

Art as Peace Building

**An exploration of practices
and impact scenarios of how
arts and culture address
fragility and conflict**

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Disclaimer

This report was commissioned by the British Council.

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The interpretations offered in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Council, its officers, or those individuals who contributed to the research.

Suggested Citation

edgeandstory, & Lanka.pro Collective (2026). *Art as Peace Building: An exploration of practices and impact scenarios of how arts and culture address fragility and conflict*. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/30WN-CQ12>

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Foreword

Art as Peace Building is an important and timely report, central to the British Council's mission to contribute to peace and prosperity around the world. The role of artists, cultural organisations and heritage experts in advancing peace and strengthening social cohesion has long been a priority for the British Council, and this research reinforces why that work matters.

This report makes a clear and compelling case: arts and culture are not peripheral to peacebuilding – they are part of its **core infrastructure**. It builds on our wider research by showing how arts and culture foster trust, dignity, connection and continuity – outcomes that are often less visible than economic impact, but no less essential to peace. While tools for measuring the economic contribution of the arts, creative industries, cultural organisations and heritage sectors are long established, approaches to understanding where and how arts and culture contribute to peace are still emerging. Drawing on case studies from **Myanmar, Syria, Sudan and Ukraine**, this report is an important contribution to that evolving field.

The report does not claim to offer definite answers. Instead, it explores diverse approaches across different contexts and poses important questions for all of us working in this space. It invites thought leaders, practitioners and policymakers to respond and to help shape stronger frameworks for research, learning and advocacy. Above all, it strengthens the case for recognising, protecting and supporting arts and culture as integral to peacebuilding, social cohesion and long-term security.



Ruth Mackenzie
Director Arts, British Council

The case studies in this report show that arts and culture are never peripheral in conflict settings: they help sustain identity, memory, trust and continuity when other systems are under strain. Ukraine demonstrates this vividly. Russia's assault has targeted not only territory, but also culture, heritage, language, artists and creatives – underlining that cultural life is central to resilience, belonging and national identity. The British Council is proud to be at the heart of the newly announced **UK-Ukraine 100-year partnership on culture**, and to continue this work in partnership with the Ukrainian Government, the FCDO and DCMS, strengthening culture as an essential part of recovery, identity and long-term peace.

This lesson extends far beyond Ukraine. For a decade, with the support of DCMS, the British Council has built widely recognised expertise in cultural protection. It has worked with communities in countries affected by war and climate change to safeguard heritage at risk, strengthen local capacity, and support the protection, sustainability and, where appropriate, sharing of both tangible and intangible heritage. The case studies from Syria illustrate impact of this work. The work remains a priority not only because of the expertise we bring through our people and partnerships, but because of the long-term legacy it can create: empowering local citizens, artists, creatives and civic leaders with the skills to protect, share and build on their own cultural heritage.

Peace is not built by agreements alone. It is sustained through the cultural and social infrastructure that holds communities together – shaped by artists, creatives and cultural leaders, and owned collectively by communities.

Ruth Mackenzie, Director Arts, British Council

Executive Summary

Background and Methodology

Commissioned by the British Council, this research presents a comparative, practice-based analysis of how arts and culture operate in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and what their contribution is towards sustainable peace across different stages and types of conflict. Drawing on in-depth case studies in Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, and Syria, alongside overview perspectives from the Baltic States, Colombia, and Northern Ireland, it brings together evidence from eleven countries and four continents. The research draws on interviews, field visits, focus groups and desk research conducted together with local researchers and local offices. Combining literature and policy analysis with practice-based insights, the report seeks to understand what works, under what conditions and for whom, as well as where and why approaches may fall short. Rather than establishing direct causal links between cultural initiatives and peace outcomes, the analysis follows a contribution-based approach, focusing on how arts and culture function across contexts in practice and what they make possible.



Above Mohamad Khayata's *Stitching My Syria Back* photo series, inspired by his mother's patching practice and supported by the British Council, weaves together fabric fragments from displaced Syrians into a patchwork blanket symbolising the hope of stitching the country back together.

This research is situated within a global context marked by increasing conflict, prolonged fragility, and declining investment in arts, culture, and peacebuilding. At the same time, the foundations of sustainable peace, such as trust, identity, participation, and legitimacy, are under sustained pressure.

Findings: How Culture and the Arts Are Integral to Sustainable Peace

Arts and culture are not peripheral to peacebuilding – they are integral.

Cultural practice functions as a form of social and institutional infrastructure, shaping how individuals and communities experience, navigate, and recover from conflict. Cultural actors operate in multiple roles: as narrators where truth is contested, as connectors where trust is fractured, as facilitators of expression where civic space is restricted, and as sensemakers within uncertainty and complexity. They also function as archivists when memory is under attack and as innovators when institutions collapse, frequently stepping into roles that exceed any formal mandate. In doing so, they contribute to processes essential to peacebuilding, including recognition, dignity, social cohesion, and resilience.

This research shifts the focus from arts and culture as tools or interventions to arts and culture as practices embedded in communities, relationships, and lived realities across different contexts and stages of conflict.

While policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge the relevance of arts and culture in these contexts, there remains a lack of clear strategies, sustained funding, and operational pathways to integrate them meaningfully into peace, development, and security approaches.

Their role varies depending on where communities are situated, whether that is in contexts of prevention, active conflict, displacement, or post-conflict recovery. In each of these scenarios, cultural practices respond to different needs: sustaining identity under pressure, enabling expression in constrained environments, maintaining connections across displacement, or supporting processes of recovery and reconciliation. This perspective highlights that arts and culture are not applied uniformly, but are shaped by context, timing, and social conditions.

Across the cases, four practice-outcome areas are examined: storytelling; memory, identity and voice; diaspora engagement; and learning and skills. For each, the analysis looks at the mechanisms through which practices generate effects, the conditions that enable or limit what they can achieve, and what this means across different conflict contexts.

Storytelling serves as both a psychological and political practice, restoring continuity, generating recognition and meaning-making amid rupture, and challenging erasure.

Memory, identity and voice practices create and strengthen individual and collective identity, affirming dignity and belonging where communities are silenced or under threat.

Diaspora engagement sustains cultural life, visibility and solidarity across borders when local systems collapse, operating as a backup infrastructure for memory, advocacy and connection.

Learning and skills practices increase creative, cultural and social capital, building capability and continuity under pressure, and in some contexts enabling livelihoods and recovery pathways.

Running across all four is a fifth dimension: **institutional strengthening and culture as infrastructure** – the small-scale organisational, relational and digital infrastructures that enable arts and culture to contribute to peacebuilding and shape alternative futures, build trust and sustain continuity where formal systems are weakened or absent.

The choice of art form or genre matters less than the outcome pathway it serves: whose narratives are held, whose voices are heard, which relationships are repaired or sustained.

Across all contexts, these practices are already taking place – led by artists, local cultural actors, communities, and informal networks, often without formal policy recognition or sustained support. Their contributions are relational and require sustained engagement over time, particularly where formal institutions are weak, contested, or absent. They function as forms of connection, continuity, and collective action, where they sustain social fabric, preserve memory, and enable communities to navigate and recover from conflict.

Yet, arts and culture are not standalone solutions. Their effectiveness depends on broader enabling conditions: local ownership, trust, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and ethical, trauma-informed approaches.

Initiatives that sustained local agency proved more legitimate and durable than externally imposed models. “Nothing about us without us” functions here not as a slogan but as a structural condition of effectiveness, reflecting a human rights-based approach that centres meaningful participation. The research also makes clear that poorly designed or externally driven interventions can undermine trust, cause harm, or reinforce existing tensions – making safeguarding, consent, and genuine community agency not optional additions but foundational requirements.



Finding 1: Arts and culture are not peripheral to peacebuilding – they are part of its infrastructure.

The research shifts focus from arts and culture as tools or interventions to arts and culture as practices embedded in communities, relationships, and lived realities. Their role varies across conflict phases – prevention, active conflict, displacement, post-conflict recovery – and is shaped by context, timing, and social conditions, not applied uniformly. Cultural actors operate in multiple roles:

as narrators where truth is contested; as connectors where trust is fractured; as facilitators of expression where civic space is restricted; and as sensemakers within uncertainty and complexity. They also function as archivists when memory is under attack, and as innovators when institutions collapse, frequently stepping into roles that exceed any formal mandate.

Finding 2: The choice of art form matters less than the outcome pathway it serves.

Storytelling restores continuity and challenges erasure. Memory, identity and voice affirm dignity and belonging where communities are silenced or under threat. Diaspora engagement sustains cultural life and solidarity across borders when local systems collapse. Learning and skills build capability and livelihoods under pressure. Running across all four is a

fifth dimension – institutional strengthening and culture as infrastructure: the small-scale organisational, relational and digital structures that sustain continuity where formal systems are absent. What matters is whose narratives are held, whose voices are heard, which relationships are repaired.

Finding 3: These practices are already happening – without recognition or sustained support.

Led by artists, local cultural actors, communities, and informal networks, they sustain social fabric, preserve memory, and enable communities to

navigate and recover from conflict – often functioning as the first-response infrastructure long before political stabilisation is feasible.

Finding 4: Local agency is not an add-on – it is a precondition for effectiveness.

Initiatives that sustained local agency proved more legitimate and durable than externally imposed models. "Nothing about us without us" functions here not as a slogan but as a structural condition of effectiveness. The research makes clear that poorly designed or

externally driven interventions can undermine trust, cause harm, or reinforce existing tensions – making safeguarding, consent, and genuine community agency not optional additions but foundational requirements.

Finding 5: The gap is not one of relevance but of integration.

While arts and culture are actively contributing to peacebuilding on the ground, they remain largely absent from strategies, programme design, funding structures, and evaluation systems. In several contexts, cultural actors did not frame their own work as peacebuilding,

even where its impact on peace was clear, further reinforcing the invisibility of their contribution within formal systems. Support is often short-term and fragmented, and insufficiently aligned with the relational and adaptive nature of cultural practice.

Finding 6: Instrumentalisation is a real risk – but the question is how, not whether.

Arts and culture carry intrinsic value, and when exogenous impact becomes the only driver, what is exploratory, critical and generative in cultural practice risks being lost. In fragile contexts, cultural practice is rarely neutral: when communities come

together through creative work around shared identity, loss, or memory, an intention to repair, reflect and connect is already present. The question is therefore not whether arts and culture are used instrumentally, but how, by whom, and with what safeguards.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The gap is not one of relevance but of integration. While arts and culture are actively contributing to peacebuilding on the ground, they remain largely absent from strategies, programme design, funding structures, and evaluation systems. In several contexts, cultural actors did not frame their own work as peacebuilding, even where its impact on peace was clear, further reinforcing the invisibility of their contribution within formal systems. Support is often short-term and fragmented, and insufficiently aligned with the relational and adaptive nature of cultural practice, while existing evidence and monitoring approaches struggle to capture change processes and longer-term impacts related to social cohesion, identity, trust, and resilience.

This report also engages honestly with the question of instrumentalisation. Arts and culture carry intrinsic value, and when exogenous impact becomes the only driver, what is exploratory, critical and generative in cultural practice risks being lost. At the same time, in fragile contexts, cultural practice is rarely neutral. When communities come together through creative work to

consider shared identity, loss or memory, there is already an intention to repair, reflect, record and connect. The question is therefore not whether arts and culture are used instrumentally, but how, by whom, and with what safeguards.

A shift is needed in how arts and culture are understood within conflict-affected and fragile contexts – not as complementary or instrumental tools, but as part of the core infrastructure through which peace processes are achieved and sustained.

This implies earlier integration into analysis and design, sustained engagement with local cultural actors and communities, and funding and evaluation models that reflect the adaptive and relational nature of their work. The research acknowledges the contextual specificity of its findings and its scope, and the constraints of conducting field research in active conflict settings.

Whom This Report Is For, and How to Use It

To support engagement across sectors, this report maps the wider ecosystem of actors working at the intersection of arts, culture, and peacebuilding, identifying both those who are present and active and those who are often absent. Building on this, stakeholder personas – spanning cultural relations and diplomacy, arts and culture, peacebuilding, security, defence, and development cooperation – offer lenses through which the findings can be interpreted from different sectoral perspectives. These personas highlight entry points, priorities, and blind spots, helping to situate cultural practices within wider policy and operational frameworks.

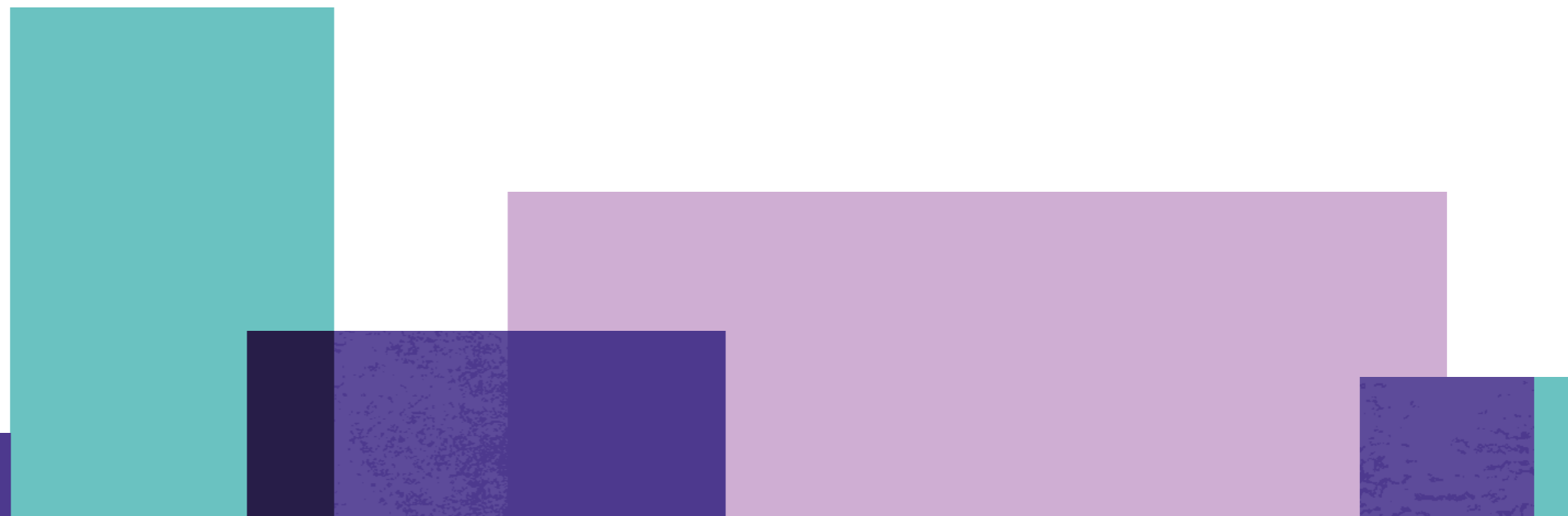
This report is intended for a range of actors working across arts, culture, peacebuilding, development and security, each engaging with arts and culture in conflict-affected contexts from different positions and responsibilities.

For artists and cultural practitioners, it offers a structured reflection on practices they are already leading, supporting reflection, articulation, and recognition of their role within broader peacebuilding processes.

For policymakers and funders, it provides an evidence base to inform advocacy, policy design, and resource allocation, highlighting where current approaches fall short and how they can be strengthened.

For intermediaries, international organisations, and civil society actors, it offers a framework to better understand, support, and connect cultural practices within wider peace, development, and security efforts.

Across these groups, the report is intended not only to inform, but to enable more coherent, context-sensitive, and sustained engagement with arts and culture as part of peacebuilding.



Recommendations and Conclusions

Based on these findings, the report sets out recommendations organised across multiple intervention areas and in phases ranging from quick wins to systemic shifts.

Across all groups, the recommendations share a common direction: culture needs to be recognised not as a complement to peacebuilding but as part of its core infrastructure, and supported accordingly.

The recommendations call for protecting artistic autonomy from instrumentalisation, safeguarding participants from harm and exposure, and building the translation interfaces that make cultural outcomes legible to security, development and policy frameworks – without reducing cultural practice to delivery tools for external agendas.

Recommendations are also phased: immediate actions focus on safeguarding, co-design, and routing support through trusted local actors; medium-term actions on integrating culture into programme cycles and building translation interfaces; and structural shifts on longer funding horizons, dedicated programme lines, and cross-sectoral recognition. This also means stopping or scaling back short-term projects designed primarily for visibility, reporting systems that reward output over honest failure analysis, and engagement that bypasses local actors in favour of more legible international partners.

The question is not whether arts and culture contribute to peacebuilding – they already do, in multiple and often critical ways. The question is whether peace, development, and security frameworks are prepared to recognise and support this contribution structurally rather than rhetorically.

Addressing this question will be central to strengthening the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in increasingly complex and fragile contexts.

For Cultural Practitioners and Organisations

- Co-design dignity-based creative work with communities using trauma-informed, consent-based approaches
- Embed inclusion as a foundational structural pillar from the outset
- Create and sustain safe physical and digital spaces for expression
- Develop facilitators equipped for arts-based engagement in fragile environments

For Intermediaries, Funders, and Policymakers

- Enable longer-term and flexible funding that reflects the relational and adaptive nature of cultural work
- Route support through trusted local intermediaries and diaspora networks when direct funding is constrained
- Integrate culture into conflict analysis, recovery planning and cross-sectoral frameworks from the start
- Invest in MEL systems that capture process, relationship and failure alongside outputs
- Establish emergency response protocols for cultural funding in crisis contexts

For Public Authorities and Security Actors

- Involve local cultural actors in designing recovery and social cohesion plans
- Develop continuity strategies for cultural spaces as essential services
- Institutionalise cultural heritage and artistic rights protection in stabilisation and recovery protocols

How to Read This Report

In this report, you will find a selection of sections that all provide a different perspective on the topic of arts and culture in peacebuilding. Naturally, each section provides insights that vary in value for different stakeholder groups.



Introduction

Research Framing – Why this? Why now?

The global landscape is undergoing a profound and destabilising shift. Conflicts are increasing not only in numbers, but also in duration and complexity. They intersect with climate pressures, democratic backsliding, economic inequality, mass displacement, and intensifying political and identity-based polarisation. Fragility is no longer confined to isolated contexts; it is increasingly systemic.

According to the 2025 Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025), global peacefulness has deteriorated for the sixth consecutive year, marking the thirteenth decline in seventeen years. There are now 59 active state-based conflicts, the highest number since the end of the Second World War, with 78 countries involved in conflicts beyond their borders. At the same time, the proportion of conflicts ending in decisive victory or negotiated peace agreements has fallen significantly, contributing to protracted instability and recurrent violence.

