

European Cultural Foundation

Work Plan 2021 Compact

INTRODUCTION: UNCERTAINTY, FOCUS, FLEXIBILITY, SOLIDARITY

We are living in truly extraordinary times. The Coronavirus pandemic has hit the world and Europe hard and we are still only at the beginning of a challenge that we may not even fully comprehend. In addition, existing challenges like the climate crisis, growing inequalities, societal polarisation, fundamentalist terrorism and shrinking public spaces have not gone away but have rather been further amplified by the Coronavirus crisis. All of these challenges on their own require a big effort. Together they seem almost overwhelming. Looking ahead to 2021, the one thing that seems certain is uncertainty.

But there is hope. Citizens reached out to each other, practice small and imaginative human gestures of everyday solidarity. This unites us, across balconies, social networks, cities and countries. It is human hope and shared culture without much ado that makes us feel together and that is all worthwhile! This is the culture of solidarity we ought to grow out of this crisis. This is a European moment, a European moment of solidarity.

Our immediate response to the Coronavirus crisis in March 2020 was to invest in a European Culture of Solidarity. All programmatic, advocacy, communication and operational activities and resources were dedicated to this purpose and a flexible Culture of Solidarity Fund was created. Nurturing a European culture of solidarity is not a quick fix. It is a long game. It means enabling visible and tangible acts of solidarity now. A culture of solidarity is a key ingredient for a European sentiment, the mission given to us by our founding fathers in 1954. In 2021, we will continue to invest in a European culture of solidarity with a two-pronged approach: Focus and Flexibility.

Focus: Our 2021 Work Plan is the second within the current five-year strategic cycle and we believe the overall lines of our strategy “Challenge 2025” are still very relevant. Some of our strategic goals have been further amplified, like the need for an open and safe European public space, especially a digital one (Share Europe). Other strategic goals need new concepts, like cross-border cultural Experience. The need to Imagine a better Europe now has an additional relevance and urgency.

Flexibility: The Culture of Solidarity Initiative is our flexible instrument to enable cross-border European activities in times of uncertainty and cultural lockdown. While it was initially established as a temporary crisis response, its relevance has not diminished, or rather it has increased. Armed with the experience and lessons of the start-up phase, we will retool the fund, improve the impact, quality and representation by focusing on certain themes and geographies, as well as further develop the multiple partnership model. We continue to pursue public funders to come on board and aim to make the fund part of the European Cultural Deal for which we advocate.

Operationally, our priority is the physical and mental health of our staff, maintaining the foundation's operations and developing a sustainable funding model.

WORK PLAN 2021

- 1. Mission:** The mission of the European Cultural Foundation is to promote a European sentiment, a shared sense of belonging. The Coronavirus crisis is the ultimate test of whether such a sentiment exists and what value it brings to individual Europeans and our societies. Today a European sentiment worth having ought to be one of solidarity. Therefore, supporting a European culture of solidarity is a timely embodiment of our original mission.
- 2. Strategic Focus:** Our strategy "Challenge 2025" is based on three programmatic clusters: Share, Experience and Imagine. Europe as a cultural community is connected through spaces (Share Europe), through people (Experience Europe) and through stories (Imagine Europe). We initiate and develop initiatives in-house (operational) and we enable and scale initiatives of others (grant-making). A minimum of 50% of our funding goes to external partners. Despite the fundamental changes in the operational context of our work, we believe the overall lines of this strategy are still very relevant.
- 3. Culture of Solidarity:** The Culture of Solidarity Fund is our main instrument to deal with continued uncertainty in a flexible manner. With the experience and lessons of the 2020 start-up phase, we will retool the fund, improve the impact, quality and representation by focusing on certain themes and geographies. We will further develop the multiple partnership model, continue to encourage public funders to come on board and aim to make the Culture of Solidarity Fund part of the European Cultural Deal.
- 4. Share Europe:** Under Share Europe, we design, develop and fund a portfolio of projects that promote a functioning and safe European public space. This includes a research and advocacy project for a safe European digital space (Digital Blueprint Europe), the debating platform Europe Talks, enabling safe physical cultural spaces (Vaha, Civitates) and concluding the Culture and Creative Spaces in Cities initiatives, which is co-funded by the European Union.
- 5. Experience Europe:** This portfolio has been heavily affected by the Coronavirus crisis as physical cross-border mobility and cultural exchange has almost come to a standstill. However, providing physical people-to-people contacts and European experiences will remain important post-Covid-19. In the meantime, we have designed new formats for people-to-people contacts by shifting some of our Experience work into the digital space before we can complement these digital with physical encounters and cross-border mobility again. Initiatives in the Experience portfolio include Libraries 4 Europe, a new multi-annual programme for young Europeans in cooperation with Stiftung Mercator (Generation Europe+) and Tandem Regions programmes. We co-fund and implement a large-scale EU pilot project on cross-border mobility for artists and cultural professionals (i-Portunus Platform), which will incorporate the findings of an initial study on the future of cultural mobility in times of and post Coronavirus and climate change. Starting with our own programmes, we will explore, implement, share and advocate cross-border cultural initiatives in a climate-neutral way (Culture for Climate Action).

6. **Imagine Europe:** How can Europe manage the Coronavirus crisis as a cultural and societal challenge and use it as an opportunity for positive change? Under Imagine Europe, we design, develop and fund a portfolio of projects that tell the stories of Europe, of the people who build this Europe every day and imagine a better Europe. This includes the European Pavilion network and the Europe Challenge, which will award innovative ideas to deal with a world full of uncertainty in partnership with the public library of Amsterdam (OBA).
7. **Public Policy:** Culture has been among the sectors that have been most severely hit in Europe. In 2021 we will continue advocating for A Cultural Deal for Europe. This involves not only advocacy for dedicated support and funding for culture on national and European level but making culture part and parcel of Europe's Recovery and Resilience Plan. A Cultural Deal for Europe and a new European model of public-philanthropic partnership will both make a significant contribution to building a better Europe.
8. **Communications:** We will expand our digital communication and media presence with the aim of being a trusted voice in the discourse on culture in building a better Europe. We strive consciously to speak a language that is accessible for a wider audience across all our communication tools and platforms, avoiding jargon and buzzwords. In 2021, we will use relevant digital and analogue events of grantees and partners to advance our programmatic goals, showcasing our work and increasing awareness of the Foundation overall. A key focus date will be Europe Day on 9 May when we will launch the Europe Challenge and our annual magazine.
9. **Operations:** Our Operations department, focusing on HR, IT and Facilities, provides a steady base and support structure for the Foundation's functioning in times of uncertainty. In 2021, a continued focus will be on maintaining the health and resilience of our organisation, staff and resources. We will upgrade our digital infrastructure and continue to develop a fresh our digital-analogue office life. We will make some necessary adjustments to our facilities and ensure healthy and safe working conditions.
10. **Finance:** The 2021 budget is in line with our multi-annual strategic and budget framework while taking account of the continued extraordinary context of the Coronavirus crisis. An organisational priority for the Foundation is to ensure an appropriate and sustainable income. We aim to diversify our funding base by developing sustainable and innovative European funding sources for the European Cultural Foundation and philanthropy with a European purpose at large.
11. **Mid-term review:** Given the volatility of the external environment due to the Coronavirus crisis and its aftershocks, we will evaluate the impact and relevance of this work plan in June 2021 and make adjustments, if needed.