A Global Agenda for Creative Resilience

Global Creative Economy Council

11 Key Actions to Strengthen Cultural and Creative Sectors in Crisis

April 2026

Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

Led by Newcastle University Business School with RSA

In partnership with BRITISH COUNCIL

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The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) works to support the growth of the UK's creative industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice. Led by Newcastle University, with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creative PEC comprises a core consortium of Newcastle University, Work Advance, the University of Sussex and the University of Sheffield.

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About the Global Creative Economy Council

The Global Creative Economy Council (GCEC) brings together academics, practitioners, policy professionals and investors from five continents to identify and discuss emerging trends of global significance in creative economy practice and policy. It provides inclusive perspectives on global policy issues that span both Global South and Global North, and consider ideas for transnational policies and standards.

The GCEC is a joint initiative between Creative PEC and British Council.

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Introduction

The era of the polycrisis is upon us. Climate disasters, armed conflict, economic shocks, and political instability no longer arrive in isolation; they compound, overlap, and amplify one another, creating waves of disruption that strike at the core of community identity and national heritage. Countries face escalating climate-related risks: hurricanes, floods, sea-level rise, wildfires, and earthquakes. But the vulnerability does not end with natural disasters. War, invasion, cyberattacks, and economic instability can also obliterate creative livelihoods overnight.

Artists, cultural workers, and tradition-bearers are the backbone of cultural identity and the creative economy. They safeguard collective memory, spark innovation, and power national development. Yet when crisis hits, creatives are quite often invisible in relief planning and national recovery frameworks that default to supporting traditional economic sectors — leaving the cultural and creative industries without recognition, resources, or representation.

The Global Creative Economy Council (GCEC) gathered lessons from Hurricane Melissa, the COVID-19 pandemic, the wildfires of California, and ongoing responses in Ukraine and Gaza to propose an actionable, practically grounded, and globally adaptable agenda. Crisis response must be cross-sectoral, and the cultural and creative industries belong at the table alongside health, infrastructure, and economic recovery, as an essential pillar of any meaningful response.

This Global Agenda for Creative Resilience serves as a blueprint that governments, funders, development bodies, and cultural institutions can implement before, during, and after a crisis. The intention is that the 11 key actions will support the safeguarding of creative livelihoods and protection of cultural heritage worldwide.

Andrea Dempster Chung, Lead author

1 Recognising Cultural Assets as Critical Infrastructure

The recognition of cultural assets as critical infrastructure is a foundational step toward building resilience. This classification carries direct implications for how governments prioritise, resource, and coordinate their response when crises occur. Without it, the cultural and creative sectors will continue to be systematically deprioritised in recovery planning.

Cultural assets encompass a broad range of tangible and intangible resources: cultural workers, listed buildings, declared heritage sites, libraries, community centres, creative districts, and both formal and informal spaces of cultural production and consumption. For the purposes of disaster preparedness and recovery, these assets must be afforded the same protected status as roads, hospitals, and utilities. When crises occur, the case for their protection is not merely cultural but economic: these assets underpin tourism revenues, employment, community cohesion, and long-term national development.

Governments have a range of policy instruments available to operationalise this commitment including workspace rent relief, targeted tax provisions, emergency grant programmes, and time-limited relief funds designed for rapid deployment. Critically, these mechanisms are preferably established in advance, not improvised in the aftermath of disaster. Embedding cultural assets within formal disaster frameworks requires policy that explicitly designates the cultural and creative sectors as essential to national recovery and sustained economic growth. The evidence from multiple crisis contexts demonstrates that community cohesion, social recovery, and economic revitalisation are all materially strengthened when cultural infrastructure is recognised, protected, and restored as a deliberate and integrated component of national crisis response

2 Develop Pre-Approved Emergency Safety Nets for Creatives

Rapid access to financial support can determine whether a creative practitioner survives a crisis or is permanently displaced. Governments should establish pre-approved, rapid-disbursement safety nets tailored specifically to artists and cultural practitioners. These mechanisms are designed, tested, and ready to activate before disaster strikes rather than constructed in its aftermath.