The economic and institutional consequences are equally stark. In 2024, the global economic impact of violence reached \$19.97 trillion USD, while military spending rose to record levels. By contrast, peacebuilding and peacekeeping accounted for just 0.52% of total military expenditure. In other words, far more is spent on fighting and

managing conflicts than on preventing or stopping them. This imbalance highlights the need for approaches that strengthen long-term stability.

In this context, arts and culture can provide complementary, trust-based pathways that strengthen social cohesion, dialogue, and participation. They engage questions of identity, memory, legitimacy, and belonging — dynamics that often lie at the heart of fragility and conflict.

Recent international policy developments increasingly recognise this role. The Outcome Document of the MONDIACULT 2025 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, attended by over 100 Ministers of Culture, affirms that “culture contributes to the full exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, peacebuilding, inclusive economic growth, climate resilience, wellbeing and sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2025). The Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace (2025) goes further by defining culture not as a supplement but as long-term relational infrastructure for sustaining peace. Other recent contributions (e.g. Gattiker, 2024; ICCRA, 2023; British Council, 2019) underline the urgency of embedding cultural strategies in peacebuilding, while also cautioning against oversimplification and instrumentalisation.

At the same time, broader global frameworks such as the UN’s New Agenda for Peace (United Nations, 2023) and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus (UNDP, 2016) underline the need for innovative, upstream, human-centred strategies to address the complexity of today’s conflicts. The UN Pact for the Future (United Nations, 2024) highlights culture within sustainable development (Action 11(a)–(c)) and includes measures with clear peacebuilding relevance, such as intercultural and interreligious dialogue for social cohesion and the restitution of cultural property (Actions 11(b)–(c),

13(b)), yet stops short of explicitly naming culture as a structural pillar in peacebuilding efforts. Meaningful integration of culture into these frameworks could strengthen preventive and cooperative approaches within the post-2030 agenda.

Together, these developments create space to reposition arts and culture not as peripheral to peacebuilding but as essential social infrastructure for trust-building, social cohesion, dialogue, and institutional bridging, supporting participatory governance and rebuilding fractured societies.

UNESCO MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document

Culture for Peace

- Promoting culture as an essential element for intercultural, intergenerational and interreligious dialogue, resilience, conflict prevention and resolution, and post-crisis recovery.
- Struggling against all forms of racism, discrimination, and prejudice that threaten artistic freedom, freedom of expression, as well as cultural diversity and heritage.
- Advancing international cultural policy based on human rights, as a tool for promoting international and cross border security, peaceful coexistence, as well as mutual respect and understanding.
- Promoting culture, as well as natural and cultural heritage -both tangible and intangible-, as a vector of memory, identities, reconciliation and social cohesion, strengthening resilience, and the realization of human rights.
- Promoting cultural spaces as safe and accessible environments that foster dialogue, social cohesion, a sense of belonging, and contribute to reducing violence and building lasting peace.

Yet, despite these developments, arts and culture remain insufficiently recognised within formal peacebuilding, development, and security architectures. This is reflected in funding patterns: while military spending continues to rise, support for preventive and culturally grounded approaches remains limited and largely project-based. Cultural actors working in peacebuilding contexts often lack sustained programme lines or long-term investment. This imbalance constrains continuity, learning, and scalability, and reinforces the perception of cultural approaches as complementary rather than integral to peacebuilding efforts.

A growing body of field-based experience demonstrates the potential of cultural initiatives, including cultural relations approaches, to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and resilience in fragile and post-conflict settings. Cultural exchange, artistic collaboration, and heritage engagement can create spaces for connection across divides, particularly where formal political processes struggle to build trust.

In response to this gap between recognition and integration, this research was commissioned to examine selected cultural practices across diverse conflict contexts, identify enabling conditions and limitations, and inform more strategic positioning of arts and culture within peacebuilding and conflict prevention frameworks.



Culture is not peripheral to peace; it shapes the conditions under which peace becomes possible.

Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace, convened by UNESCO, 2025

Objectives

The objective of this research is to provide practice-based knowledge for policymakers, practitioners, and institutions working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts on how arts and culture operate in peacebuilding processes. Through reviewing key literature, analysing recent global policy developments, and examining a diverse set of contextualised practices across different conflicts and phases of fragility, the study identifies recurring approaches, enabling conditions and limitations. Its purpose is to support informed decision-making without assuming direct causal links between cultural initiatives and broader peace or stability outcomes.

The research recognises that arts and culture can contribute to peacebuilding efforts, but they are not standalone solutions. Cultural initiatives do not replace political settlements, security arrangements, or development interventions. They operate primarily at the social and community level. In conflict settings, they can help sustain stability, continuity, and resilience by

supporting dialogue, expression, memory work, and relationships – particularly where institutions are weakened or trust is fragile. The research also highlights risks of instrumentalisation, especially when cultural work is reduced to messaging or detached from local agency, safeguarding, and context.

Drawing on initiatives of the British Council alongside those of local and international actors, and integrating local expertise with interdisciplinary analysis, this research engages with ongoing international discussions on culture and peace, including the commitments articulated in UNESCO's MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document.

The research recognises that the cultural sector and peacebuilding and policy communities often operate with different frameworks, languages, and expectations. It therefore presents findings in terms relevant to institutional mandates and decision-making processes, and provides clear, actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and programme implementers.

Core Research Questions

- **What are the creative/artistic practices that support key outcomes in conflict-affected spaces, and what are the lessons learned where these approaches and practices haven't worked?**
- **How can these creative/artistic practices and approaches foster inclusivity and cultural diversity while taking a 'do-no-harm' approach?**
- **What can the impact of arts and culture in fostering peace and stability look like, illustrated by selected case studies?**
- **What could be actionable approaches for future arts and culture initiatives for peace, conflict resolution and addressing fragility?**

Approach

The research critically engages with recent literature, policy and practice since the 2018 University of the West of Scotland (UWS) report *A Review of the Contribution of Arts & Culture to Global Security & Stability*, commissioned by the British Council (McPherson et al., 2018), examining how its findings have been taken forward, where implementation has occurred, and what barriers have persisted. That foundational report highlighted the fragmented nature of evidence and called for a stronger comparative basis across diverse geographies and types of conflict.

The present research adopts a comparative approach across multiple contexts. It examines both initiatives that achieved their intended outcomes and those that faced constraints, in order to identify recurring approaches, enabling conditions, and limitations.

The analysis of practices is structured around two complementary perspectives:

🔍 **A practice-centred perspective**, focusing on five practice-outcome areas – storytelling, identity and voice, diaspora engagement, learning skills, and institutional building – identified in both this study and the 2018 UWS report as high-impact modalities of cultural engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and particularly relevant to resilience, trust-building, and social cohesion.

🔍 **A conflict-context perspective**, examining the nature of the conflict, particular fragilities, the particular challenges faced by affected communities, and how artistic and cultural practices respond within these specific settings.

Ultimately, findings are analysed and communicated in relation to different stakeholder groups working across peacebuilding, development, cultural relations, security, and the arts sector. This enables recommendations for policymakers, institutional actors, and cultural practitioners on how cultural approaches may be more effectively integrated into peace and security efforts. It also identifies synergies and gaps across sectors that can serve as a testing ground for the development of new methodologies, practical experiments, and collaborations.



Below Left Displaced young people from Syria take part in a stonemasonry workshop in Tripoli run by the World Monuments Fund and supported by the British Council Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with DCMS. Copyright: World Monuments Fund

Below Right A group of displaced theatre Syrian artists perform at the Create Syria conference in Lebanon, part of the British Council and Ettijahat–Independent Culture’s Create Syria programme, which has supported Syrian artists in exile. By James Coltham



General Note About Images

The photographs used in this report are provided by the British Council and serve an illustrative purpose.

For safeguarding reasons, we could not use photographs from the case studies on which this report is based.

Understanding the Terms: Core Concepts and Definitions

Exploring the Complexities of Concepts at the Intersection of Art, Culture, and Peace

Several of the key terms used throughout this report lend themselves to manifold interpretations due to their inherent complexity and frequent use across multiple disciplines. Taking this into account, this section sets out the general understanding of these concepts as adopted by the research team, drawing on relevant literature in the cultural and peacebuilding fields.

For practical purposes, this glossary does not provide a comprehensive review of the many existing definitions of terms such as culture, peace, security or fragility. Rather, it clarifies how these concepts are used throughout the report, enabling readers to orient themselves within the analysis and relate it to their own areas of practice.

Arts, Culture and Cultural Heritage

Drawing on several existing definitions, the research team understands culture as a set of values that inform ways of perceiving and engaging with others and the wider world. At the collective level, **culture** can be reflected in the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual

and emotional features that characterise a society or social group (UNESCO, 1982). The structural, systemic nature of culture as an underlying element in society allows us to treat **culture as infrastructure** – a system of relationships, institutions, memories, and capacities that shape how societies experience, survive, and recover from conflict (see box).

Culture is also reflected in specific forms and expressions, including the arts and letters, modes of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Among the different components of this understanding of culture, the report places particular emphasis on the role of the arts – that is, a set of creative practices and expressions including painting, acting, dancing, music, film, literature and mixed forms of expression, which enable individuals and groups to convey ideas and emotions. Whilst cultural expression can be a manifestation of identity, it is also a creative means of expressing thoughts, emotions, and imagination (Gattiker, 2024). At times, arts and culture may be used interchangeably in this report, but the research team has nonetheless aimed to apply these concepts in line with the definitions above.

While receiving less attention in this research, another component of culture addressed here is heritage. **Cultural heritage** (CH) includes tangible elements such as sites, buildings, and remains of archaeological, historical, religious, cultural or aesthetic value, as well as intangible elements. **Intangible**

cultural heritage (ICH) refers to living traditions, customs, practices, and forms of knowledge maintained and transmitted within communities and across generations.

From a human rights perspective, cultural heritage is understood as a link between past, present and future and is valued particularly for the importance that individuals and communities attach to it. It encompasses elements inherited from previous generations that are considered of such value or significance that individuals and communities seek to safeguard and transmit them to future generations (UN Independent Expert in the Field of Cultural Rights, 2011).

Peace and Peacebuilding as a Continuum

Traditionally, peace was seen simply as the absence of war or direct violence – a concept often called **‘negative peace’**. Today, a much broader understanding prevails. **‘Positive peace’** goes beyond just stopping the fighting; it requires removing ‘structural violence’ – the deep-seated social, economic, and political inequalities embedded in unfair or unrepresentative systems (UNESCO, 2018). Peace therefore involves not only ending violence, but fostering justice, inclusion and equitable social relations.

This shift requires moving beyond binary and stage-based understandings of war and peace. Drawing on Lederach (1997), this report understands peacebuilding as unfolding along **a continuum**, where conflict, recovery and transformation frequently coexist. Communities may

simultaneously experience insecurity, displacement and rebuilding, rather than progressing through clearly defined phases.

It is in this context that the notion of **‘sustaining peace’** becomes meaningful – viewed as a long-term goal that emphasises trust-building, equity, justice, inclusion, the prevention of violence, and support for health and wellbeing as essential preconditions for a peaceful society. An Advisory Board of Experts established by the UN Secretary-General argued that sustaining peace is **both a goal and a process** that can be connected to building a common vision of society (UN Secretary General’s Advisory Group of Experts, 2015). This suggests a vital connection with culture, when the latter is understood as a set of values and ways of perceiving the world that underpin that shared vision (Baltà, 2021). This understanding resonates with the emphasis on long-term trust-building and people-to-people relationships as foundations for peace and prosperity (British Council 2025).

The UN Sustaining Peace Agenda, closely connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (notably SDG16) calls for efforts towards peace to focus on **prevention and local, bottom-up, inclusive, and participatory peacebuilding**. Other important aspects put forward are focusing on trust-building and collaboration between citizens, as well as between citizens and the state, supporting the establishment of norms, rules and processes for social equity and justice, actively including and engaging women, young people and other traditionally discriminated and/or left behind groups.

Culture as Infrastructure

In this report, culture is not treated merely as content or soft power. The researchers approach culture as infrastructure – a system of relationships, memories, and capacities that shape how societies experience, survive, and recover from conflict.

This shifts the focus from what cultural interventions do to how they work, the underlying processes of generating social cohesion, trust, and healing, and why they keep functioning when formal institutions are weakened or absent.

Here, “infrastructure” does not refer only to physical assets or formal organisations. In fragile and conflict contexts, we often rely on micro-infrastructures, such as peer networks, digital archives, story circles, borrowed spaces, and diaspora hubs, patchworked from what exists and is kept alive by continuity anchors, like a trusted facilitator, a community space, or a shared archive.

Building on the case studies’ findings, culture operates as infrastructure when it:

- **Sustains safe and brave spaces for dialogue, expression, and reflection where formal institutions are weakened;**
- **Preserves memory and identity under repression, displacement, or occupation;**
- **Maintains continuity and meaning through archives, peer networks, and diaspora ties that outlast individual projects;**
- **Rebuilds trust and legitimacy across fractured communities;**
- **Generates economic resilience by converting creative skills and networks into livelihoods and cultural capital under pressure; and**
- **Creates evidence and civic infrastructure for justice and accountability through archives and testimonies that feed into long-term justice processes.**

This infrastructure operates in two directions simultaneously: community-facing, holding communities together through belonging, dignity, continuity, and economic survival; and outward-facing, sustaining visibility, advocacy, solidarity, and justice claims across borders when local systems are under threat.

This understanding aligns with UNESCO’s MONDIACULT 2022 framework, which positions culture as a strategic dimension of sustainable development, crisis response, and peace. It further integrates relational approaches to peacebuilding (Lederach, 2005) that emphasise rebuilding the social fabric disrupted by violence, framing culture not as a luxury but as the foundational infrastructure required for societal resilience.

This understanding connects directly with **peacebuilding**, referred to as a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of conflict, by addressing root causes and reinforcing national capacities for conflict management and recovery. It differs from conflict prevention (focused on pre-violence conditions) and conflict resolution (typically about brokering short-term settlements) in that it works toward durable transformation. It involves long-term processes that consolidate peace by strengthening institutions, justice and inclusion, and creating conditions for resilience and stability, beyond mere violence prevention.

However, peacebuilding does not unfold in neat or predictable stages. Contemporary conflicts – frequently protracted, overlapping, hybrid and geographically dispersed – disrupt any clear separation between crisis, recovery and reconstruction. In this report, peacebuilding is therefore understood as a **long-term and adaptive process**, shaped by evolving political, social and institutional conditions.

At the same time, the **meaning of peace remains context-dependent**. In situations of ongoing aggression or occupation, peace cannot be equated with the mere absence of violence; it must be understood as just, sustainable and aligned with accountability, sovereignty and self-determination.

Fragility

The multidimensional understanding of peace which emerges from the definition of sustaining peace and peacebuilding outlined above is closely connected to notions like that of fragility. The OECD defines fragility as “the combination of exposure to risk and the insufficient resilience of a state, system and/or community to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.” Its multidimensional fragility framework assesses fragility based on 56 indicators of risk and resilience across six dimensions: economic, environmental, political, security, societal and human (OECD, 2025).

This report builds on this notion of fragility, examining it in different geographical settings. It emphasises how cultural practices function not only as expressive tools but also as relational, psychosocial and organisational infrastructure, sustaining civic life where formal systems are weakened or absent. In our ‘Impact Scenarios’, this has been analysed in relation to different forms of fragility in conflict settings, including threats to life and health, threats to freedom of expression, dislocation or limited mobility, communities in the situation of anxiety and high risk of danger, communities experiencing post-conflict trauma, and others. Cultural practices can therefore serve different purposes and lead to diverse outcomes, illustrating how **specific fragility contexts and community needs** inform the choice and function of cultural and artistic practices.

Culture for Peace and Conflict Transformation

The **intersections between culture and peace** have been considered for several decades, including in UNESCO's foundational statement that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed (UNESCO, 1948)." This double role of cultural aspects, as both potential drivers of, and bulwarks against, conflict, is also visible in the EU's strategic approach to cultural heritage in conflicts and crises, which recognises that "Cultural heritage can be a driver of conflict but also a vector for peace, reconciliation and development" (European External Action Service, 2021).

The *Report of the Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace* released by UNESCO in September 2025 suggests that peace "requires the promotion of local non-violent, culturally informed methods for conflict resolution, as well as the promotion of social cohesion through mutual respect, trust and ritual, in order to address root causes of conflict" (Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace, 2025), thus underlining several linkages between conflict resolution and culture (culturally informed methods, mutual respect, trust and ritual, etc.).

By transforming relationships between different social groups and communities and addressing underlying grievances, practices in the arts and culture can be one but not the sole contributor to 'conflict transformation', which also depends on political settlements, institutional reform, economic justice, security guarantees and accountability mechanisms. Conflict transformation has been defined as "a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict" (Miall, 2004).

In this respect, the notion of '**culture for peace**' can be understood as a long-term process that strengthens dialogue, trust, inclusion and the capacity of societies to address conflict constructively (Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace, 2025). Rather than treating culture as symbolic or peripheral, this approach frames cultural practice as a sustained commitment to building social cohesion, amplifying voice and supporting institutional and community resilience.

Across the case studies examined in this report, several initiatives reflect this understanding. They foster spaces for dialogue in polarised contexts, rebuild trust where institutions are weakened, preserve memory and identity under pressure, and strengthen local capacities for participation and recovery. In this sense, the examples analysed here illustrate how practices in the arts and culture can contribute meaningfully to sustaining peace over time.

State of the Art – Where is the Discussion?

An Evolving but Fragmented Field

There is growing recognition, supported by recent policy and academic contributions, that integrating culture, cultural heritage and the arts into wider global frameworks and peacebuilding strategies can enhance efforts towards sustainable peace. Yet implementation remains fragmented – particularly at the policy, institutional, and systemic levels – across donors, governments, cultural agencies, and local practitioners.

This fragmentation is reinforced by a persistent "measurement gap." While agency, cultural identity and collective action are increasingly acknowledged as important, they remain difficult to operationalise within development and peacebuilding frameworks. The *Human Development Report 2023/24* (UNDP, 2024) highlights the absence of granular and standardised indicators capable of embedding such values into evaluation systems. As a result, cultural interventions are often recognised rhetorically but rarely integrated structurally into peacebuilding programmes.

The 2018 University of the West of Scotland (UWS) *Review of the Contribution of Arts & Culture to Global Security & Stability* (McPherson et al., 2018) identified many of the same challenges that still remain visible today: siloed mandates, inadequate evidence frameworks, and the marginalisation of arts and culture in mainstream peacebuilding. These issues are echoed and significantly expanded in the

Independent Expert Group on Culture for Peace, whose 2025 report highlights the lack of policy mainstreaming, the invisibility of local knowledge, the need for trauma-informed and rights-based frameworks, and warns against the instrumentalisation of culture.

