



“Beyond the crisis: Recovery, resilience and sustainability of the book sector”

Summary of online event, 17 March 2021

On 17 March 2021, IFRRO launched the first “Re:start conversations” event, together with its partners EVA, EWC and FEP.

The “Re:start conversations” events aim to create better awareness about the actions authors, publishers and collective management organisations (CMOs) in the text and image sectors have taken to make content available and accessible during the Covid-19 crisis. As the book and image sectors have proven to be particularly hard hit, they were the focus of the first event.

Following some opening remarks by IFRRO CEO *Caroline Morgan*, IFRRO’s President, *Yngve Slettholm* welcomed participants and speakers and discussed how the Covid-19 crisis has impacted all parts of our society. He said that while culture has been a comfort to a lot of us during this difficult period, unfortunately many in the cultural and creative sectors (CCS), including the book and image sectors, have not felt the benefits. A recent EY [study](#) showed that in 2020 the cultural and creative economy lost approximately 31% of its revenues, with a net drop of €199 billion from 2019, more than tourism, for example.

Sabine Verheyen MEP, Chair of the European Parliament’s (EP) Culture Committee, opened the event by discussing the EP’s work in support of the CCS, including its [Resolution](#) on the Cultural Recovery of Europe in September 2020 and a new report in preparation on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU. Mrs. Verheyen encouraged the CCS to actively engage with governments, including ministers of economic and financial affairs, to ensure they put in place appropriate strategies for the recovery of the CCS.

Barbara Gessler, Head of Unit for “Creative Europe” in the European Commission’s (EC) DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC), discussed some of the EC’s work to support the CCS, including the Creative Europe funding programme, which aims to, amongst other things, strengthen the book sector across the entirety of its value chain. She spoke of the EC’s commitment, in particular Commissioner Gabriel (responsible for Culture), to the EU’s CCS and to defending copyright. For more details about EC support, see [here](#).

A panel discussion followed on the impact of the crisis on authors, publishers, visual artists and RROs, how they have responded with best practices and their recommendations for a sustainable future.

Nina George, novelist and EWC President, explained that 97 % of writers and translators had experienced a high loss of income in 2020 (with the situation set to worsen in 2021). Sales went down, while e-book and audio book piracy went up. Best practices include simplified access and time-limited reduction of tariffs for the digital exchange of material in schools for remote schooling in Germany (authors consequently waived part of their fees in 2020), while children’s book writers have read stories online for families in distress (for free). Key priorities for a robust recovery include full implementation of the EU’s Copyright (DSM) Directive, compulsory remuneration for text and data mining, which

forms the basis for competing AI products, remuneration schemes for online activities for authors and an increase in national budgets for educational materials.

Ángel L. González (Member of the Federación de Gremios de Editores and the Educational Publishers Forum, invited by FEP), discussed the impact of Covid-19. For example, 3.500.000 access codes were provided, representing the number of digital books sent to teachers, students and families in Spain to continue working at home (at no cost to the user). 30.000.000 euros worth of digital content has been delivered for free. Publishers' best practices include offering a unified solution to access digital educational content and the provision of support and training for users. Recommendations include creating sustainable business models that increase the value of digital content and improving teachers' digital competences (only 40% have a basic level).

Carola Streul, Secretary General of European Visual Artists (EVA) said according to the EY [study](#), Covid-19 had resulted in 38% losses in visual sector: 1 in 8 galleries will not re-open, big museums lost between EUR 100,000 and 600,000 per week, 88% of the artists have suffered losses of more than EUR 500. Book sales have also been hit, with a drop in turnover in 2020 by 25% in comparison to 2019, according to the EY study. Recommended best practices for the image sector include financing (grants preferable to loans), with distribution to visual authors through their CMOs helping facilitate the identification of visual authors' eligibility for loans and grants. A speedy implementation of the DSM Directive (by June 2021) is also recommended, as well as social security and lifelong learning.

George Andrew Zannos, Managing Director at OSDEL (Greek Collecting Society for Literary Works) described the significant impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the Greek book sector. OSDEL has enabled access to content, e.g., offering a 50% reduction on digital licence fees for all universities that would like to provide remote access to their students, initiated a Financial Relief Program for authors of 140.000 euros, as well as expanding its anti-piracy program. Private copying remuneration has been a very important source of income for creators, contributing to the financing of social and/or cultural activities. In terms of recommendations, George underlined, in particular, the importance of ensuring remuneration for rightsholders under the DSM Directive's teaching exception (see www.contentforeducation.org).

Rita Brasil de Brito from the Portuguese Presidency of the EU (and current Chair of the Council's Culture Committee) then discussed the Presidency's priorities in the field of culture, which include: recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors (on which Council Conclusions are foreseen to be adopted at the Culture Council meeting on 18 May); culture and social cohesion, and arts and education. Upcoming events include a conference on Arts and Education (26 and 27 April) and the European Launch of the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027, on 17 and 18 June. For more information about the work of the Portuguese Presidency, see [here](#).

The event concluded with some closing remarks from the Chair, *Yngve Slettholm*, who said that our community will continue working together, as well as with the EU Institutions and other stakeholders, to ensure that the text and image sectors can recover as quickly as possible, and be as sustainable as possible going forward.