Such mechanisms might include Universal Basic Income (UBI) schemes that are automatically triggered and applied to registered creatives when a national emergency is declared, or crisis-activated grant programmes distributed through trusted intermediary organisations with existing relationships in the sector. Los Angeles County's emergency grant programme, deployed during wildfire shutdowns, demonstrated that timely, targeted financial support can meaningfully accelerate recovery, provided the infrastructure to deliver it is already in place.

3 Establish Heritage Emergency Protection Committees

Disasters pose an acute and immediate threat to cultural heritage. Governments must invest in dedicated Heritage Emergency Protection Committees (HEPC); standing teams of archivists, librarians, conservators, practising artists and cultural custodians who are trained, resourced, and ready to deploy before or immediately upon the onset of an emergency. Their mandate is both preventive and protective: to evacuate, digitise, or secure at-risk cultural assets before damage or loss occurs. Early intervention by these committees can preserve artefacts, safeguard institutional collections, and protect the physical foundations of cultural tourism in ways that post-disaster recovery efforts cannot replicate.

4 Implement Crisis Documentation Initiatives

Systematic documentation of the cultural impacts of crisis is essential for preserving collective memory, establishing accountability, and informing future reconstruction efforts. Photographers, writers, filmmakers, and historians can be mobilised to record cultural losses and acts of resilience during and immediately after a disaster. This creates an archival record that extends well beyond the emergency itself; serving as both evidence and advocacy. Ukraine's national documentation programmes, established amidst ongoing conflict to capture cultural destruction and community responses, offer a compelling model for how this can be operationalised even under the most challenging conditions.

Beyond its evidentiary function, crisis documentation serves a broader public purpose. When strategically disseminated, it can raise awareness of the value of cultural assets, build public understanding of post-disaster recovery processes, and mobilise greater citizen support for and participation in rebuilding efforts. Integrating a documentation mandate into crisis response frameworks ensures that truth and memory are treated not as incidental outputs, but as deliberate and valued outcomes of the recovery process.

5 Conduct Cultural Loss and Damage Assessments

Whereas the Heritage Emergency Protection Committees focus on prevention and immediate response, the Cultural Loss and Damage Assessments (CLDA) address the critical need for systematic post-crisis evaluation. A standardised methodology for rapidly assessing the full scope of damage to both tangible and intangible cultural assets is essential for making the evidentiary case for sustained investment in cultural reconstruction.

CLDAs should evaluate a broad spectrum of impacts: damage to archaeological and heritage sites, disruption to creative businesses, staffing and revenue losses, security and looting risks, and wider social effects including displacement and impacts on education and community life. Tools such as UNESCO's Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) framework offer a validated model that governments can adopt and adapt to their national contexts. Investment in training dedicated assessment teams in advance of crisis will significantly improve both the speed and quality of data gathered, and consequently, the effectiveness of the recovery response that follows.

6 Ensure Cultural Representation in Recovery Response

Meaningful recovery requires that the creative sector is formally represented in decision-making processes at both national and local levels. Artists, cultural practitioners and creative industry representatives should be included in all reconstruction committees (spanning economic redevelopment, education, urban planning, tourism, and social cohesion) in order to ensure that cultural considerations are integrated into rebuilding strategies from the outset.

This representation on committees serves a functional as well as symbolic purpose. When cultural perspectives inform redevelopment planning, recovery frameworks are better positioned to produce outcomes that are economically viable, socially cohesive, and reflective of the values and histories of affected communities. Conversely, the absence of artists' voices from recovery committees has repeatedly been shown to result in blind spots that undermine long-term resilience, such as displacement of communities, erosion of identity, and diminishment of the cultural assets that drive future tourism and economic activity.

7 Strengthen Copyright and IP Systems to Protect Income

For many creatives, intellectual property rights represent a primary, and often under protected, income stream. During crises, when physical production is disrupted and traditional work environments become inaccessible, the ability to generate revenue through IP becomes even more critical to financial survival.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Culture's wartime efforts offer an instructive example: faced with mass displacement and the suspension of normal creative activity, Ukraine prioritised streamlining copyright registration, strengthening transparency in royalty collection through accredited collective management organisations, and developing public awareness campaigns to promote fair compensation for creative works. These measures ensured that artists could continue to derive income from existing work even when creating new work was not possible.