The report calls for culture to be recognised and supported not as a supplement, but as a structural component of peace efforts, embedded across policy cycles and protected in conflict contexts.

Our case studies show that despite a growing wealth of practice-led approaches – from storytelling initiatives to diaspora mobilisation, skills-based cultural learning and institutional building – strategic integration remains weak. Cultural actors often assume roles traditionally associated with justice, psychological support, or social infrastructure, but without institutional protection, sustainable funding, or formal recognition. As seen in Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, and Syria, cultural engagement is often the first-response infrastructure that maintains social cohesion long before political stabilisation is feasible, yet it remains budgetarily and strategically invisible in global peace frameworks (Breen, 2023).

This persistent gap must be understood in relation to the broader architecture of peacebuilding as defined by the UN, OECD, and critical scholarship. Peacebuilding is widely understood to include multiple interconnected components: conflict prevention; inclusive dialogue and mediation that transform narratives and address

grievances; transitional justice mechanisms enabling accountability and reconciliation; institutional reform and governance renewal to build legitimacy; psychological healing addressing trauma; social cohesion bridging identity divides; economic recovery fostering dignity and participation; and long-term resilience rooted in local ownership and adaptive capacity.

Cultural actors and infrastructures play a role in nearly all these dimensions – especially in enabling narrative transformation, rebuilding social trust, sustaining memory, and supporting emotional recovery – but remain structurally disconnected from peacebuilding mandates and funding streams. Culture continues to sit “everywhere and nowhere” within peace and security architectures: symbolically recognised, but operationally excluded. Mechanisms for measuring impact, securing mandates, and scaling interventions remain underdeveloped. The gap between recognition and implementation identified in The British Council/University of West Scotland report (McPherson et al., 2018) still holds.

Field-based insight continues to demonstrate the potential of arts, culture, and cultural heritage to serve as catalysts for dialogue, reconciliation, and resilience in fragile and post-conflict settings. The *Key Approaches to International Cultural Relations in Fragile Contexts* report (Baltà, 2021) moved the field forward by framing cultural relations as contributing to peace via participation, trust, and responsiveness to complexity. Recent British Council evaluations and syntheses (e.g. Art of Peace, 2019; Cultural Protection Fund evaluations; and the UK/Ukraine Season assessments, 2023) underline that

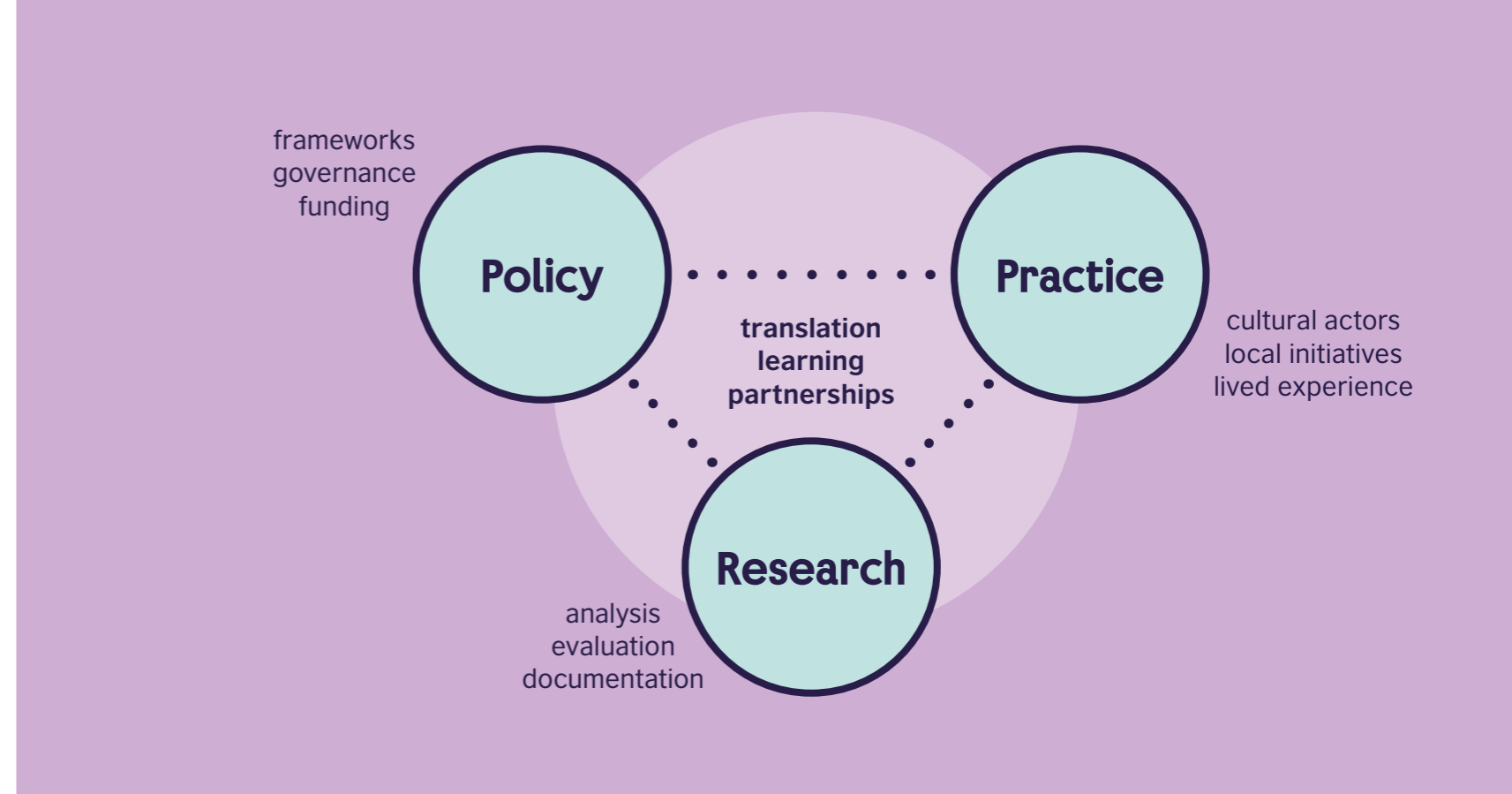
positive outcomes are highly contingent on how interventions are designed, by whom, and with what safeguards.

Importantly, many of the programmes demonstrating positive outcomes were underpinned by a cultural relations (CR) approach grounded in mutuality, values-based engagement and equitable partnerships, shaping how they were designed and delivered. Cultural relations are reciprocal, voluntary and often long-term people-to-people exchanges between different nations or groups that foster mutual understanding, trust and connection. Unlike state-driven cultural diplomacy, they involve non-state actors – such as artists, students, cultural institutions or NGOs – engaging through dialogue, collaboration and shared values. In this sense, durable impact arose from integrating cultural practice with CR principles of mutuality and equitable partnership.

This suggests that culture’s potential lies not only in its aesthetic or expressive power but in its ability to rebuild social and relational infrastructures – trust, meaning, and memory – following rupture.

Rather than offering a general literature review, this section provides a practical synthesis of recent developments across three interlinked areas – policy, research, and practice – and reflects on key questions:

- What can we learn from what’s already happening on the ground?
- What remains missing or underexplored?
- How can this knowledge travel - across sectors, across countries, across power levels - from grassroots to donors, from practice to policy?



Recent Developments

POLICY Opening Doors, But Lacking Operational Translation

Culture’s position across public policy domains, while slowly emerging in policy documents and high-level speeches, is rarely fully put into practice. In foreign affairs, culture is often used as a soft power tool. In security policy, culture is treated both as a risk factor and a resilience mechanism and is only now slowly entering prevention and preparedness frameworks. It is either seen as an asset to protect – such as cultural heritage – or a symbolic target, used to undermine identity, reshape historical narratives and weaken civilian morale. In peacebuilding, culture is the primary driver of “patchwork peacebuilding” – the reality that sustainable peace is built through a bottom-up assembly of local social contracts rather than a single top-down

fix. However, policy architectures consistently struggle to iterate this “patchwork” into formal, funded strategies.

Often in development, culture is framed as an enabler of inclusion and growth, but often instrumentalised and reduced to mere outputs, rather than integrated into policy design. For the cultural sector itself, culture is about identity, healing and memory and a form of resistance, but actors often fail to use it strategically or provide consistent, sustainable support. This gap is further widened as, when major donors shift budgets toward military hardware, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) and mediation funds that sustain the human and cultural work of the patchwork are systematically stripped. Consequently, cultural engagement remains chronically fragmented across all sectors.

The 2025 MONDIACULT Outcome Document (UNESCO 2025a) reflects a purposeful shift in how UNESCO’s 194

Member States frame the role of culture. In their collective view, culture is no longer a passive mirror of society but a “political response to the fractures of the world,” intended to address contemporary risks. By organising culture into nine operational domains – including cultural rights, education, the economy of culture, climate action, digital transformation, heritage in crisis, peace, artificial intelligence, and cultural data – the document provides a common language to better align cultural work with national and UN security agendas.

Importantly, the new ‘Culture for Peace’ stream moves beyond a traditional heritage-only framing. While it continues to recognise the importance of cultural heritage sites and intangible practices, it now also recognises the protection of artists and cultural workers, the creation of cultural spaces as safe environments, and the vital role of culture in strengthening resilience, social cohesion, and memory in crisis contexts.

Culture in Multilateral and European Frameworks: Present, but Peripheral

Even as culture appears more often in strategic documents, it is rarely positioned as a structural component of peacebuilding or conflict prevention.

Key examples include:

- **Agenda 2030 and SDGs:** Efforts to include culture as a standalone pillar in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have not succeeded, though implicit, and occasionally explicit, links remain with SDGs 5 (gender), 11 (cities), 16 (peace), and 17 (partnerships). UNESCO’s Culture|2030 Indicators highlight culture as a resilience asset, but uptake is uneven.

- **UN New Agenda for Peace (2023) & Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR, 2025):** Emphasise prevention, social cohesion, and inclusive, locally led peacebuilding. While local civil society participation is encouraged, cultural actors and institutions remain implicit rather than formally positioned as strategic actors in peacebuilding architectures.
- **OECD States of Fragility (2022/2025):** The framework defines six dimensions of fragility, with the “human” dimension added in 2022 to cover health, education, and inclusion. While it supports diagnostic mapping, it does not account for cultural resilience, and cultural systems remain outside its indicator set.
- **EU Strategic Compass (2022) & Integrated Approach (2018):** Note heritage protection and cultural diplomacy, yet culture is peripheral in EU external action and almost absent in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.
- **EU Council Conclusions on Cultural Heritage in Conflict (2021):** A strong framework, yet narrowly focused on heritage, not cultural ecosystems or peacebuilding.

- **NATO: Protection of Cultural Property (PCP) & Human Security (2024–2026):** Following the 2024 report *History and Identity Under Attack*, NATO now treats heritage as a “strategic imperative” for local legitimacy and countering identity-based disinformation. However, its doctrine remains primarily defensive and policing-led, focusing on physical assets and illicit trafficking rather than deploying cultural ecosystems as proactive, non-kinetic tools for conflict transformation.
- **EU Cultural Strategies & The Culture Compass (2025–2028):** The 2025 Culture Compass for Europe aspires to embed culture across EU policy but remains operationally siloed. International Cultural Relations (ICR) initiatives, while valuable for cooperation, remain strategically absent from the EU’s security and fragility agendas.

Learning from Other Cross-Cutting Agendas

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, anchored in UNSCR 1325 (2000), rooted in feminist peacebuilding, is widely adopted and multi-sectoral. Similarly, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda (UNSCR 2250, 2015) has been translated into the EU’s Youth Action Plan (2022), embedding youth voices into external action and the African Union’s Framework on YPS (European Commission, 2022). These examples show how cultural strategies could follow a similar path: cross-cutting, embedded, and institutionalised. While beyond the current research scope, they offer an important policy horizon for a future culture and peace mandate.

Remaining Gaps

Culture is still treated as an adjunct to peacebuilding rather than a driver. Without tools, mandates, or funding frameworks, its strategic potential remains unrealised. Bridging this gap requires policy frameworks that reflect lived realities and institutional mechanisms that enable culture to contribute meaningfully.

RESEARCH From Advocacy to Evidence – Still Underdeveloped

The research landscape for arts, culture, and peacebuilding is defined by a profound paradox: while high-level theory across various disciplines has long hinted at the transformative potential of cultural practice, the empirical evidence remains fragmented, siloed, and under-leveraged. Even though there is rich, grounded insight from practice, it has not significantly influenced either mainstream peacebuilding frameworks or academic theory. This may be due in part to the field's inherent interdisciplinarity, which creates a loop of disconnection between disciplines, sectors, and methodologies. Culture remains marginalised, lacking impact metrics and still viewed as a “soft” addition rather than a structural pillar of peace.

In international relations and diplomacy, thinking has moved beyond the classic conceptualisation of soft power – defined by Nye (2004) as the ability to affect others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion – toward models of cultural engagement based on mutuality, trust, and people-to-people connection (Isar, 2010; Melissen, 2005). However, these frameworks are not exclusive; in practice, long-term relational connection often coexists with more traditional, instrumentalised soft power agendas. As we enter 2026, these models are increasingly contested by a global shift toward hard power and transactional diplomacy, where culture is either reframed as strategic communication or deprioritised in favour of immediate security concerns. The normative shift toward mutuality therefore remains uneven and

contested, particularly in crisis-affected settings where immediate security concerns often override the rest.

In the field of peace and conflict studies, culture has been somewhat acknowledged as a methodology for transformation. Lederach's *Moral Imagination* (2005) remains foundational in this shift, emphasising that peacebuilding is not merely technical but requires creative capacity to envision and shape new possibilities through human connection and constructive engagement. Here, culture is seen as part of the “peace process” and a potential contributor to innovation, yet the research often stops at the social level and fails to influence broader peacebuilding frameworks.

This is compounded by insights from sociology and memory studies, where Rothberg (2009, 2019) has offered frameworks for understanding multidirectional memory and implicated subjects, helping researchers understand how artistic projects can address indirect complicity and overlapping histories in post-conflict reconciliation. Meanwhile, Bourdieu's (1993) concept of cultural capital continues to shape critical analysis of whose voices are amplified or marginalised in international cultural interventions. Psychology and trauma studies offer perhaps the most advanced look at the “how.” Affect theory and trauma studies (Ahmed, 2004; Caruth, 1996) have informed how arts-based methods engage the emotional and physical dimensions of conflict, yet these insights usually stay confined to individual or community-level healing and rarely inform macro-level peace policies.

To bridge these disciplinary gaps, the Berghof Foundation's work on the transition from violence to peace (Dudouet, 2006) argues that constructive change requires both individual behavioural shifts and the taming of structural violence through complementary methodologies. These insights support a multidirectional theory of change where culture is not simply a messenger of peace, but an active arena in which peace is contested and reimagined. This phrasing provides a vital bridge between academic and grey literature: it acknowledges the formal lineage of peace geographies (Mamadouh, 2023; Macaspac & Moore, 2022), which views peace as a set of spatial practices and political negotiations, while simultaneously validating the sophisticated, arts-based work found in practitioner reports.

On the ground, the field is actually quite advanced, with practitioners using sophisticated, intersectional arts-based methodologies to navigate trauma and transition. Policy-oriented scholarship from figures like Gattiker (2024) and Baltà (2021), alongside the ICCRA policy brief (2023), has stressed the need for systemic, policy-aligned approaches that frame culture as a political and infrastructural field shaping legitimacy and institutional trust. Foundational reports from the British Council (2018) and EUNIC (2021) have moved the field forward by framing cultural relations as contributors to peace via participation and resilience.

Yet these contributions remain mostly in grey literature – hidden in donor reports, program briefs, or evaluation documents. As a result, they rarely update academic theory or inform policy design. The result is a field where practice is fast and adaptive, but research is slow, siloed, and reactive – failing to frame culture as a connected infrastructure rather than a series of disconnected projects.

Ultimately, the challenge is not a lack of evidence, but a lack of a mechanism – including digital platforms and intermediary organisations – to facilitate these different types of knowledge working together. Organisations like cultural institutes and other intermediaries, are uniquely positioned to address this by operating at the nexus of high-level diplomacy, academic research, and grassroots practice.

Remaining Limitations

The most pressing limitation is the growing gap where researchers in almost all academic fields may be late to the innovations happening in the field. Practitioners are already navigating the complexities of digital memory, decolonial aesthetics, and socially engaged arts long before these concepts are formally established, while academic outlets – even those shared via policy briefs and forums – often remain siloed within specific disciplinary networks. Without a functional mechanism to integrate these insights, cultural evidence remains isolated in case studies, making it difficult for both academics and decision-makers to perceive the full scope of cultural work as a vital infrastructure for peace.

PRACTICE

Innovation under Pressure but Still Isolated

Across all major contexts of fragility, cultural practitioners demonstrated extraordinary ingenuity, adaptability, and commitment, often stepping into roles far beyond the arts: fostering healing, community organising, documentation, skills transfer, identity work, and social resilience. Yet, despite this innovation, practice remains constrained by fragmented funding, political insecurity, and limited cross-sectoral integration.

The following practice-outcomes were chosen from the British Council/ University of West Scotland Review of the Contribution of Arts & Culture to Global Security & Stability. The institutional building – culture as infrastructure was added from findings of this research.

Storytelling serves as both a psychological and political intervention. Drawing on oral histories, theatre, digital narratives, comics, and documentary, cultural actors generate recognition and meaning-making amid rupture. As the report underscores, storytelling restores continuity, challenges erasure, and reclaims identity - particularly in contexts of censorship or propaganda. It is a practice of both memory and resistance.

Memory, Identity & Voice are foundational across fragile settings. In contexts marked by repression, displacement or violence, cultural practice enables individuals and communities to reclaim narrative agency, reassert dignity, and sustain collective belonging under conditions of silencing or threat. This includes women's artistic networks preserving testimony, youth collectives challenging dominant narratives, and practitioners safeguarding archives and commemorative practices at risk of erasure.

Diaspora Engagement operates transnationally. Diaspora artists, cultural workers, and collectives sustain cultural continuity, provide transnational advocacy, and generate vital material and symbolic resources. Diaspora - home collaborations - digital festivals, collective archiving, creative residencies - form resilience networks that outlast institutional collapse.

Learning Skills – Capacity Building: skills-based cultural work (digital media, crafts, theatre-making, creative entrepreneurship) strengthens livelihoods and autonomy while building confidence, adaptability, and relational trust. In many contexts, “skills” become the bridge between immediate survival and longer-term civic engagement.

