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AI set to slash creators' revenues by up to 24% by 2028, UNESCO warns

Musicians and audiovisual creators could lose up to a quarter of their earnings by 2028 as generative artificial intelligence floods the market with synthetic content, a UNESCO report has warned on the 20th anniversary of the international treaty designed to protect cultural diversity.

The good news is that culture is now recognised as an economic force, enabling the design and implementation of policies, despite the fact that social and national divisions persist and AI is advancing faster than legislation can keep up with.

Launched on Tuesday, the fourth edition of [Re-Shaping Policies for Creativity](#) draws on data from more than 120 countries and analyses almost 4,000 policies and measures introduced between 2021 and 2024.

Creativity generates significant economic value. Global trade in cultural goods has doubled since 2005, reaching \$254 billion in 2023, with developing countries now accounting for 46 per cent of exports.

But the benefits of this progress are unevenly distributed and largely concentrated in a very few developed countries.

The creative economy, transformed by digital technology, is reshaping the creative landscape and making it increasingly

precarious for the human creators at its heart.

Digital revenues are now the main source of creators' income, accounting for 35 per cent of the total — up sharply from 17 per cent in 2018 — but stable employment and fair pay remain out of reach for many.

The report cites economic projections forecasting global revenue losses of 24 per cent for music creators and 21 per cent for audiovisual creators by 2028, directly resulting from generative AI outputs.

"Artificial intelligence is a cross-cutting force in this report, reflecting how cultural practices are being deeply transformed," writes Jordi Baltà Portolés, principal editor of the UNESCO report. "Algorithms now determine how diverse cultural content is distributed, accessed, and discovered, with significant implications for public debate. This requires sustained interministerial collaboration, as well as partnerships among public, private, and civil society stakeholders, to safeguard human creativity and the diversity of cultural expressions in an increasingly AI-driven landscape," he concludes.

Meanwhile, the rapid proliferation of AI-generated content, coupled with online harassment and sometimes censorship, is fostering an increasingly hostile environment for creators, particularly women, indigenous peoples, and other marginalised groups.

A legal void

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in Paris in 2005 and entering into force in 2007, established the foundational international framework for treating culture as more than a commercial commodity. Grounded in the recognition that cultural goods and services—from film and music to literature and the arts—carry identity, values, and meaning, the Convention affirmed the right of states to design and implement cultural policies while committing them to international cooperation and the protection of cultural diversity as a shared heritage of humanity.

During World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, there were fears that cultural goods and services (like films, music, books, and art) would be treated purely as commodities, potentially allowing dominant industries—such as Hollywood or major music labels—to overwhelm local cultures. Countries like

France, Canada, and many in the Global South advocated for "cultural exceptions" in trade agreements, arguing that culture embodies identities, values, and social meanings beyond economic value. This led to the Convention, which complements earlier UNESCO instruments like the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and serves as a counterbalance to trade-focused frameworks. As of 2026, it has been ratified by 152 parties (countries and the European Union), making it one of UNESCO's most widely supported cultural conventions.

Under the Convention, signatory countries agreed to support their domestic cultural industries, promote equitable access to diverse cultural expressions, and report to UNESCO every four years on their progress. A key priority embedded in the treaty is reducing the global imbalance between richer and poorer nations: developed countries are called on to offer preferential access to cultural goods and services from developing countries, and an International Fund for Cultural Diversity was established to help build cultural capacity where it is most needed. These commitments provide the normative backdrop against which UNESCO periodically assesses how well governments are translating the Convention's principles into concrete policy action.

The 2026 report renews the commitment to the [2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#), adopted 20 years ago. Compiled from 133 national Quadrennial Periodic Reports and an analysis of nearly 4,000 policies and measures introduced between 2021 and 2024, the 267-page study provides the most authoritative global snapshot yet of how governments are attempting to safeguard cultural diversity in an era of explosive digital transformation, generative AI, chronic underfunding and widening North-South imbalances.

It shows clear institutional progress — every reporting country now has a dedicated culture ministry or agency, a milestone reached for the first time in 2025 — but warns that structural vulnerabilities, from a "visa wall" blocking artists from the Global South to a regulatory vacuum around AI, risk undermining the very diversity the Convention was created to protect. Between 2021 and 2024, 85 per cent of the countries involved also developed policies to promote the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sector, up from 80 per cent in 2017-2020. Countries worked to enhance the discoverability of domestic cultural content, representing a 20 percentage point increase in both areas since the previous reporting period.

Over 8,100 policy measures have been identified worldwide,

ranging from broadcasting quotas and artist residencies to content export strategies and financing schemes. Some 85 per cent of surveyed countries integrate cultural and creative industries into national development plans, yet only 56 per cent set specific cultural goals. Of the 148 AI-related goals adopted worldwide, only one focuses on culture. "In 2025, the Conference of Parties to the 2005 Convention noted that existing regulatory frameworks are inadequate to address challenges posed by generative artificial intelligence," the report states.

Public funding for culture remains critically low at under 0.6 per cent of GDP globally and continues to decline in many places. Development aid directed to culture stands at just 0.15 per cent of total aid. A "visa wall" continues to restrict the movement of artists from the Global South: 96 per cent of developed countries support outward mobility for their own creators, but only 38 per cent facilitate inward mobility from developing nations. Furthermore, only 48 per cent of countries are collecting statistics on digital cultural consumption, leaving policymakers flying blind.

Digital divides are widening. While 67 per cent of people in developed countries possess essential digital skills, the figure is just 28 per cent in developing contexts. Women now hold 46 per cent of leadership roles in national arts and cultural institutions globally, up from 31 per cent in 2017. In developed countries the figure reaches 64 per cent, but in developing countries it is still only 30 per cent.

A blueprint for action

Without urgent and coordinated action, the authors warn, the very diversity that the 2005 Convention sought to protect will be eroded at the moment when technological tools make creation more accessible than ever before.

"The global digital marketplace is characterised by a small number of major platforms that dominate the digital ecosystem," writes Heritiana Ranaivoson, senior researcher and author of the chapter on the digital environment and its offline implications. "This raises concerns about market imbalance and its implications for creativity and diversity. In this environment, a limited group of highly visible artists captures a disproportionate share of revenues and exposure, while many lesser-known creators struggle to achieve comparable visibility," he adds.

UNESCO offers thousands of documented policy examples that governments can adapt, including tax incentives for private investment in culture, digital skills programmes for artists, and strengthened collective management organisations for royalties. It urges countries to integrate culture more deeply into national sustainable development plans — currently only 56 per cent of those that mention creative industries set specific cultural objectives.

"The big shift is that culture is now acknowledged by the ministries that are not in this room, by the ministries of the economy, by the ministries of finance, of trade and employment, those who decide on budgets" said Ekaterina Travkina, coordinator, of Culture, Creative Industries and Global Events at OECD, during the presentation of the report. "From our own work, we see that, well, having data to say that culture contributes to 3,4% of overall employment, up to 10% of employment in some mega cities, up to 7% of all businesses are in culture and creative sectors with very similar survival rates to the rest of the economy, It does change the conversation" she added.