Grants and support programmes should explicitly include provisions that help artists understand, register, and monetise their intellectual property, particularly in contexts where awareness of IP rights remains low. Robust copyright systems, transparent collective management structures, and targeted creator education together form an important financial safety net: one that can meaningfully sustain creative livelihoods during periods of crisis, even if they cannot fully replace the income lost when physical work and in-person activity are suspended.

8 Transition Funding from Short Term Relief to Long Term Recovery

Immediate relief efforts are necessary but insufficient. To achieve lasting recovery, emergency funding mechanisms must evolve into sustained, strategically structured investment in the cultural and creative economy. For micro small and medium enterprises, access to credit and micro-financing is foundational, enabling businesses to rebuild operational capacity, acquire new tools and equipment, secure venues, and invest in digital infrastructure. Beyond individual enterprise recovery, funding frameworks should facilitate co-investment in export-ready cultural and creative goods and services and increase the availability of de-risked capital instruments designed to attract longer-term private sector investment. In addition, governments should invest in R&D funding to support innovation for withstanding future shocks. These mechanisms not only support immediate recovery but strengthen the creative sector's capacity to absorb and withstand future shocks.

Transition funding should also be understood as a shared international responsibility. While localised assistance addresses immediate needs, major disasters — particularly those affecting multiple nations or regions simultaneously — require coordinated global responses. Governments should establish and maintain cross-border cooperation mechanisms in advance of crises, creating the frameworks necessary to mobilise external support rapidly and equitably when needed. International development bodies, bilateral partners, and multilateral funders all have a role to play in ensuring that the transition from relief to long-term recovery is adequately resourced and does not stall at the point where emergency funding ends.

9 Build Local Supply Chains for Creative Production and Innovation

Crises frequently disrupt the supply chains on which creative production and education depend, severing access to equipment, raw materials, and specialist facilities at precisely the moment they are most needed. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated this acutely, as students and practitioners across the creative sector lost access to the tools, materials, and institutional facilities essential to their work.

Reducing this vulnerability requires a dual approach. At the local level, governments, academia, industry and cultural institutions should encourage the development of creative production hubs, including shared digital tools and maker spaces that are capable of providing access to equipment and materials so that creative production does not fall off a cliff's edge when global supply chains are compromised.

At the international level, robust partnerships with overseas universities and industry partners can facilitate resource-sharing and maintain access to specialist skills and knowledge during periods of disruption. Bringing together creatives and academics through these hubs and global partnerships can also foster innovation to support reconstruction of the sector in new ways.

Together, shared resources, local sourcing capacity and resilient digital distribution networks reduce dependence on fragile global markets, enabling creative industries to maintain operational continuity and recover more rapidly following a crisis.

10 Psychological and Social Support for Creative Communities

Creatives are custodians of cultural memory and community identity, yet they often carry the emotional toll of crises deeply. Mental health support and social wellness services must be integrated into emergency response and recovery efforts. Field teams should include counsellors and community wellness experts who understand the unique stresses faced by cultural practitioners. Protecting the psychological well-being of creatives safeguards the intangible cultural heritage that sustains societies and helps communities heal and rebuild collectively.

The psychological and social benefits of creativity on wellbeing are widely recognised and increasingly part of healthcare approaches. Integrating creatives into psychological recovery work brings fractured communities together around cultural activities, and has the added benefit of providing work for artists. Interventions like concerts, art or music workshops with children and other vulnerable groups can be used to support them in processing trauma. Cultural practitioners should be deployed to affected areas to provide arts-based community interventions and creative activities that offer psychological support and help rally communities during the recovery period.

11 Technology-Driven Cultural Safeguarding

Technology offers powerful and expanding tools for cultural preservation, and building long-term digital resilience should be a strategic priority for governments and cultural institutions alike. Archival digitisation, offshore and disaster-resistant backup systems, drone-based site assessments, remote production hubs, and virtual reality documentation of murals, monuments, and performances all represent concrete ways to ensure that cultural memory survives even when physical structures do not.