Institutional Building- Culture and Infrastructure: Cultural institutions – formal and informal – act as stabilising forces across fragility contexts. Even when physical spaces collapse, networks, norms, and shared practices endure. Institution-building appears not as brick-and-mortar capacity, but as relational infrastructure: collectives, ensembles, micro-organisations, digital communities.

Recurring Structural Challenges

Across all practices, practitioners face similar barriers:

- Sustainability constrained by short cycles, limited funding, and political volatility
- Lack of systemic integration, where culture is treated as a “soft add-on” rather than a strategic pillar
- Lack of proper monitoring and direct impact mechanisms
- Silence around failure, due to reputational risks and donor incentives
- Weak cross-sectoral collaboration, especially with peacebuilding, security, development, and justice actors
- Ethical risks, including retraumatisation, securitisation, or co-optation of cultural narratives.

Despite these challenges, cultural actors and institutions consistently operate where institutions cannot and show resilience and resourcefulness.

Methodology – Our Approach

The findings presented in this report emerge from a mixed methodology comprising field research in four countries, additional research examining the context of three additional countries and regions, and desk research including a literature review of international and context-specific references. The combination of these sources of information, and the analysis of contexts and practical case studies from seven countries/regions across continents, illustrates the global nature of the research project.

In particular, the project team conducted:

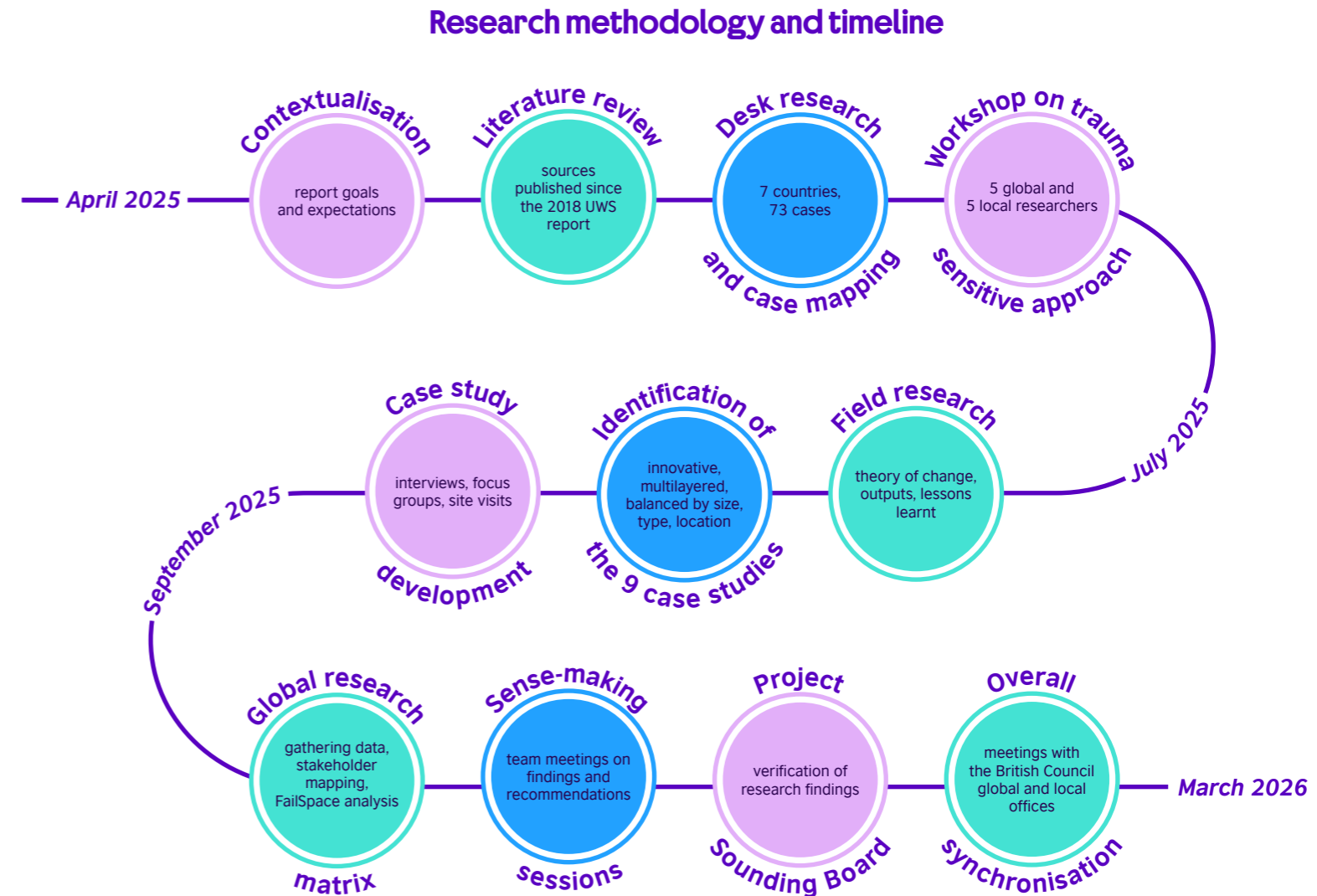
- ‘deep dive’ or ‘in-depth’ analyses, combining desk research, interviews and, in some cases, surveys and focus groups, in four countries with ongoing active wars or conflicts (Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria);
- two panoramic reviews of countries with less active conflicts for which extensive previous documentation is available (Colombia, Northern Ireland); and
- a special conflict prevention outlook in the Baltic region spanning Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The selection of countries was made through discussions between the British Council and the research team, and took into account the diversity of contexts, approaches and regions, and the relevance of the examples to the British Council’s priorities in this field. The research includes initiatives both from within the above-mentioned countries as well as diaspora and refugee communities where relevant. The table below provides further details on the research approach followed in each of the countries or regions under review.

Myanmar	Deep dive
Sudan	Deep dive
Syria	Deep dive
Ukraine	Deep dive
Colombia	Review
Northern Ireland	Review
Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)	Outlook

Phases of the Research

The research process, conducted between April 2025 and March 2026, has involved the following stages¹:



¹ Additional information about the methodology used in each of the deep-dive countries is presented in the ‘Technical Methodology’ section included in the annex. As described in this section, whilst the project has applied a common approach to the collection and analysis of data, the specific circumstances of each country under study have required adaptations.

Initial discussions with the British Council to contextualise the research, understanding expectations and discussing the choice of focus countries.

Literature review on the contribution of the arts and culture to addressing fragility, peace and stability, with a particular emphasis on sources published since the 2018 UWS report.

Desk research conducted at the level of the seven focus countries/regions listed above. For deep dive countries this stage also included a mapping of culture for peace practices and the identification of a long list of cases demonstrating the practical dimension of arts and culture contributing to the peacebuilding efforts across contexts. In total 73 potential cases were identified, including British Council-funded or supported initiatives and non-British Council activities.

Identifying 2-3 case studies for each deep dive country to illustrate a variety of approaches to the integration of the arts and culture in different types of conflict and phases of development. Common guidelines and criteria for the selection of case studies were discussed and agreed upon by the research team, in dialogue with the British Council, including aspects like geographical diversity within a country (e.g. urban / rural), conflict type and phase, type of cultural intervention, and the potential to extract lessons from both success and failure. The final choice of nine case studies was done in consultation with the British Council teams in each country as well as headquarters, taking into account diversity of approaches, relevance and potential to contribute to the project's goals.

Interviews and focus-groups to expand and verify findings per each country. The research team has conducted over 60 interviews, in both deep-dive and review/outlook countries. In Sudan and Ukraine, focus groups have also been conducted. In some countries, additional information has been collected through online surveys and e-mail exchanges. A standard set of questions to be used in semi-structured interviews or in focus groups was discussed, building on the overall objectives of the project yet enabling local adaptation. In this respect, country researchers designed specific methodologies for each country in dialogue with other members of the research team, taking into account an assessment of risks and relevance in each case.

Describing selected cases using a **common framework of analysis** through the lens of practices, enabling/blocking factors, stakeholders involved, what worked or did not work so well, and core principles applied.

Applying the “FailSpace” approach to place successes and failures across a spectrum that includes many intermediate positions, and enabled a more nuanced understanding of case studies. We adapted the FailSpace methodology developed by the University of Leeds and Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. Learn more at failspaceproject.co.uk.

Identifying case-specific recommendations and those with broader relevance. Developing recommendations according to different contexts of the conflict.

Using a persona analysis approach to interpret how various key stakeholders around arts and peacebuilding may view, experience, or act upon the findings to inform recommendations of the research.

Verifying research findings with the Project Sounding Board.

Ensuring continuous synchronisation between the research team and the British Council team.

Ensuring that a **trauma-informed approach** is integrated across all stages of the research, as illustrated in the box below.

A Trauma-Informed and ‘Do-No-Harm’ Approach

The research follows a **do-no-harm principle** and integrates **trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practices**. The design and implementation were developed with the involvement of local experts to ensure contextual relevance, including the use of local languages, culturally appropriate vocabulary, and awareness of sensitive or polarising topics related to conflict and fragility. Research tools and group processes were adapted to minimise tension and respect local norms of communication. Internal training on trauma sensitivity and self-care was provided to all experts from seven countries, covering both online activities and on-site visits.

The team ensured transparency about research goals, data use, and confidentiality, reviewed research questions with local experts to avoid retraumatisation, and created safe conversational spaces through careful facilitation and deep listening. Political, security, and safety risks were regularly assessed, and potential harms related to publishing sensitive content were evaluated. Participants retained control over their contributions, including sensitivity checks and verification of final texts, with a human rights-based approach guiding decisions in contested or high-risk situations. The findings of the report will be disseminated to all contributors to ensure feedback loops and inform future conversation on this topic.

Key Limitations and Contextual Observations:

This report does not aim to evaluate existing or past practices, nor to highlight best practices. It aims to provide knowledge on what cultural practices can be conducive to sustaining peace in conflict settings, on the basis of the observation of different examples in different conflict settings. The evidence presented should, therefore, not be seen as an assessment of individual projects and programmes as it did not follow an evaluative approach.

The security context in some of the research countries limited the research team's ability to visit certain areas and the availability of informants, and influenced the methodology used.

The research structure foresaw only a limited amount of case studies, thus limiting the amount of approaches analysed at a deeper level. However, an effort was made to analyse a diverse set of approaches.

Few of the cases using arts and culture in the context of peacebuilding had their narrative reflected in a Theory of Change (ToC) or equivalent strategic framework, which limited the ability to correlate the actions undertaken and the outcomes observed with explicit objectives and inputs.

Every fragile context is very nuanced. Even though each case study might offer approaches that could be applied elsewhere, they should still be treated as highly contextual.

Similarly, the contexts under analysis, particularly those of deep-dive countries, are highly dynamic and evolving. Thus, some of the conclusions obtained may be partial and subject to subsequent revision.

The fragility and security concerns prevailing in some of the countries and regions under analysis limited the ability to disclose some research data.

While the project has involved a diverse team with knowledge of several languages, linguistic skills or the ability to interpret some data may have been limited in some cases.



Above Discover Ukraine: Bits Destroyed at the Greenwich+Docklands International Festival (UK/ Ukraine Season 2022), a digital work by Yevgen Nikiforov with ROCK 'N' LIGHT STUDIO and PTAKH JUNG, reimagining Ukraine's mosaic heritage in response to its destruction. Photograph by David Levene

Case Studies and Country Contexts

After an initial long list of more than 70 potential initiatives was compiled by the researchers, a final selection of 9 cases was made in dialogue with the British Council's Culture Responds to Global Challenges and the Research and Insight teams as well as the respective country offices. The selection of the case studies was guided by how well each case responds to the following criteria:

- **Multilayered** – combining different goals, approaches, or artistic forms
- **Charged** – tackling sensitive or touchy topics
- **Diverse** – bringing in different geographies, themes, and stakeholders
- **Impactful** – through outcomes, enabling factors, or even lessons learnt from failure
- **Innovative** – different in method, form, or partnership

Cases that were identified as 'political' by the British Council and/or actively supported resistance movements (civil, armed or otherwise) were excluded from the selection of case studies. For safeguarding purposes of the people involved as well as the activities themselves, some case studies were anonymised.

Additionally, three shorter country or regional overviews (the Baltic States, Colombia and Northern Ireland) are included to draw lessons from other experiences and to better contextualise the case studies.

The following overview presents only snapshots. The full case studies can be found in the report's annex.

Myanmar

Country Context

Myanmar has experienced prolonged internal conflict and militarisation since independence in 1948. The military coup of 1 February 2021 dismantled the country's fragile democratic transition and plunged Myanmar into an escalating civil war, now in its fifth year. Conflict dynamics are increasingly complex and fragmented, with rapidly shifting territorial control, competing systems of governance, and multiple armed actors operating across the country. Violence has intensified, and governance has fractured, producing overlapping systems of law and control that vary significantly by region. Civic space has collapsed under widespread repression, with severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and access to information. Surveillance and the criminalisation of dissent have forced most public discourse, advocacy, and independent media underground or into exile. In this context, meaningful dialogue on human rights has mostly disappeared. As international attention wanes, Myanmar remains one of the most under-addressed crises facing deteriorating humanitarian and governance conditions.

Culture Context

Within this fractured environment, the cultural sector operates as a hybrid ecosystem of local civil society organisations, artist collectives, and

independent cultural workers, sustained by partnerships with international actors and regional diaspora networks. Following the 2021 coup, cultural production increasingly intersected with resistance dynamics. Artistic works circulate transnationally, often through digital platforms, generating financial resources, symbolic solidarity, and international visibility. Hybrid approaches – blending online and offline methods – have become necessary. Digital platforms serve as both exhibition spaces and safe channels for communication, while discreet community workshops continue to take place in displacement camps and ethnic-controlled areas. Artists in Myanmar face acute personal risks, including arrest, detention, and enforced disappearance, for work the military deems threatening (PEN America, 2022; Soraide, 2023). Cultural actors operate within a constrained balance between expression and security, adopting adaptive safeguarding strategies to mitigate surveillance and exposure risks. This has led to the proliferation of transnational solidarity art – creative works circulated digitally and sold internationally to generate financial support and global attention. Arts and cultural production persist despite censorship, security risks, internet shutdowns, banking restrictions, and limited mobility. Beyond targeting producers, the authorities have systematically sought to suppress public consumption of art that could in any way be construed as social or political commentary. Diaspora engagement has become both a practical necessity and a strategic opportunity, further strengthened by digital platforms.

Case Study: Myanmar

Peace through Culture*

2020–2023, *project name anonymised

Operating during two overlapping crises – the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 military coup – the project trained over 300 civil society organisation (CSO) representatives and awarded 114 grants directly to artists. It also developed a toolbox that contains 17 arts and culture tools designed to foster intercultural dialogue, trust, and social cohesion through creative and participatory approaches. The project aimed to empower CSOs as key actors in peacebuilding and policy engagement, supporting efforts to address formal and customary laws that hinder the peace process. The initiative was arts-based and community-driven in both its design and stakeholder engagement. In other contexts, similar CSO-led projects work with governments to support policy change; in Myanmar after the 2021 coup, this was no longer possible. With the elected government removed, and the military junta widely regarded as illegitimate while actively closing civic space, suppressing free expression, and making engagement with state actors unsafe, the project's priorities were driven by CSOs themselves, with little or no engagement with government stakeholders.



The assistance from Peace Through Culture* during the financial strain and emotional distress of the COVID period was helpful in allowing us to move forward.

Purpose: To empower local CSOs and artists to use arts and cultural activities for peacebuilding and policy advocacy, particularly by addressing formal and customary laws that hinder the peace process.

What Stood Out: The hybrid model combining top-down donor frameworks with bottom-up local implementation proved adaptive under crisis conditions.

Intended Impact: Community engagement across ethnic and religious groups; cross-regional networking and capacity building sustained artist motivation and CSO management skills under crisis conditions; youth from diverse religious backgrounds collaborated on exhibitions, building trust across communities; elements of the toolbox were taken up by CSOs beyond the project's original scope.

Unintended Impact: Local CSOs developed digital skills and integrated online communication into their work for the first time. However, advocacy goals were not met after 2021 and women and queer artists remained significantly underrepresented, limiting the project's pluralism ambition in practice.

Case Study: Myanmar

Digital Art Platform*

2021–ongoing, *project name anonymised



If you want to create socially-engaged art, you have to be inside the society first.

Grantee artist

The Digital Art Platform, conceived shortly after the coup, positions itself as a non-political collective that uses art to promote dialogue. It operates primarily online, with discreet offline activities in IDP camps and conflict-affected zones, and international exhibitions. Through grants and online exhibitions, it creates a safe space for artists to voice contemporary human rights and justice issues, raising transitional justice awareness among the Burmese society and the wider public. Participatory workshops in ethnic-controlled areas and displacement camps extend this work offline, bringing together communities across political divides through co-created art. Over time, the project has evolved from artist-led critical pedagogy toward more accessible formats such as podcasts and comics, broadening its reach and improving audience comprehension.

Purpose: To raise rights and transitional justice awareness through art and dialogue, to provide a platform for free expression, and to support young artists to sustain their practice under crisis conditions.

What Stood Out: A critical pedagogy approach with artist-activists created a digital safe space and anonymous expression, significantly reducing persecution risk. Participatory workshops enabled community collaboration and co-creation, with art providing indirect metaphorical expression that allowed diverse groups to listen across political differences.

Intended Impact: Grants enabled artists to sustain practice and build portfolios during resource scarcity; online exhibitions engaged both local and diaspora audiences, extending reach beyond conflict-affected areas.

Unintended Impact: The platform functioned as a professional portfolio archive, building artist visibility and career pathways beyond its original scope. However, conveying transitional justice messages through contemporary art formats proved challenging without sufficient contextual support. Notably, diaspora communities engaged organically, creating unexpected cross-border connections.

Sudan

Country Context

Sudan has experienced continuous upheaval since the 2019 revolution that ended decades of authoritarian rule. The October 2021 military coup derailed the democratic transition, followed by a devastating war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that began in April 2023. The conflict has displaced more than 12 million people, including approximately 8 million internally displaced people and 4 million refugees. Cities have been destroyed, with confirmed famine conditions in parts of North Darfur and South Kordofan. With over 30 million people in need of assistance, Sudan is one of the world's largest humanitarian emergencies. Divided international approaches and attention have marginalised Sudan's tragedy, leaving millions without adequate support or sustained focus. Sudan's trajectory from revolution to war represents a dampening of democratic hopes amid deepening polarisation. The 2019 revolution mobilised youth, women, and grassroots resistance committees against authoritarian rule, creating space for cultural expression and civic engagement. The 2021 coup reversed these gains, triggering sustained protests and economic collapse. The 2023 war has devastated civilian infrastructure, targeting hospitals, schools, and cultural institutions, with museums looted, archives lost, and cultural spaces destroyed as part of a broader assault on Sudanese identity.

