives, activities, key products and timeline
ABILITY OF THE APPLICANT	Ability to carry out the proposed project and experience in managing similar ones
EFFECTIVENESS	Effectiveness of the proposed implementation modality, including with regards to gender mainstreaming
COST-EFFECTIVENESS	Cost-effectiveness of the proposal, as well as ability to mobilize co-funding/in-kind contributions
RELEVANT PARTNERSHIPS	With concerned stakeholders including other government institutions and civil society organizations
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	Quality of the communication and visibility strategy

Special attention will be granted to applications that address the **strategic priorities of UNESCO:**

- Africa
- Gender Equality
- Small island developing states (SIDS)
- Youth
- Inter-sectorality: That is, projects that facilitate a collaborative approach between stakeholders in the cultural sector and other sectors represented under UNESCO's mandate (Communication and Information, Social and Human Sciences, Education, Natural Sciences), leveraging their joint action towards addressing common concerns and reaching shared goals.

V. APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

To submit a project proposal:

1. **Download the electronic application form** corresponding to your category (government/public institutions **or** civil society organizations) at:

<https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/articles/call-projects-unesco-aschberg-programme-artists-and-cultural-professionals-0>

If you experience difficulties downloading the electronic application form, please contact the UNESCO Secretariat at aschberg@unesco.org.

2. Fill out the application form in English OR in French.
3. Attach all required supporting documents
4. Sign and date the application form.
5. Submit the application by email to aschberg@unesco.org. You will receive confirmation of receipt.

EVALUATION PROCESS An independent panel of experts will evaluate applications and make recommendations to UNESCO. Final decisions will be based on compliance with the eligibility and selection criteria outlined above.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

Selected proposals will be finetuned and finalized in cooperation with UNESCO before the start of implementation, notably in terms of methodology, timeline and budget.

Applicants should be directly responsible for the implementation and management of the proposed activities. In case of contractual agreement between UNESCO and the applicant, UNESCO will follow its own rules and regulations.

The projects are expected to last between **12 and 18 months**. Project implementation will be supported by the UNESCO Secretariat at Headquarters and by UNESCO Field Offices.

Once selected, candidates will be required to submit to the UNESCO Secretariat:

1. **A detailed implementation work plan**, no later than three months after the notification of approval (between May and July 2026);
2. **A detailed mid-term report** on the implementation of the project and progress towards the results (between March and July 2027);
3. **A final report** providing information on outcomes/outputs and follow-up to the project, no later than three months following its completion (by December 2027).

VII. INDICATIVE TIMELINE

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME
Launch of the call for projects	18 December 2025
On-demand assistance provided to potential applicants, to clarify the objectives and scope of the call for projects	January-mid February 2026
Application deadline	23 February 2026
Announcement of the results	15 April 2026
Implementation period	September 2026-December 2027

VIII. UNESCO CONTACT INFORMATION

Should you have any questions, please contact the UNESCO Secretariat by e-mail:
aschberg@unesco.org

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