Ongoing investment in digital capacity equips creatives, cultural institutions, and policymakers with the skills needed for disaster readiness and business continuity in a crisis. All parties must work collaboratively to build networks of cultural intermediaries and create platforms for knowledge exchange, ensuring that digital tools are accessible, maintained, and fit for purpose before a crisis occurs.

Digital infrastructure gaps, limited connectivity in rural and remote areas, and differing levels of institutional capacity mean that these strategies cannot be applied uniformly in all countries. International support, knowledge transfer, and targeted investment will be required to ensure that technologically under-resourced nations are not left further behind in the aftermath of a crisis. Nevertheless, the trend indicates that as technology continues to evolve, the opportunity to build more robust, distributed, and redundant digital systems for cultural safeguarding increases. Digital systems can be scaled to context and offer every nation, regardless of current capacity, a credible pathway toward greater resilience.

Case Studies and Examples: Lessons Learned

A. Ukraine: Copyright Reform and Crisis Documentation Under Conflict

Relevant to Points 4, 7, and 11

Ukraine's cultural response to ongoing conflict demonstrates that even under conditions of active war and mass displacement, targeted policy action can protect creative livelihoods and preserve cultural heritage. The lessons it offers are concrete and transferable.

Faced with the suspension of normal creative activity, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture prioritised the reform of its copyright and intellectual property systems, streamlining registration processes, strengthening royalty collection mechanisms, and launching public awareness campaigns around fair compensation. The result was a functioning income pathway for displaced artists who could no longer produce or perform physically. This directly validates the case made in Point 7: that robust IP systems are not administrative luxuries but financial lifelines, and that they must be strengthened before crisis renders them urgently necessary.

Ukraine also established national documentation programmes to systematically record the destruction of cultural sites and community responses to conflict. This documentation served multiple simultaneous functions providing legal evidence for future reparations claims, informing reconstruction planning, and sustaining cultural identity and continuity for displaced communities. The Ukraine case makes a compelling argument for Point 4: that crisis documentation must be treated as a deliberate policy mandate, not an incidental output of recovery.

Finally, Ukraine's rapid deployment of digital tools — virtual exhibitions, online creative education, and digital archiving — demonstrated that technology can maintain cultural continuity when physical infrastructure is compromised or inaccessible. This experience directly informs Point 11, illustrating both the opportunity and the urgency of building digital cultural infrastructure in advance of crisis, rather than in response to it.

B. Los Angeles County, USA: Embedding Culture in Climate Resilience Planning

Relevant to Points 1, 2, and 6

The response of Los Angeles County to successive wildfires offers one of the most instructive contemporary examples of what it looks like when cultural considerations are proactively integrated into disaster resilience frameworks — and what becomes possible as a result.

Prior to and following wildfire events, the county undertook comprehensive mapping of cultural infrastructure at risk, identifying vulnerable venues, institutions, and creative spaces and incorporating them into emergency planning. This is the operational expression of Point 1: that cultural assets must be formally recognised as critical infrastructure, with their protection built into preparedness frameworks rather than improvised after the fact. The mapping exercise demonstrated that this is not only achievable but practically valuable, providing planners with the data needed to act decisively when emergencies occur.

Los Angeles County also introduced artist-focused emergency grants that provided timely, targeted financial support to individual creatives facing disruption enabling them to replace lost equipment, recover lost income, and resume work. These grants functioned as the kind of pre-approved rapid-disbursement safety net advocated in Point 2, and their effectiveness reinforces the case for establishing such mechanisms in advance, with clear eligibility criteria and disbursement pathways already in place.

Perhaps most significantly for the broader policy argument, cultural planning was formally embedded into the county's climate resilience strategy establishing a precedent that culture is not a secondary consideration to be addressed after core infrastructure is restored, but an integral component of community resilience from the outset. This institutionalisation of cultural representation, consistent with Point 6, is the model that other governments and municipalities should seek to replicate.

C. Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana USA: The Cost of Cultural Exclusion from Recovery Planning

Relevant to Points 2, 5, and 6

If the Los Angeles and Ukraine cases illustrate what becomes possible when cultural resilience is planned for in advance, Hurricane Katrina offers the counterpoint; a detailed account of what is lost when it is not. The experience of New Orleans in 2005 remains one of the most thoroughly documented examples of cultural sector exclusion from disaster recovery, and its lessons remain directly relevant to this Global Agenda.

In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, the absence of pre-approved financial mechanisms for creative practitioners meant that musicians, artists, and cultural workers — many operating informally and without institutional affiliation — had no rapid pathway to financial support. The delayed and fragmented nature of assistance that followed accelerated the displacement of the very communities whose cultural life defined the city's identity and economic appeal. This gap is precisely what Point 2 seeks to address: the establishment of pre-approved emergency safety nets that can be activated immediately, without requiring creatives to navigate bureaucratic processes at the moment of greatest vulnerability.

The Katrina response also exposed the absence of standardised cultural loss and damage assessment methodologies. With no systematic framework in place, the full scale of cultural destruction to venues, instruments, archives, oral traditions, and creative livelihoods was poorly captured, poorly evidenced, and consequently poorly resourced in recovery planning. This directly informs Point 5: the case for standardised Cultural Loss and Damage Assessments is not theoretical but demonstrated, and the cost of their absence has been quantified in real communities.

Most fundamentally, Katrina illustrated the consequences of cultural exclusion from recovery decision-making. Where cultural voices were absent from reconstruction committees, rebuilding plans repeatedly failed to account for the role of cultural infrastructure in community cohesion, economic recovery, and place identity. The Musicians' Village initiative is a community-led housing project for displaced artists that emerged from grassroots organising rather than formal policy It demonstrated both the demand for culturally informed recovery and the gaps left when Point 6 is not implemented. Its success as a model of targeted, community-centred support underscores the importance of ensuring that creative sector representation is embedded in recovery governance from the outset, not mobilised after the fact by communities left without institutional support.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear. From the streets of New Orleans to the conflict zones of Ukraine, from the wildfire-affected communities of Los Angeles to the hurricane-ravaged island of western Jamaica, the same pattern repeats: when crises strike, the cultural and creative sectors are among the hardest hit and the last to receive structured support. The human cost of this institutional failure is not abstract. It is the musician who lost every instrument they owned and had no emergency fund to draw on. It is the displaced elder in a rural community, the sole living carrier of an oral tradition, left without food, water, or any mechanism to document or pass on what they carry. It is the filmmaker whose shoot was cancelled as the landscape was his backdrop, the artisan whose workshop was flooded, the dancer whose entire income — built on tourist arrivals that will not return for months — was erased overnight. These are not peripheral anecdotes. They are the reality for creatives, repeated across every crisis context examined in this paper.

The Global Agenda for Creative Resilience was developed in direct response to this reality. It is a practical and scalable framework, informed by evidence drawn from multiple crisis contexts and designed to be adaptable across national settings. Its points are deliberately interconnected: recognising cultural assets as critical infrastructure creates the foundation for pre-approved safety nets; standardised damage assessments generate the evidence base that justifies sustained recovery funding; cultural representation in decision-making ensures that rebuilding strategies reflect the communities they are meant to serve. Taken together, these 11 key actions constitute not a checklist but an integrated system designed to ensure that the cultural sector is protected before crisis strikes, supported effectively during it, and positioned to contribute meaningfully to recovery in its aftermath.

What is at stake extends beyond earnings, though the economic case is compelling. When crises interrupt the transmission of cultural knowledge — when elders cannot gather, when festivals are cancelled, when oral traditions go undocumented — the losses that result can be permanent. No recovery fund can restore what is gone. No reconstruction programme can rebuild what was never archived. The urgency of cultural resilience planning derives precisely from this irreversibility: unlike the infrastructure of roads or buildings, culture lost in a crisis may not be recoverable.

This Global Agenda is therefore both a policy framework and a call to action. It asserts that creative livelihoods deserve the same institutional protection as any other sector of national economic life. It insists that cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is a matter of national infrastructure, not sentiment. And it makes a direct call to governments, funders, development bodies, and cultural institutions to act now, before the crisis, so that when the next disaster comes, no community is left rebuilding its identity, and no creative is left behind.

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