Culture Context

Arts and culture have shifted from tools of democratic expression during the revolution to instruments of survival, memory, continuity and resistance. Cultural practitioners now operate across diaspora networks in Cairo, Nairobi, Kampala, Addis Ababa, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe, using creativity to maintain Sudanese identity, psychosocial wellbeing, and global attention when diplomatic efforts fail. In this context, culture often functions as a distributed community back-up system, preserving archives and stories, rebuilding social ties, and converting creative work into protection, livelihoods, and visibility for displaced communities. Some organisations have cautiously resumed in-country operations, though these efforts do not always include explicit arts programming. Cultural activity within Sudan must now navigate extreme insecurity, censorship, and complex political geography. Visa regimes and mobility remain major barriers. Even for established cultural workers, gaining access to regional or European residencies and convenings is near-impossible under current travel restrictions. Some displaced artists have established new creative spaces abroad; the majority, however, continue to operate informally or invisibly, with minimal resources.

Case Study: Sudan

Sudan & Europe Creative Connections

2019-2022

Sudan & Europe Creative Connections was an EU-funded programme led by the Goethe-Institut Sudan, with partners including the British Council and Institut français. It strengthened Sudan's creative ecosystem through five pillars: Moda (Fashion), SAMA (Music), Shasha (Cinema), Hajjeytak (Literature), and Turath (Archaeology). It trained more than 445 artists, co-developed university curricula, and built platforms for music, cinema, and storytelling that bridged Sudanese and European practitioners. The programme was discontinued following the outbreak of war in 2023.

Purpose: To build skills, visibility, and collaboration across five creative sectors through evidence-based design aligned with EU cultural policy and Sudan's transition priorities.

What Stood Out: Practical sector training strengthened confidence, employability and professional agency across the five creative sectors, while cross-border collaboration helped sustain creative networks after displacement.

Intended Impact: Modular training, shared standards, and digital platforms helped artists sustain practice, collaborate, and represent Sudanese culture internationally across diaspora and displacement networks.

Unintended Impact: Peer networks and collaborations outlasted the project through informal channels. As physical cultural infrastructure was destroyed by conflict, digital archives and outputs took on renewed significance as repositories of cultural memory.



**We work quietly,
sometimes in darkness,
but every image, song,
or poem is a reminder
that Sudan's story is
still being written.**

Female filmmaker

Case Study: Sudan

SOBAJO

2018–ongoing

SOBAJO is a creative studio and social enterprise that supports marginalised women, youth, and refugee communities through cultural practice, storytelling, and traditional crafts. Since 2018, it has provided safe spaces, skills development, and psychosocial support for women from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Operating quietly throughout periods of political instability, SOBAJO programmes provide training and resources to conflict-impacted communities, using cultural work to generate livelihoods, belonging, and protection in a highly fragile environment.

Purpose: To create safe, low-profile spaces for women and youth to process trauma, build skills, and connect across regions; to use traditional crafts and storytelling for healing, livelihood, and cultural continuity; to support refugee and displaced communities facing severe social and economic barriers.

What Stood Out: Trusted safe-space model rooted in familiar women’s gatherings; storytelling circles where many spoke “for the first time”; traditional crafts serving as both psychosocial support and income; inclusivity that protects stigmatised groups; continuity maintained through volunteering, digital networks, and diaspora ties during war.

Intended Impact: Safe spaces, skills development, and psychosocial support enabled women and youth to process trauma, build livelihoods, and maintain cultural continuity despite displacement. Craft-based methods, such as hands-on training, safe-space facilitation, and micro-sales channels, generated income and belonging across borders.

Unintended Impact: The small scale and low-profile model proved an asset as the programme continued wherever communities were displaced to, sustained through word of mouth, volunteering, and informal networks, even as the need for international funding remained unmet.



We celebrate the culture... we don’t care where you are coming from.

Syria

Country Context

Syria has endured more than a decade of conflict characterised by shifting frontlines, multi-actor violence, and societal fragmentation. What began as a civic uprising soon escalated into a complex war involving state and non-state actors, extensive foreign intervention, and deepening sectarian and social divisions. Over half the population has been displaced, with millions seeking refuge in neighbouring countries or further afield (UNHCR, 2015–2024). The conflict has devastated urban centres such as Aleppo, Homs, and Raqqa, obliterating heritage sites and cultural spaces, and imposing severe constraints on artistic freedom and civil society (Create Syria Report 2022 ICP, 2022). Beyond the immediate physical and humanitarian toll, the war has inflicted profound wounds on Syria’s cultural memory, collective identity, and mechanisms of social cohesion. Artists have faced exile, censorship, and loss, yet creative practices have persisted – often in new forms and spaces – as tools for healing, documentation, and the reimagining of community (Abu Deyya, 2020). The fall of the Assad government in late 2024 has opened new and uncertain possibilities for cultural life and civil society, though the path to stability and recovery remains fragile.

Culture Context

Prior to 2011, Syria had a vibrant, albeit state-regulated, arts and culture sector, with deep roots in music, theatre, visual arts, and oral storytelling. The onset of war shattered much of this infrastructure. Cultural institutions were destroyed or repurposed, and artists faced exile, censorship, and severe restrictions on movement. Nevertheless, a resilient and adaptive cultural ecosystem has emerged, sustained by practitioners working across exile in places like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Europe, as well as those continuing to operate within Syria itself. These practitioners work through hybrid models combining local ownership with international partnerships, with a strong focus on participatory, community-based, and socially engaged practices. Local practitioners increasingly view creative practice as a lifeline and a right – fundamental to the work of remembering, healing, and rebuilding social trust. Despite chronic underfunding, security risks, and fluctuating policy environments, these actors have played a crucial role in sustaining cultural life, preserving heritage, and fostering dialogue and psychological and social support among Syrian communities (رميس، 2021; دومج، 2019).

Case Study: Syria

Action for Hope's Music School and "On the Tracks of Music"

2015–ongoing

Action for Hope's Music School works to preserve, revitalise, and transmit endangered folk music traditions among displaced and marginalised communities across Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. Central to this work is the "On the Tracks of Music" project, which integrates music education, research and documentation, instrument-making, self-production training, and public performance. Implemented first in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon before expanding to Syria in summer 2025, it was delivered through the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF), administered by the British Council and funded by the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Purpose: To preserve, revitalise, and transmit endangered folk music traditions among displaced and marginalised communities.



One of the most recurring comments that were uttered during the concerts (...) is that art keeps on proving its undeniable power to make and influence change, even during the hardest of times.

Project Officer, Action for Hope

What Stood Out: Highly participatory, community-driven methodology with researchers selected from within target communities; significant growth in women's participation in instrument-making, challenging traditional gender norms; over 1,600 exhibition attendees and 900,000 online video views extended reach far beyond direct participants.

Intended Impact: Preservation and revitalisation of 146 musical pieces and 15 traditional instruments; empowerment of local musicians and artisans through skills development and new livelihood opportunities; increased visibility and appreciation of folk music traditions within and beyond the participating communities.

Unintended Impact: Alumni formed new bands and small cultural enterprises, allowing the programme's outcomes to continue beyond the original activities.

Case Study: Syria

Ettijahat: Create Syria

2015–ongoing



What we are building is not just individual projects. It's a network of people who can continue working, even when formal structures fail.

Programme Officer

Create Syria is a regional incubator for socially engaged art, led by Ettijahat – Independent Culture and launched in partnership with the British Council in 2015 to support Syrian artists in exile. It has since grown into an international platform operating across the SWANA region and Europe. The programme supports artists, collectives and community-based organisations through seed grants, mentorship, residencies and public forums, enabling them to develop creative interventions addressing displacement, memory and community rebuilding. To date, it has supported more than 20 artistic initiatives and engaged thousands of participants across Lebanon and the wider region. Since 2021, it has also formed part of the Beyond the Now collective, alongside Counterpoints Arts, Arts University Plymouth and Mozilla Festival.

Purpose: To strengthen artists' capacity to design and deliver community-based creative interventions that foster social cohesion and participation across conflict-affected and displaced communities.

What Stood Out: Participation was highly inclusive and co-created, with artists engaged through open calls and iterative workshops. The "Arts & Uncertainty" toolkit, codifying participatory methodologies for crisis contexts, has been widely adopted across the sector.

Intended Impact: Development of higher-quality, community-responsive artistic interventions; strengthened community ties and identity; enhanced visibility and career pathways for Syrian artists, including international exposure.

Unintended Impact: Mobility and visa restrictions sometimes limited participation in residencies and international showcases, highlighting structural barriers faced by artists in exile and affecting the sustainability of some initiatives.

Case Study: Syria

Damascus Theatre Lab

2010–ongoing

The Damascus Theatre Lab (DTL) was founded in 2009/10 by Syrian director and dramaturg Oussama Ghanam, a professor at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Through workshop-based programmes, it develops local theatre skills, engages communities in storytelling, and fosters civic dialogue through participatory performance, with a focus on socially engaged arts for youth and marginalised groups. DTL has maintained a continuous presence in Damascus while working across Beirut, Tunis, Germany, and Belgium – a rare feat for a Syrian cultural organisation operating through multiple phases of conflict. It has received support from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and has collaborated with the British Council.

Purpose: To create protected spaces for participatory theatre that enable communities to process trauma, negotiate identity, and reimagine civic life amid ongoing conflict.

What Stood Out: Co-created with local participants through iterative workshops, the Lab created micro-spaces of freedom and reflection, enabling participants to process trauma, negotiate identity, and envision alternatives to violence in an otherwise repressive environment.

Intended Impact: Strengthened local capacity and technical theatre skills; enhanced storytelling and expression of lived realities; fostering of empathy and negotiation within fragmented communities.

Unintended Impact: Collaborative practice strengthened networks among artists beyond individual productions. At the same time, participation remained concentrated among urban youth due to safety and mobility constraints, though informal artistic networks helped sustain cultural activity despite limited institutional recognition.



**We are not trying to provide answers.
We are trying to create a space where
questions can exist safely.**

Organiser

Ukraine

Country Context

Ukraine has been resisting Russian aggression since the military interventions in eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the full-scale invasion in 2022. By 2026, this war of aggression has triggered the largest displacement crisis in Europe since WWII, uprooting nearly a quarter of the population – approximately 10.6 million people (6.9 million refugees globally and 3.7 million internally displaced people) since the full-scale invasion in February 2022 (UNHCR, 2025). The war expanded in scope, with Russia directly engaging Iran and North Korea in military actions, forming anti-Western alliances through economic and diplomatic means, and constantly destabilising the EU through covert operations, acts of sabotage, and informational warfare. The Russian war is characterised by systematic and widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the ICC have qualified these actions as war crimes and crimes against humanity, identifying elements of genocide in the systematic targeting of civilians and the forced deportation of children (Council of the European Union, 2024; International Criminal Court, 2023).

Culture Context

Attacks on Ukrainian culture – through physical destruction, looting, and rhetoric aimed at denying or erasing Ukrainian identity – have foregrounded the role of culture in conflict. Russia has systematically instrumentalised culture, manipulating historical narratives, deploying agents of influence, and using cultural diplomacy to disseminate narratives favourable to the Kremlin among international audiences (Ukrainian Institute, 2022), seeking to shape the global understanding of the conflict. At the same time, these attacks have highlighted the importance of culture and identity as integral elements of national sovereignty. For many Ukrainians, culture – the foundation of a united yet diverse national identity – has become a powerful source of solidarity and collective strength. Peacebuilding in the Ukrainian context is understood as establishing a just and sustainable peace, with culture functioning as essential infrastructure for society to survive and recover. Practices ranging from arts for social cohesion and trauma healing to documenting crimes and envisioning the future continue to flourish in wartime Ukraine.

Case Study: Ukraine

Room for Heritage

2024–ongoing

The Room for Heritage programme supported 30+ cultural organisations in the frontline and de-occupied areas of Ukraine in identifying and strengthening local cultural resources. It focused on peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, network-building, and mentorship to enhance local actors' capacity in using heritage to promote social cohesion and community identity in the areas most affected by war. The programme was implemented by a consortium of five organisations, including Mystetskyi Arsenal, IZOLYATSIA, Kharkiv Literary Museum, Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture (DCCC), and Odesa National Art Museum, with support from the Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine (PFRU).



If we lose our cultural heritage, if we don't preserve it, then we simply won't have a future. We are well aware of this, even if it causes us some fear. I'm being frank. Why do we want to do so much? Because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. It hurts, but it's true.

Purpose: To decentralise cultural infrastructure, build capacity among local cultural actors, and use heritage as a tool for reconciliation and identity formation, through training, pilot projects, and cross-organisational networking.

What Stood Out: Horizontal networks of solidarity proved more effective than traditional top-down support structures. Peer-to-peer knowledge transfer between practitioners facing the same conditions was consistently identified as the most valuable element. Direct support also strengthened the visibility and survival of grassroots organisations and cultural actors in frontline areas.

Intended Impact: Organisations gained transferable skills in project management and social cohesion work. Projects documented heritage and community responses to war, preserving memory and fostering collective sense-making. Creation of a publicly accessible online course ensured knowledge transfer.

Unintended Impact: Peer networks and horizontal cooperation proved more impactful than the formal training structure itself. Organisations expanded their community roles beyond heritage work into mental health support and emergency response. Strong demand led to a second programme edition.

Case Study: Ukraine

PEN Ukraine

2022–ongoing



Ukraine provides an answer to a key question that divides the modern world: how to find a balance between tradition and modernity, between the past and the future.

PEN Ukraine is a cultural and human rights organisation bringing together Ukrainian journalists, writers, scholars, and artists. As one of 146 national PEN centres, it works to uphold literature and cultural freedom even amid war, implementing projects locally and internationally that promote human rights, inclusivity, and community engagement. Activities range from evacuating individuals from conflict zones and documenting war crimes to delivering books and organising readings, exhibitions, and workshops both near the frontline and internationally. Its work is supported by a range of international partners as well as bottom-up crowdfunding.

Purpose: To support Ukrainian voices and visions of peace, protect cultural heritage, and foster resilience through literary and artistic initiatives.

What Stood Out: The PEN Bus brought mobile cultural engagement directly to frontline-adjacent towns. A holistic, dignity-centred approach that combines poetry, storytelling, and literature as tools for trauma healing and sensemaking ensured authentic community voices were heard. The dual focus on humanitarian aid and cultural advocacy proved an effective combination. Active participation in international forums elevated Ukrainian narratives and contributed to global understanding of the war.

Intended Impact: The emphasis on authentic narratives from affected communities preserved memory, dignity and promoted sense-making, while documentation of war crimes created records for advocacy and future legal processes. Collaboration with international PEN centres and global partners amplified Ukrainian cultural voices across borders and preserved literary heritage under war conditions. Supported cultural institutions continued to operate and strengthen community resilience.

Unintended Impact: Workshops and volunteer projects built transferable skills in journalism, literature, and cultural facilitation.

Baltic States

Country Context

The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) are post-Soviet societies with sizable Russian-speaking communities, long-standing tensions around language and citizenship, and persistent divides that intensified after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Border regions, especially in Latvia and Estonia face the sharpest pressures: social fragmentation, generational divides, and high exposure to disinformation complicate trust and weaken cohesion. Policy shifts such as Estonia's move toward stronger Estonian-language inclusion have reshaped integration debates while still requiring sensitive engagement with Russian-speaking communities.

Overview

For the scope of this research, we only looked at the UK FCDO-funded **People to People (P2P)** cultural engagement programme, a ten-year initiative (2016–2026) implemented by the British Council. Its aim is to strengthen social cohesion across linguistic and ethnic groups while improving access to culture, education, civic participation, and international opportunities. P2P's approach centres on engaging hard-to-reach communities, providing relevant activities (youth leadership, community skills, applied arts, women's empowerment, social action), and building 21st-century skills – especially critical thinking, media literacy, and digital citizenship – as foundations for resilience in the information space.

Across the P2P portfolio, several mechanisms stand out. Community and applied theatre, including verbatim, participatory, and multilingual, created safe, non-politicised spaces for dialogue, allowing sensitive histories to be explored indirectly through making and storytelling. Youth-led social action and community-curated projects fostered agency and relational resilience rather than one-off events. Trusted local partners, such as Narva Art Residency or small Latvian NGOs, proved essential for entering low-trust environments, with repeated presence building credibility in places initially sceptical of external actors. While municipal and ministry uptake has grown as some programme methodologies now inform integration and education agendas, continuity remains vulnerable as British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) funding winds down and no other funding has been secured, leaving smaller organisations at risk despite demonstrated community impact.



Arts engagement activates people, gets them interested in who lives next door, builds trust. And you can't build trust without doing something together.

Colombia

Country Context

From the 1960s until the mid-2010s, Colombia experienced a multipolar internal armed conflict involving the government, far-right paramilitary groups, and various guerrilla movements. While early reports (CNMH, 2013) documented 220,000 deaths, the 2022 Truth Commission Final Report significantly upwardly revised these figures, estimating that at least 450,000 people were killed between 1985 and 2018 alone, with approximately 80% of victims being non-combatant civilians. In 2024, UNHCR estimated that 7.3 million people are internally displaced in Colombia, making this the country with the third highest number of IDPs in the world, after Sudan and Syria (UNHCR). Additionally, estimations of missing people are around 25,000.

Overview

In June 2016, the Colombian government and FARC signed a ceasefire agreement. Although narrowly rejected in a referendum, both parties maintained their commitment and the Colombian Congress approved a revised agreement later that year. As a result of those agreements, a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and a Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition ('Truth Commission') were established. The Truth Commission paid significant attention to the cultural dimension of the armed conflict and the role of culture and the arts in reconciliation, through the exploration of the cultural dimension of the conflict, the use of creative expressions to document and reflect on the conflict, and the presentation of its findings through some creative practices, including a major performing arts and audiovisual production, *Develaciones* (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). Many arts and culture initiatives have addressed the conflict and post-conflict contexts in Colombia. The examples identified while drafting this report may be grouped as follows: community and participatory creative activities to foster resilience; documentation of violence and memory exercises, notably through the many initiatives that have enabled communities to voice their concerns, tell their stories and engage in dialogue and rebuilding; and fostering alternatives and peaceful scenarios through arts education, employability initiatives, and more.

Northern Ireland

Country Context

Northern Ireland's contemporary political and social context has been shaped by *the Troubles*, a period of violent conflict that lasted from the late 1960s until 1998. During this time, republican paramilitary groups, mainly from the Catholic nationalist community, pursued Irish unification, while loyalist paramilitary groups, largely from the Protestant unionist community, sought to maintain Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom. The conflict also involved state security forces. Before the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement was signed in April 1998, more than 3,700 people were killed and tens of thousands more injured (CAIN Archive - Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland, 2007).



The number of people that have told us that when we have toured the work internationally, they say: it is easier for us to talk about our conflict, looking through the lens of your conflict.

Overview

Northern Ireland is widely regarded as a recent example of successful peacebuilding, and many aspects of the peace process over the past two decades are considered a model for other post-conflict societies (Jarman, 2016). At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that relationships with the past remain contested, and that the social and economic benefits of peace have not been distributed evenly across all communities. The arts sector took on a significant role in responding to the legacy of conflict, with cultural peace work becoming central to community healing and dialogue. The concept of cultural peace work in Northern Ireland is multifaceted, involving different forms of artistic expression, community engagement, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting understanding, healing, and reconciliation (Leonard, 2025). Overall, the role of arts and culture can be understood as helping the communities grapple with the legacy of conflict, promoting better understanding of each other and enabling communities to imagine a shared future.



The more that we allow art to take risks and to ask those hard questions, then I think that's how you move the conversation on.



Above British Council-supported exchange between Belfast's Hit the North and Colombia's Graficalia featured Cali artist Sancho MDN at Peace & Beyond (April 2023). His mural Forzan (Force) reflects on people, nature, and Belfast's changing cityscape. Copyright: Hit the North Street Art Festival

Conflict in Context

Impact Scenarios of Arts in Peacebuilding

The research conducted in the target countries shows that similar types of cultural and artistic practices can be used for different purposes and lead to different outcomes, depending on the fragility context and the needs of the affected communities. The visual on the following pages illustrates seven impact scenarios, specifically the connection between the contextual lens and the potential peacebuilding effects of practices related to storytelling, voice and identity, diaspora, and skills development. It also highlights the crucial success factors, as well as the possible side effects if an intervention goes wrong.

Pick the fragility the context relevant to your work, and explore the options. Keep in mind that different fragility contexts often overlap in a given location, making it difficult to address the right issues with the appropriate tools.

Supporting local ownership and co-creating interventions together with the communities in need are cross-cutting principles for navigating such complexity.

Culture as Community Infrastructure in Fragility

Across all fragility contexts, cultural practices function not only as expressive tools but as relational, psychosocial, and organisational infrastructure, sustaining civic life where formal systems are weakened or absent. These fragility contexts reflect different configurations of sociopsychological stress, fear, memory disruption, and identity pressure, as described in research on intractable conflict dynamics (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal, 2013; Halperin & Sharvit, 2015).

It is visible across all impact scenarios that cultural and artistic interventions can play a critical role in peacebuilding by strengthening resilience and psychosocial health, preserving dignity and identity, and enabling everyday peace practices, and reconciliation through shared narratives and future imaginaries. At the same time, poorly designed interventions or those not matching the context risk re-traumatisation, loss of trust, security harms, narrative capture, and deepening divisions. This is especially prevalent when approaches are externally imposed, top-down, poorly facilitated, or disconnected from community sources of resilience as they undermine the long-term potential of culture to contribute to sustainable peace.

Why Arts Matter in High-Stress and Intractable Conflict Contexts

Research on intractable conflict shows that violence is sustained not only through military force, but through a socio-psychological infrastructure of shared narratives, memories, emotions, and identity frameworks that shape how societies interpret reality and justify harm. In prolonged crises, these frameworks become rigid and polarised, limiting societies' capacity to imagine alternatives to violence.

Arts and cultural practices intervene precisely at this level. They work on meaning-making, emotion, memory, and identity – the underlying conditions that enable or block resilience, dignity, and social cohesion. When locally led and carefully timed, cultural practices can loosen rigid narratives, support emotional processing, sustain civic life, and preserve agency under pressure. When poorly designed or instrumentalised, they can deepen mistrust or cause harm.

This explains why similar cultural practices generate different peacebuilding effects depending on context, sequencing, and safeguards. The scenarios in this graphic therefore focus not on art forms but on how creative practices interact with fragile socio-psychological conditions, either stabilising communities or unintentionally reinforcing conflict dynamics.

Conflict in Context: Impact Scenarios

Fragility context

-  Communities in the situation of threat to life and health (existential threat)
-  Communities in the situation of threat to freedom of expression
-  Communities in the situation of dislocation or limited mobility
-  Communities in the situation of disconnection from the political or institutional power/powerlessness
-  Communities in the situation of worldviews/values conflict
-  Communities in the situation of post-conflict trauma
-  Communities in the situation of anxiety and high risk of danger

Peacebuilding effect

Strengthened collective and individual resilience as well as health condition, ability to better protect oneself, ability to preserve dignity and sense of future, evidence base for criminal justice and potential pathway for sustainable peace. Processes provide emergency psychosocial infrastructure.

Potential risks

Re-traumatisation; destruction of trust; increased burden of distress; misuse of data / worsened security; overexposure of participants; evidence extraction rather than care.

Success factors

Human-rights based approach; do-no-harm principle; local ownership and agency; participatory design; layered visibility and strong security protocols.

Peacebuilding effect

Sustaining civic life and enabling communities to reimagine futures under pressure. Creation of alternative civic spaces when formal spaces are repressed.

Potential Risks

Implementation relying heavily on external policies (e.g., transitional justice) can be counterproductive, potentially exacerbating existing discord among communities. When space is not safe - risk of long-term trust destruction. Narratives can be instrumentalised by donors, political actors or propaganda; digital exposure can increase surveillance and reprisals.

Success factors

Artistic autonomy (legitimacy and long-term trust); robust safeguarding and digital security; focus on continuity and relationships between artists and communities over mere output number. Careful attribution and layered visibility negotiated with participants.

Peacebuilding effect

Cultural practices become vital mechanisms for survival and identity preservation, when physical infrastructure collapses. The focus shifts from place-based to network-based culture reorienting community healing and economic resilience. Diaspora networks become an operational backbone for continuity and advocacy.

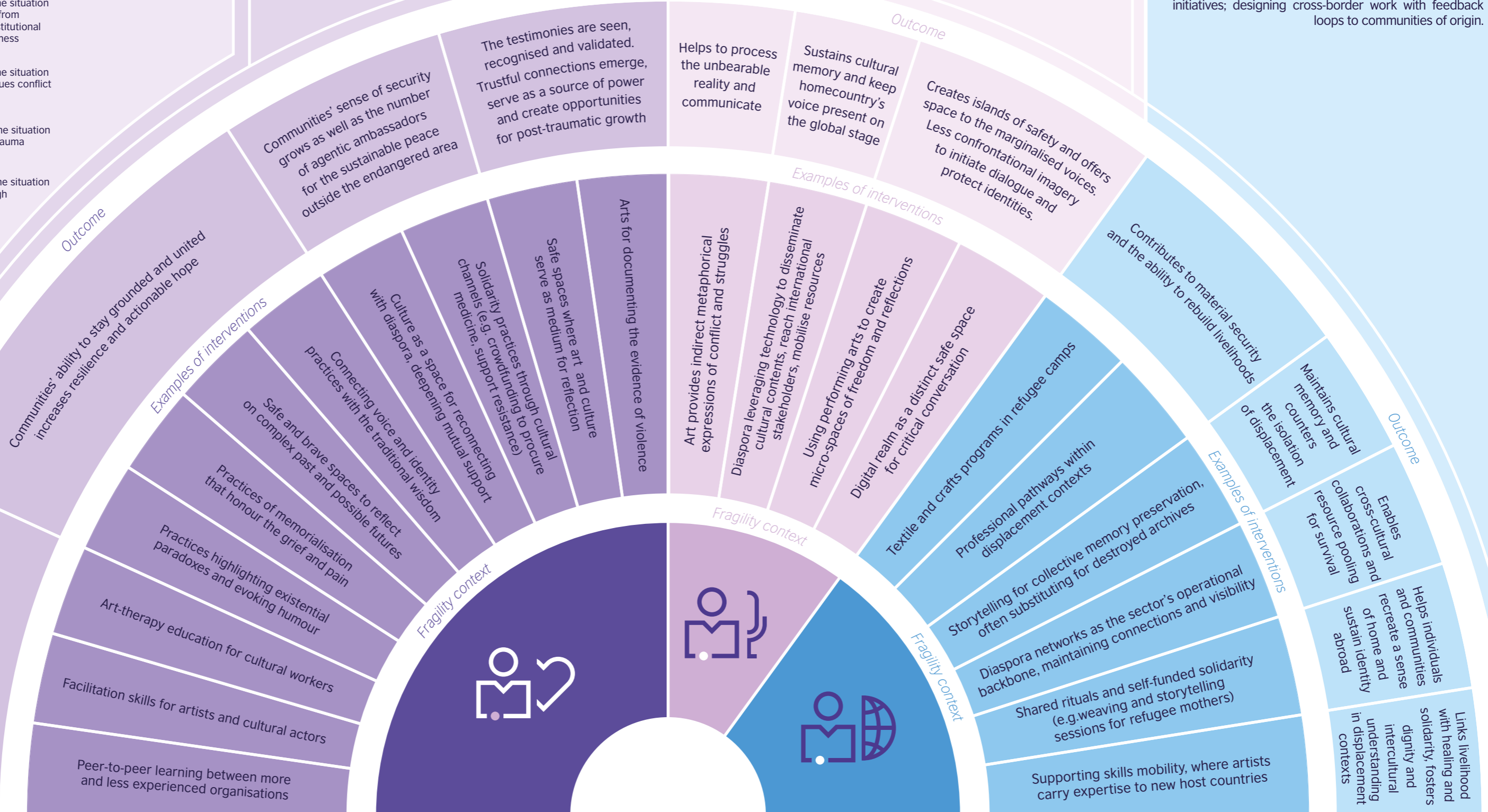
Potential Risks

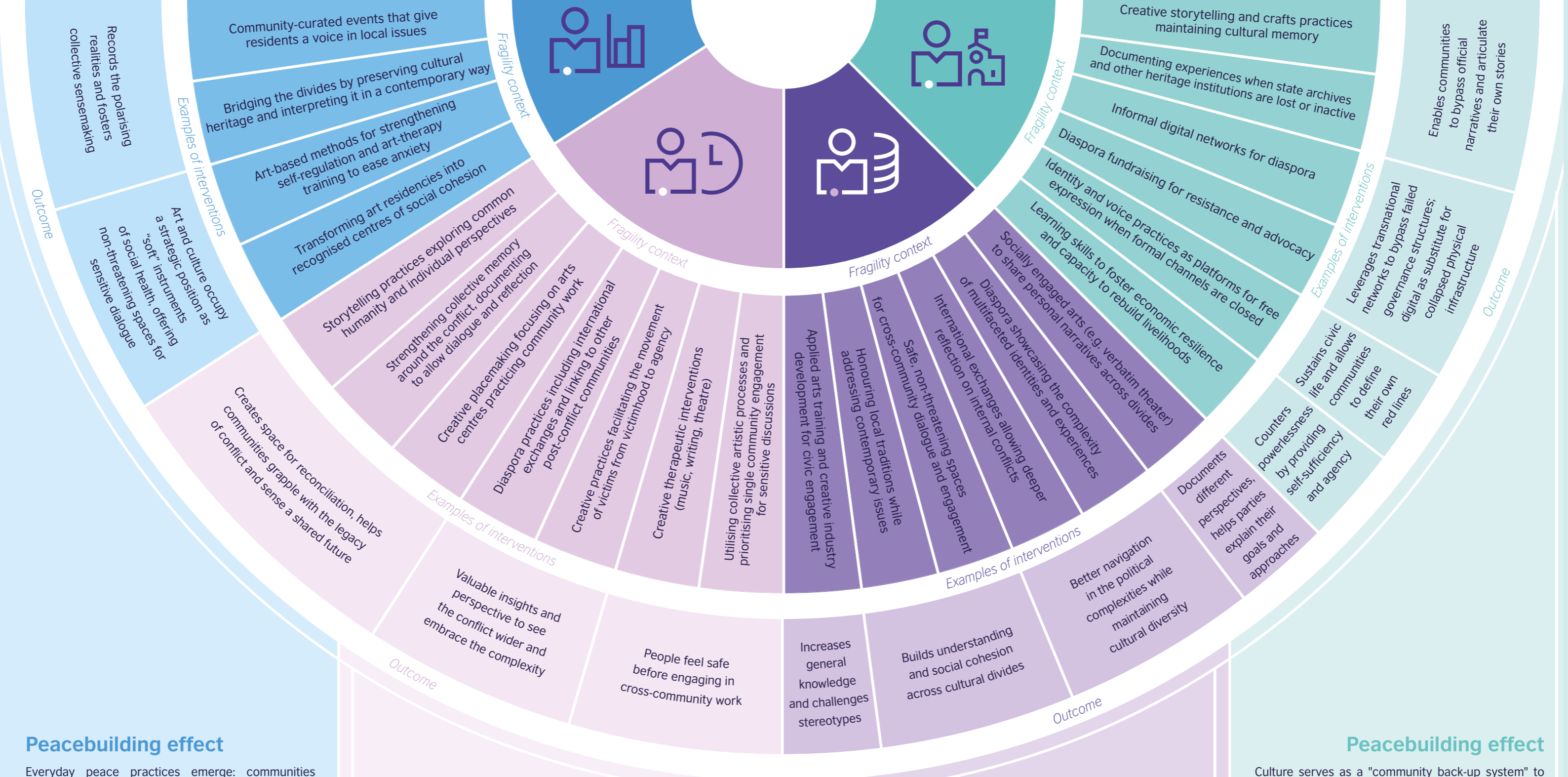
Interrupted timelines and network dispersal due to political instability or weak infrastructure; unequal access connectivity reinforcing existing inequalities; talent drain if mobility pathways lack "return loops".

Success factors

Digital-first creation (mobile studios, cloud archives, virtual showcases); flexible funding; network resilience (pre-war connections as lifelines); supporting women-led initiatives; designing cross-border work with feedback loops to communities of origin.

The case of arts for peacebuilding starts to become visible at the policy level





Peacebuilding effect

Everyday peace practices emerge: communities maintain cohesion, manage fear, and keep communicative channels open despite ongoing risk. Therapeutic release and resilience, allowing individuals and communities to adapt their survival strategies.

Potential Risks

If interventions are not rooted into the sources of resilience that are natural to the community it may lead to the deepening of the problem; shallow, event-based dialogue that does not sufficiently engage with deeper tensions.

Success factors

Considering contextual complexity incl. urban-rural and intergenerational divide; support from local authorities when safe and relevant; prioritising community ownership and civic participation over external programming.

Peacebuilding effect

Foundations for healing and longer term reconciliation, which leads to conflict transformation; civic imagination, helping to build the moral architecture of peace and shared future imaginaries.

Potential Risks

Lack of an understanding of the sources of trauma and the need for holistic support mechanisms; tokenising or forcing cross-community work prematurely, single narrative tourism (offerings coming from a biased perspective).

Success factors

People-led approach (respecting individuals, recognising diversity); sensitivity to formats (single or mixed communities); community ownership; integration into government policies; careful pacing of cross-community work and protection from politicised narrative capture.

Peacebuilding effect

Arts serve as medium for clarifying the intentions and values as well as addressing historical tensions and bridging generational and ethnic divides.

Potential Risks

Lack of synchronisation among stakeholders; building a shallow dialogue (not spending enough time to explore the complexity of each worldview); risks of polarisation if formats are too confrontational or poorly facilitated.

Success factors

Substantial research prior to intervention; developing language-sensitive and value-sensitive approaches; creating neutral safe spaces for interaction and open-minded exploration; skilled facilitation and careful sequencing of contact and dialogue.

Peacebuilding effect

Culture serves as a "community back-up system" to withstand political shocks. Art provides a space for agency and hope where formal governance has collapsed.

Potential Risks

Top-down, metrics-driven project management reduces artists' leadership and results in transactional relationships, failing to foster sustained connections and belonging necessary for long-term peacebuilding; risks of donor dependency and narrative capture.

Success factors

Local agency as the engine of authenticity and resilience; flexible funding adapted to crisis; horizontal and distributed leadership; local partnerships based on deep cultural understanding; light administrative expectations and recognition of informal infrastructures.

Practices for Peacebuilding

Introduction to Practices and Outcomes

Across the case studies, cultural interventions in fragile settings show that impact is shaped less by the specific art form and more by the practice-outcomes they generate. Whether through crafts, theatre, photography, music, literature, digital media, or festivals – similar creative actions repeatedly activated four recurrent practice-outcomes:

Storytelling

Sharing narratives, unpicking stereotypes, and increasing shared awareness and understanding.

Memory, Identity & Voice

Creating and strengthening individual and group identity, positive reinforcement; expressing and affirming who people are, strengthening dignity and belonging.

Engaging with Diaspora

Engagement with displaced individuals and groups to potential benefit of diaspora members and those who have remained in the country of origin; sustaining cultural life, visibility and solidarity across borders when local systems collapse.

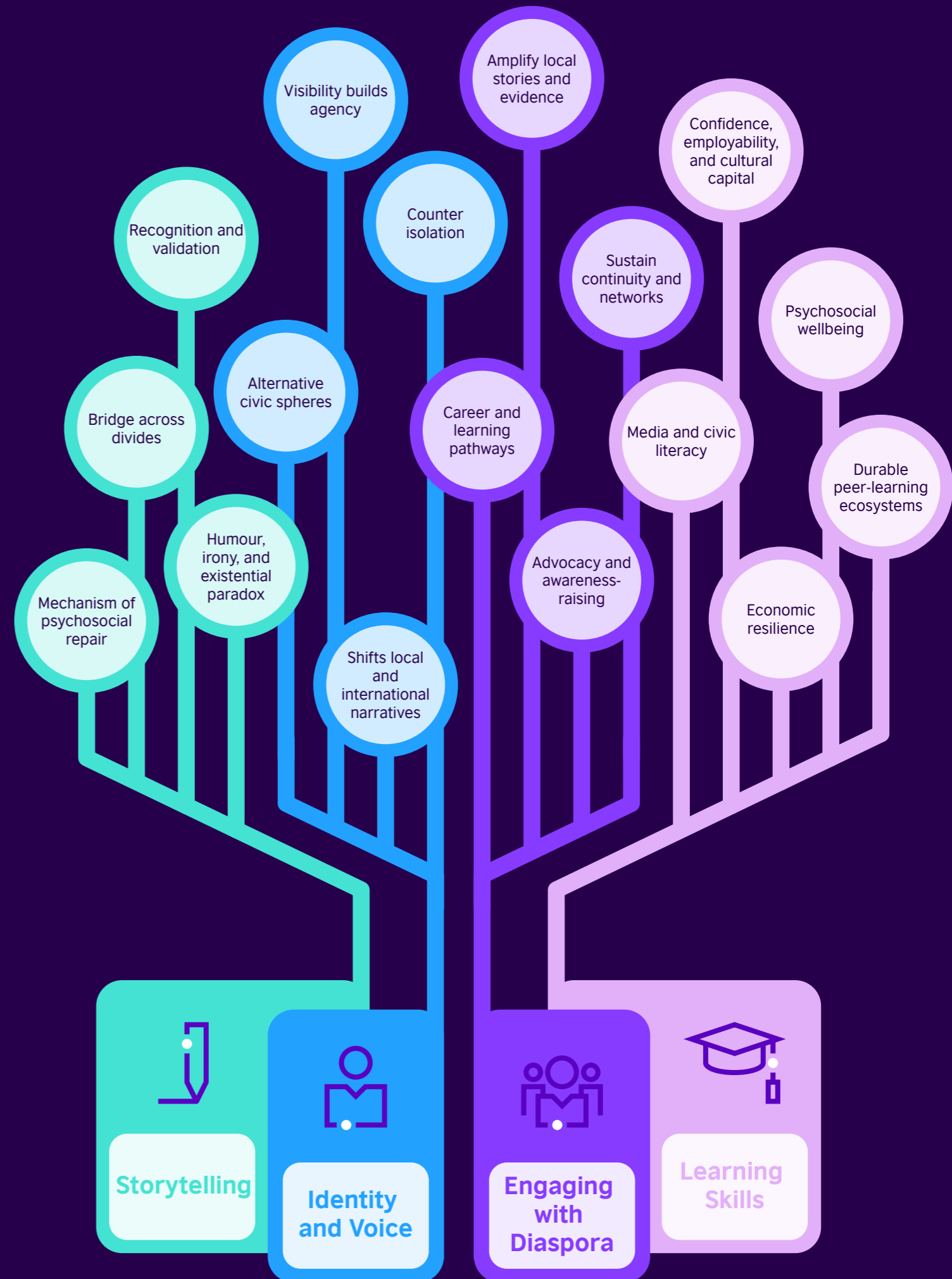
Learning Skills

Increasing creative, cultural and social capital, and potentially creating economic benefit; building capability, employability, and cultural capital, enabling continuity under pressure.

Institutional Strengthening / Culture as Infrastructure

Creating or reinforcing the small-scale organisational, relational and digital infrastructures that enable arts and culture to contribute to peacebuilding and shape alternative futures. This dimension was added since impact and meaning are also created by institutions themselves, both locally and by international actors.

Practices for Peacebuilding



A **practice-outcome** is understood as a recurring creative practice (e.g. storytelling, crafting, ensemble work, digital expression) that reliably produces a pattern of outcomes (e.g. recognition, identity, visibility, learning, capability). These outcomes behave consistently because they are rooted in relational, embodied, improvisational forms of cultural engagement that adapt quickly to threat, displacement, institutional breakdown, and social division. In this report, we do not analyse “art forms” or specific programme types. Instead, we focus on how these practices work in action: how people use creative processes to generate recognition, belonging, continuity, connection, or capability under pressure. What matters is who leads the work, how it is carried out, and the conditions around it. Similar activities can take on different functions depending on what issues communities are facing.

In the *Impact Scenarios* (pages 60-63), we examined these shifts through a contextual lens. We look at the internal logic of each practice-outcome: the mechanisms through which it generates effects, the operational moves that recur across case studies in focus, and the conditions that enable or limit what it can achieve. Where the graphic names practices, risks, and success factors for each fragility context, this section translates these into mechanisms, operational moves, enabling conditions, and evidence signals.

Across case studies, clear patterns emerge how these practices behave under pressure. They often generate both immediate outcomes and “micro-infrastructures” of memory, belonging, continuity and capability that keep operating when cultural ecosystems and formal institutions are non-functional.

Each practice-outcome area is described and examined in-depth through:

- the mechanism of change (why and how it works),
- typical operational moves used across countries,
- enabling conditions and risks,
- evidence signals, and
- its transferability across regions and conflict stages.

This structure allows us to understand not only what these practices produce, but how and under what conditions they support resilience, cohesion, and cultural continuity in fragile settings.

Across all case studies, several enabling principles consistently shape whether cultural practices generate positive impact: trusted local conveners, community ownership, flexible pacing, layered visibility and protection-by-design, trauma-informed facilitation, and continuity supported by peer or diaspora networks. Correspondingly, cross-cutting risks include exposure to security threats, re-traumatisation, inequitable access, narrative capture by political or donor actors, and pressure for visibility that outpace protection.

These principles and risks were identified through comparative analysis of interviews, practitioner reflections, programme documentation, and observed implementation patterns across contexts, and were further refined through cross-case synthesis and validation with local partners.

Note: Because these patterns apply across the four practice-outcomes, each practice outlines only its additional specific enabling conditions and risks.



Above Performance of Chornobyldorf, an archaeological opera inspired by the impact of nuclear power on our world by Roman Grygoriv and Illia Razumeiko, at EuroFestival Liverpool 2023. Photograph by Valeriia Landar.

Cross-Case Study Insights

Storytelling

Sharing narratives, unpicking stereotypes, increasing shared awareness and understanding

Across cases, storytelling consistently operates as a high-impact, high-sensitivity practice. It increases recognition, dignity and agency, while helping communities process trauma and build trust in contexts where direct political dialogue is unsafe. It also supports identity and continuity. Through archives, testimonies and digital platforms, storytelling creates forms of evidence that make community claims legible to media, educators, advocates and, at times, legal actors.

In many settings, storytelling becomes the first entry point into subsequent peacebuilding processes – including organising, advocacy, dialogue or institutional engagement – particularly where formal civic spaces have collapsed or become unsafe. Importantly, it often leaves behind small but durable memory infrastructures, such as archives, digital repositories, and story circles, that continue to function even after projects end or institutions withdraw.

Common Positive Patterns

Storytelling reliably **unlocks recognition and validation**, especially for communities whose experiences are dismissed or silenced. Frontline accounts, heritage narratives, women-led story circles, and transitional justice visual storytelling all show strong effects on dignity, agency, and collective memory.

Storytelling acts as a **bridge across divides**, allowing plural narratives to coexist without forcing debate. Participatory arts workshops, community film-making, and verbatim theatre each demonstrate how indirect expression facilitates non-confrontational dialogue and micro-spaces of safety, and reduces defensiveness.

Storytelling is also a **mechanism of psychosocial repair**: people process trauma by naming it metaphorically, collectively, or through creative distance, a protective space gained by viewing one's experience as an external story rather than directly.

In several contexts, **humour, irony and existential paradox** also appear as protective storytelling strategies, helping people regulate fear, process chaos, and maintain psychological distance from violence.

Partial or Limited Outcomes

Many initiatives aimed for **deep cross-community narrative exchange** but reached only partial success due to language barriers, fear of exposure, or fragile trust.

In several contexts, **institutions collapsed** before storytelling outputs could feed into justice, reconciliation, or education systems.

Public storytelling sometimes **over-relied on written or highly aestheticised forms**, unintentionally excluding low-literacy participants or communities whose traditions are oral, textile-based or ritual-based.

In a number of cases, storytelling spaces tended to **attract already literate, mobile, or well-connected participants**, while public storytelling efforts – unless accompanied by targeted outreach – often remained elitist or urban-centric, missing more rural, marginalised, or less digitally connected communities as both contributors and audiences.

Efforts to embed stories in policy processes often stalled due to **political volatility** or lack of institutional uptake and high dependency on external policy frameworks.

Pressure Points

Storytelling can **retraumatise participants** when facilitation is not trauma-informed or when stories are extracted without care.

Visibility creates security risks of surveillance, reprisals, and online harassment, especially in authoritarian or conflict settings.

Digital circulation without security protocols (metadata, geolocation, file ownership) can increase exposure

Misuse or misinterpretation of narratives (e.g. selective editing, sensationalisation) can reinforce stigma or deepen conflict.

Over-curated or externally driven storytelling risks tokenism, producing performative inclusion rather than genuine participation.

Over-reliance on external justice or transitional policies can re-open tensions or create unrealistic expectations if local institutions cannot absorb the stories.

➔ Implication

Storytelling is powerful but fragile. Its strength lies in rebuilding dignity, trust and memory at community level, not in guaranteeing institutional or policy change. It works best when community-led, consent-based, locally paced, and connected to longer-term memory or justice processes.

Practice-Outcome

Storytelling

Mechanism of Change

Storytelling restores recognition and agency by making lived experience visible and countering distortion, using low-risk, indirect forms when explicit speech is unsafe. It adapts across conditions: rapid testimony under threat, portable archives in displacement, counter-archives when institutions fail,

and plural formats to hold complexity without forced consensus. It also creates durable memory/evidence infrastructures that enable organising, advocacy, dialogue, and institutional claims beyond the life of individual projects.

Operational Moves

Across cases, effective storytelling initiatives tend to follow a recognisable operational sequence: they begin with locally grounded documentation, create safe entry points for expression, co-develop formats with communities, and then move material through carefully staged public exposure – from private and local to national or transnational –

while protecting storytellers and meaning. What distinguishes successful practice is not the art form itself, but how practitioners manage consent, co-authorship, contextual risk, and continuity. The moves below reflect what practitioners actually do on the ground, and the examples highlight how this looked across countries.

Documentation & Evidence Practices

include arts and cultural practices that document violence and lived experience, produce forms of evidence, preserve and maintain collective memory through creative expression, and shape narratives that can mobilise resources.

Participatory audio-visual archives

» community photographers, podcasters, and videographers documenting and circulating everyday life, testimonies, micro-narratives

Story-textiles and craft-based memory work

» weaving and craft sessions that embed memory and shared experience, including storytelling sessions for refugee mothers, displaced families

Function in Practice

Documentation and evidence practices anchors storytelling in lived experience. They work when local actors can move safely, negotiate consent, and document both harm and daily continuity. Often, they include humour, irony and mundane detail, which later help reconstruct timelines or counter disinformation.

Safe & Brave Spaces for Expression and Reflection

include spaces where art and culture serve as a medium for reflection and memorialisation, that honour grief and pain, highlight existential paradoxes and evoke humour, and enable critical conversation across physical and digital environments.

Story circles and testimony-based workshops

» safe spaces where participants share experiences in small groups

Remembrance and grief-honouring practices

» rituals, commemorations, and artistic acts that honour loss and pain without forcing public exposure

Humour, existential paradox and absurdity

» comic sketches, cartoons, memes and ironic storytelling as coping strategies under extreme threat

Low-visibility digital spaces

» closed groups, encrypted channels, and curated online circles used as semi-private zones for expressing and processing reality

Function in Practice

Safe spaces for expression and reflection are often the first necessary step before any public output and used especially in contexts where other 'safe spaces' are not guaranteed. Low-visibility entry points help people express without exposure. They need to be built slowly through rituals, routines, and peer-led formats.

Co-Creation & Multi-Perspective Narrative Making

include socially engaged arts that share personal narratives across divides, preserve and reinterpret heritage in contemporary ways, and shape narratives grounded in shared humanity.

Verbatim and documentary theatre, storytelling

» performances, scripts built from interviews, community-devised plays, and forum theatre

Community-curated exhibitions and heritage storytelling

» exhibitions, memory quilts, heritage walks, and artefact-based storytelling

Function in Practice

Co-creation and multi-perspective narrative making ensures dignity, accuracy and shared control, reduces extractive dynamics, and allows iterative editing with participants to decide what can safely be shared. It supports FailSpace principles: acknowledging failures, tensions and contradictions as part of the narrative, not as errors to be curated out.

Layered Visibility & Narrative Protection Mechanisms

include phased storytelling formats that adjust publicness, authorship, and risk, both protect participants and enhance reach, memory, and civic space in repressive or fragile environments.

Podcasts, readings, live literary events

» story circles, frontline accounts, essay series, public readings and conversations based on lived experiences

Mobile and digital formats

» pop-up shows, travelling performances, online galleries and archives enabling reach beyond fragile locations and to diaspora

Micro-spaces of freedom

» small cultural events, low-profile performances and informal gatherings that create temporary islands of safety and reflection within hostile environments

Function in Practice

Layered visibility moves from private to small collective to curated public to (occasional) international circulation, adjusting attribution and visibility at each step to avoid premature exposure to global audiences. It also creates an alternative civic space when formal institutions are repressed allowing people to speak, listen and be seen without direct political confrontation.

Memory & Evidence Infrastructure for Justice, Policy and Public Record

includes cultural practices that strengthen collective memory, produce evidence for justice and public record, and function as community back-up systems when formal institutions are absent or compromised.

Systematic recording and safeguarding of testimonies

» images and documents for later use in justice and accountability processes

Analog/digital dual systems and distributed archives

» paper and cloud back-up protecting records where archives and internet access are at risk

Public memory platforms and heritage archives

» memory museums, online archives, exhibitions, and documentation of heritage and lived experience for civic recognition and long-term record

Function in Practice

Turning cultural work into durable evidence and public memory supports justice, advocacy and awareness processes, and provides civic and legal infrastructure when institutions collapse.

Practical Notes for Implementation

- **Start small:** begin with low-visibility spaces before moving to public formats.
- **Co-design the medium with participants:** avoid imposing forms unfamiliar to the community.
- **Use layered visibility:** local to controlled public to wider circulation, with consent checked each step.
- **Pair documentation with clear ethical protocols:** ownership, anonymity, security.
- **Anchor outputs in continuity structures:** local archives, diaspora copies, analog + digital backup.
- **Avoid extractive storytelling:** build in time for editing and feedback with participants.

Enabling Conditions and Risks

Storytelling-specific Enablers

- **Community authorship and narrative control** – participants decide what is said, how, and to whom; protects dignity, supports agency.
- **Flexible visibility boundaries** – anonymisation, coded forms, or delayed sharing prevent exposure while still allowing expression.
- **Cultural legitimacy of form** – using locally recognised narrative modes (oral traditions, craft-based storytelling, humour, ritual) strengthens trust and participation.
- **Linkages to other practices** – where storytelling is coupled with skills development, identity work, or

institutional memory (heritage projects, archives), helping to preserve continuity, strengthen legitimacy, and prevent erasure.

Storytelling-specific Risks

- **Emotional over-exposure** – pressure to “share more” or produce outputs can destabilise participants if pacing isn’t participant-led.
- **Meaning distortion** – stories can be taken out of context by media or donors, reinforcing stereotypes or political agendas.
- **Unequal narrative power** – the most articulate, mobile or confident voices can dominate, overshadowing marginalised storytellers.

Evidence Signals

Successful storytelling initiatives tend to show:

- **Diverse participation and representation (age, gender, language, locality)**
- **Cross-community listening without escalation**
- **Shifts in perception, empathy, or reduced stereotyping**
- **Increased confidence and articulation of identity**
- **External uptake by journalists, advocates, museums, educators, legal actors**
- **Emergence of locally sustained story circles, documentation practices or platforms that continue beyond the original project**
- **Memory infrastructure: archives, exhibitions, digital repositories recognised as legitimate by communities**
- **Sustained relationships or follow-up collaborations (new projects, alumni networks, online communities, joint productions)**

Transferability

Storytelling is highly transferable across conflict stages and geographies because its formats are lightweight, low-cost, and adaptable to shifting conditions – from home-based circles to digital platforms.

It becomes a backbone for peacebuilding when grounded in local agency, carefully facilitated, and linked to wider memory, justice, or dialogue processes. Specifically, it supports peacebuilding by bridging to transitional justice, supplying the human evidence formal courts often overlook.

Through layered visibility, it fosters social cohesion by introducing the “other’s” experience at a pace that prevents backlash, while driving institutional reform through community archives that challenge official state records. However, the process remains extremely sensitive because meaning, risk, and readiness vary widely across contexts. Storytelling works best when integrated with memory and advocacy rather than standing alone as a “content-production” exercise. If rushed or instrumentalised, it risks re-traumatisation and reinforcing the very harm it seeks to repair.

Cross-Case Study Insights

Identity and Voice

Creating and strengthening individual and group identity, positive reinforcement and belonging

Across the case studies, identity and voice emerge as a strong practice-outcome: a space where individuals and groups assert who they are, claim dignity, and challenge erasure. These practices strengthen belonging, recognition, and confidence, especially for communities that have historically

been marginalised, displaced, or targeted by conflict. While they consistently produce strong personal and relational outcomes, structural impacts (policy change, institutional inclusion, cultural market access) remain uneven.

Common Positive Patterns

Across countries, initiatives show that **visibility builds agency**: women sound engineers, refugee artisans, minority youth performers, and frontline cultural actors – all report increased confidence and recognition.

Identity-based practices **counter isolation** and create social belonging. Multicultural craft circles, intergenerational heritage projects, and memory rituals strengthen interpersonal trust.

Arts and cultural spaces become **alternative civic spheres** where people can express identity without political confrontation.

Public recognition (exhibitions, performances, festivals, awards) often **shifts local and international narratives** about what is happening and who is doing what.

Partial or Limited Outcomes

Structural empowerment goals remain limited, including policy change, institutional inclusion, and equitable cultural markets. Identity gains often stay at the individual or small-group level.

Representation gaps frequently persist. Women, gender-diverse communities, rural populations, disabled people, religious minorities, and other marginalised communities remain underrepresented.

In places where identity is highly contested, **artistic visibility does not ensure broader social acceptance**.

In several examples, **visibility sometimes outpaces protection**, leaving participants more exposed than the surrounding legal and social systems could safely absorb.

Pressure Points

Increased **visibility can expose already vulnerable groups** to backlash, surveillance, or social stigma.

Identity work can unintentionally harden boundaries or **reinforce perceived differences** if not paired with bridging practices.

Poorly facilitated visibility processes may **reproduce hierarchies**, for example privileging charismatic leaders or “safe” identities while marginalising others.

Donor expectations for ‘authentic’ or singular identity narratives can become **extractive or reductive**.

Implication

Identity and voice is a powerful but delicate practice-outcome. It works best when it is community-led, paced by local rhythms, and linked to social, relational, educational, or livelihood strategies.

Practice-Outcome

Identity and Voice

Mechanism of Change

Identity and voice restores dignity and belonging by enabling people to affirm who they are under conditions of displacement, repression, or social exclusion. Through familiar cultural forms, such as ritual, craft, music, or language, it anchors identity when formal recognition is absent or unsafe.

These practices adapt across contexts: indirect expression in censored settings, continuity across borders in exile, and shared identity-making in collective formats. When carefully paced and community-led, they transform vulnerability into agency, reinforce social ties, and create alternative civic visibility that outlasts institutions.

Operational Moves

Effective initiatives for building identity and voice tend to follow a recognisable operational sequence: they begin with grounding identity in familiar cultural practices, create protected entry points for expression, build identity collectively through making and performance, and only then move into layered visibility or

cross-border continuation. What is important is how practitioners manage belonging, safety, co-authorship and pacing in politically sensitive environments. The following moves reflect what practitioners actually do on the ground.

Grounding Identity in Heritage, Traditional Wisdom and Everyday Cultural Practice

includes practices that connect voice and identity with traditional wisdom, sustain shared rituals and self-funded solidarity, honour local traditions while addressing contemporary issues, and maintain cultural memory through creative storytelling and crafts.

Heritage- and tradition-based identity practices

» objects, rituals, crafts, folk music, and cultural symbols reinforcing continuity and belonging; including archaeology, decolonisation practices, memory textiles, and indigenous knowledge

Shared rituals and solidarity practices

» weaving circles, food rituals, storytelling sessions, and community gatherings, often informal, self-organised, and self-funded in displacement contexts (e.g. refugee women's weaving and storytelling groups)

Function in Practice

Grounding identity in heritage, traditional wisdom and everyday cultural practice anchors identity in familiar and legitimate forms, creates non-confrontational entry points where identity claims risk backlash or censorship, reclaims and transmits disrupted knowledge, and sustains cultural continuity and shared belonging under displacement and rupture.

Cross-Border Identity Continuity & Diaspora–Local Bridging

include connections and exchanges that link diaspora and local actors, enable expression of complex identities, and create space for reflection and external understanding of conflict.

Cross-border collaborations and alternative formats

» online showcases, mobile formats, residencies, touring performances, artists-in-exile collectives, and digital archives that connect diaspora and local actors, allowing memory and voice to be shared across locations and helping people reconnect and make sense of identity across contexts

Function in Practice

Cross-border identity continuity and diaspora–local bridging enable voice where local expression is constrained or unsafe, connect dispersed communities, create alternative spaces for visibility and exchange, and support continuity through transnational linkages.

Collective Identity Formation Through Co-Creation

includes creative and community-based processes that share personal narratives across divides, enable movement from victimhood to agency, and build social cohesion and collective identity through co-creation and placemaking.

Shared creative processes

» ensemble theatre, collective film and photo projects, quilting, craft circles, music ensembles, and co-designed installations that strengthen social bonds and group identity

Community-based creative placemaking

» arts centres, residencies and hubs that function as recognised centres of social cohesion where people practice, perform and organise

Function in Practice

Collective identity formation through co-creation works by bringing people together in shared creative processes that build trust and belonging across differences, enable co-decision-making and a sense of agency, and, through repeated collaboration, recreate social bonds and substitute for disrupted community structures, particularly in displacement contexts.

Voice, Visibility & Recognition

include platforms and formats that enable free expression and dialogue where formal channels are closed, create non-threatening spaces for cross-community engagement, and use applied arts training and creative industry development to support civic participation.

Community performance and visibility platforms

» exhibitions, showcases, festivals, literary events and performances that make underrepresented identities publicly legible and socially recognised

Intergenerational and cross-memory practices

» heritage dialogues, oral history dialogues, memory-based cultural activities, that bring older and younger groups together to transmit cultural knowledge, bridge fragmented experiences, and re-anchor identity

Civically oriented arts platforms

» training programmes, public event series, community media initiatives, and creative hubs combining applied arts training, media production, and public discussions to increase civic engagement, challenge stereotypes, and support participation in public life

Function in Practice

Voice, public visibility, and recognition advance through platforms that make identity visible and socially recognised, open space for dialogue where formal channels are closed, reinforce continuity through intergenerational exchange, and enable civic participation while challenging stereotypes.

Safe & Brave Identity Spaces

include environments that provide low-risk conditions for identity expression under surveillance, stigma, or political targeting, enable indirect exploration of belonging and voice, and strengthen psychosocial resilience through protected formats.

Safe and accessible identity spaces for marginalised or high-risk groups

» small workshops, circles, labs, rehearsal rooms, or home-based sessions for groups whose identities carry social, political, or personal risk, or who are targeted (e.g. women, youth, minorities, LGBTQ+, displaced, disabled, rural or low-connectivity groups)

Low-risk, indirect and creative modes of identity expression

» visual metaphor, photography, textile work, composition, animation, craft-

based symbolism, participatory arts, and abstract forms to explore and communicate identity where expression may trigger backlash or surveillance

Art-based self-regulation and anxiety-easing practices

» drawing, rhythm, breath-based and movement practices that strengthen self-regulation while reaffirming identity and sustaining engagement

Function in Practice

Safe and brave identity spaces provide protected, low-visibility entry points for identity expression. They build confidence and internal legitimacy before public articulation and allow tailored pacing before moving to mixed or public formats. They are important in contexts of surveillance or social stigma as they use indirect methods to enable exploration of identity where direct expression is unsafe.

Practical Notes for Implementation

- **Begin with heritage-based grounding** before moving into more sensitive identity expression.
- **Use safe, protected spaces as the first step.**
- **Integrate indirect and artistic expression techniques in early stages.**
- **Build identity through collective meaning making**, not solely individual expression.
- **Combine visibility with protection measures:** anonymity, partial attribution, selective documentation.
- **Maintain continuity through diaspora networks and digital archives.**
- **Check for internal inequities:** whose identity is being centred, whose is missing?

Enabling Conditions and Risks

Identity and Voice-specific Enablers

- **Cultural familiarity of form** – when identity-building uses recognisable, non-threatening cultural practices, participation deepens and stigma decreases.
- **Internal legitimacy** – trusted facilitators and peer-led dynamics ensure identity work is not perceived as externally imposed.
- **Gradual visibility ladders** – controlled exposure builds confidence while preventing backlash.

Identity and Voice-specific Risks

- **Identity hardening** – identity affirmation can unintentionally solidify boundaries without parallel bridging practices.
- **Visibility outrunning protection** – increased public recognition can expose already vulnerable groups to harm.
- **Internal inequities** – dominant or more “public-ready” identities may overshadow quieter or marginalised voices.

Evidence Signals

Successful identity and voice initiatives tend to show:

- **Increased confidence, self-expression, and public visibility**
- **Recognition of marginalised groups by their communities**
- **Formation of peer groups, collectives, or informal networks**
- **Positive shifts in local narratives about who belongs**
- **Emergence of role models (women technicians, youth performers, refugee artisans)**
- **Sustained participation over time, even during displacement or crisis**
- **Uptake of identity narratives into exhibitions, festivals, digital platforms**

Transferability

Identity and Voice practices are highly transferable across conflict stages and geographies because they rely on adaptable, non-threatening formats, such as craft, ritual, music, and digital storytelling, that can operate under restrictive conditions.

These practices support peacebuilding in multiple ways: by reinforcing social fabric in fragile settings, preventing conflict escalation, and contributing to reconciliation in divided societies. In contexts where national, cultural, or group identity is under threat, identity-based practices also strengthen psychological resilience and help communities withstand erasure and distortion. They function as protected spaces when formal institutions are repressive or absent, enabling marginalised groups to express

themselves through indirect means and build internal legitimacy. They also sustain cross-border cultural continuity, as diaspora networks and mobile formats carry cultural voice, memory, and solidarity beyond local systems. When grounded in local agency, identity practices create the relational and emotional conditions that underpin peacebuilding: dignity, recognition, and belonging. However, their success depends on careful pacing, contextual sensitivity, and protection. If visibility is pushed too quickly, the work risks backfiring, exposing communities to backlash, hardening identity divisions, or reinforcing exclusion. When paired with storytelling or skills-based pathways, these practices not only elevate recognition but also deepen long-term agency and contribute to sustainable peace.

Cross-Case Study Insights

Engaging with Diaspora

Engagement with displaced individuals and groups to potential benefit of diaspora members and those who have remained in the country of origin

Diaspora engagement emerges as a medium-to-high impact but structurally under-operationalised dimension. It rarely appears as a dedicated programme line. Instead, it is carried by cross-border partnerships, digital platforms, remote collaborations, informal networks, and audience spillover across all contexts analysed. These transnational linkages sustain visibility, cultural continuity, skills exchange, and solidarity, particularly when local institutions collapse or mobility becomes restricted. At the same time, engagement remains

uneven, often constrained by safety risks, mobility barriers, digital divides, funding discontinuity, and they risk reproducing inequalities, speaking over local actors, or becoming detached from evolving realities at home. Diaspora engagement encompasses a wide range of displaced actors: from refugees and internally displaced people working in host countries or border regions to long-term emigrants who remained culturally and politically active. This diversity expands the reach of engagement but also introduces complexities.

Common Positive Patterns

Many initiatives use diaspora channels to **amplify local stories and evidence**: podcasts and touring, online music archives, and digital exhibitions all enable narratives to travel beyond immediate risk zones, increasing visibility, recognition, and sometimes concrete support (funding, equipment, invitations).

When institutions collapse or mobility is restricted, diaspora links **sustain continuity and networks**: alumni who collaborate across countries, artists in exile who maintain ties with home communities, and cultural practitioners who rely on diaspora buyers, mentors, and production support during war.

In several cases, diaspora engagement **creates career and learning pathways** (residencies, joint productions, touring, online audiences), feeding back into local capacity and providing visibility for artists and organisations.

Engaging with diaspora also **enables advocacy and awareness-raising, and directs support** to those in conflict zones (fundraising channels, international media attention, solidarity campaigns).

Partial or Limited Outcomes

Many projects aimed for deeper two-way collaboration with diaspora (co-creation, long-term mentoring, policy influence) but encountered **structural limits**: precarious legal status, travel restrictions, bandwidth issues, and short project cycles prevented sustained, reciprocal engagement.

Economic and institutional goals were only partially realised as diaspora reach did not consistently translate into stable income, long-term platforms or durable institutional alliances (e.g. halted follow-up, limited policy uptake).

Some initiatives struggled to systematically include the most marginalised diaspora voices (e.g. women, non-urban, racial/religious minorities), resulting in **uneven benefits and representation**.

Practical constraints also emerged on the donor side as many funding envelopes restrict expenditure to in-country or host-country activities, complicating programme design and contracting with diaspora actors.

Pressure Points

Different diaspora groups hold **unequal proximity and legitimacy** as some have deep recent connections. Others, long removed, may dominate international spaces without reflecting lived realities. This raises ongoing questions about power, voice, and accountability.

Diaspora visibility can **expose artists and communities** at home to additional risks, such as surveillance, online harassment, and political backlash, especially where narratives are highly sensitive.

Inequality of access is recurrent. Funding, travel and showcasing opportunities cluster around those with existing networks, language skills or urban location, deepening exclusion for less connected practitioners.

Representation tensions emerge around who is authorised to speak, whose perspectives are platformed, and whether diaspora narratives overshadow local realities.

Conflict-related disruption (war, internet shutdowns, repression) can sever links abruptly, sometimes preventing diaspora engagement from maturing into stable support systems.

Implication

Diaspora engagement is a structurally significant but fragile practice-outcome. When grounded in local agency, designed around safety, and embedded in long-term transnational relationships, it strengthens cultural continuity, visibility and resilience across borders. It functions best as a relational, care-based extension of local cultural practice.

Practice-Outcome

Engaging with Diaspora

Mechanism of Change

Diaspora engagement sustains cultural life when local conditions deteriorate by activating transnational networks to archive memory, amplify voices, and maintain identity across borders. Whether through safe storage of testimonies during existential threat, creative platforms countering censorship, or cross-border collaborations that reconnect displaced

artists, diaspora ties offer continuity, protection, and alternative social infrastructure. Diaspora engagement also functions as a protective and advocacy mechanism: it shifts stories into safer spaces, connects local struggles to international audiences, and maintains cultural life when institutions collapse or mobility is restricted.

Operational Moves

Effective diaspora engagement initiatives tend to follow a recognisable operational sequence: they maintain lightweight cross-border infrastructures, create safer visibility platforms, build co-creation and peer support, and then use these networks to mobilise resources and open pathways for continuity and protection.

What matters is how practitioners balance visibility and safety, share authorship between local and diaspora actors, and sustain relationships beyond single projects. The following moves reflect what practitioners actually do on the ground.

Diaspora-Enabled Visibility, Narrative Protection & Advocacy

include networks and platforms that sustain civic life and keep home-country voices present on the global stage by leveraging digital technologies to disseminate cultural content, create safer spaces for expression, and mobilise funding, visibility, and rights-based advocacy to counter disinformation and support resistance.

Cross-border visibility and narrative platforms

» podcasts, digital exhibitions, online readings, diaspora-hosted screenings and performances that extend local stories into safer international spaces

Advocacy and cultural diplomacy by diaspora actors

» diaspora-led campaigns, media engagement, and cultural diplomacy efforts that communicate local realities internationally, counter disinformation, and build recognition for marginalised groups

Function in Practice

Diaspora-enabled visibility and advocacy protect and amplify narratives beyond local constraints, enable safer circulation of sensitive content, and shape international understanding and recognition through strategic communication and cultural diplomacy.

Digital, Institutional & Memory Infrastructures Across Borders

include substituting destroyed archives through digital-first creation using mobile studios, cloud archives and virtual showcases, which become backup systems when home institutions are destroyed and connect often informally displaced.

Digital archives and remote collaboration spaces

» cloud-based repositories, online memory collections, and shared workspaces enabling artists and communities to document, co-create, and maintain continuity when mobility is restricted, such as online music and art archives and digital sharing via messaging app networks

Diaspora-local creative partnerships

» co-produced theatre, film, literature, photography or music connecting exiled artists with home practitioners to create plural, multi-perspective cultural work, such as artists in exile collaborating with host institutions and linking programme alumni with diaspora professionals

Function in Practice

Digital, institutional and memory infrastructures act as “backup cultural institutions” when local infrastructure collapses. It also sustains practice, memory and connection despite displacement, censorship or shutdowns.

Transnational Learning, Co-Creation & Peer Support Networks

include peer-to-peer learning between more and less experienced organisations, professional pathways within displacement contexts, and the support of skills mobility where artists carry expertise to new host countries.

Mentorship and peer-to-peer learning across borders

» diaspora professionals providing remote coaching, skill development, and career guidance through alumni networks, WhatsApp groups, and informal hubs

Diaspora-local learning networks

» informal transnational communities of practice that maintain relationships, exchange information, and share emotional and professional support when national infrastructures collapse

Function in Practice

Transnational learning, co-creation, and peer support networks distribute voice and authority, enhance shared capacity, and sustain professional identity and belonging despite displacement. They work as a long-term ecosystem, not a one-off activity, reducing isolation and enabling cross-border problem-solving under pressure.

Solidarity, Resources, and External Pathways

include resource mobilisation and solidarity practices through cultural channels, diaspora fundraising for resistance and advocacy, and enable cross-cultural collaborations and resource pooling for survival.

Diaspora fundraising and solidarity channels

» crowdfunding, equipment donations, book drives, touring events, and humanitarian mobilisation initiated by diaspora communities (fundraising for vehicles and books, diaspora art buyers and supporters, and diaspora solidarity platforms)

Function in Practice

Solidarity, resources, and external pathways provide flexible, rapid-response resources that institutional donors cannot always supply. They work best when priorities are set together with local partners, financial pathways are transparent, and solidarity does not create dependency or internal inequity.

Mobility Pathways, Safety Routes, and International Exposure

include professional pathways within displacement contexts, international exchanges allowing deeper reflection on internal conflicts, and diaspora residencies and touring circuits.

Residencies, touring circuits, and international pathways

» exchange visits, residencies, touring performances, and festival participation that create visibility, skills, and future opportunities for artists from conflict-affected contexts – often facilitated or hosted through diaspora networks

Function in Practice

Cultural mobility pathways provide temporary safety, income and professional development, while raising international awareness of the conflict. They are most effective when designed with “return loops”, such as knowledge sharing, co-productions, mentoring or shared archives, to ensure mobility benefits communities at home rather than contributing to talent extraction.

Practical Notes for Implementation

- **Start from existing relationships and networks**, not blank-slate structures.
- **Co-design messaging, visibility and attribution with in-country partners.**
- **Plan for low-bandwidth, multilingual communication tools to include rural and less-connected actors.**
- **Pair residencies or travel with return loops:** joint projects, mentoring, shared archives.
- **Ensure financial transparency in cross-border resource flows.**
- **Fund coordination and care roles** (moderators, translators, network conveners), not only outputs.
- **Clarify representation:** who speaks, for whom, and how local feedback shapes diaspora advocacy.

Enabling Conditions and Risks

Diaspora Engagement-specific Enablers

- **Plural diaspora ecosystems** – when multiple diaspora nodes participate, representation broadens and power concentrates less.
- **Diaspora institutions as “safe hosts”** – enabling narratives, archives or performances to circulate in protected environments.
- **Stable transnational ties** – alumni groups, professional networks, or pre-war relationships make collaboration durable despite crisis.

Diaspora Engagement-specific Risks

- **Unintentional overshadowing** – diaspora visibility or advocacy may dominate public narratives and crowd out local voices.
- **Reciprocity breakdown** – when diaspora actors benefit (funding, visibility, mobility) more than in-country partners.
- **Exposure by association** – diaspora-led content can increase risks for people at home even if attribution is careful.

Evidence Signals

Successful diaspora engagement initiatives tend to show:

- **Wider reach and visibility of local stories through cross-border platforms.**
- **Sustained transnational relationships (alumni groups, creative partnerships, networks).**
- **Continuity of cultural practice despite collapse or displacement.**
- **Activation of solidarity channels (fundraising, mentoring, equipment support).**
- **New professional or learning pathways emerging through residencies, touring, or digital audiences.**
- **Improved reputational security for artists and organisations.**
- **Feedback loops where diaspora visibility reinforces local confidence and agency.**
- **Evidence of two-way influence, where experiences and feedback from diaspora partners reshape practice and strategy in-country.**

Transferability

Diaspora and cross-border cultural engagement can be powerful tools for peacebuilding, particularly in protracted or post-conflict settings where direct in-country programming may be limited.

However, their positive impact depends on how they are designed, governed, and connected to local realities. Diaspora initiatives can strengthen continuity, cultural visibility, and transnational solidarity, offering alternative spaces for expression, memory, and voice. They can also serve as bridges – sustaining cultural agency and connection across borders, especially during displacement or crisis. However, when diaspora efforts are treated mainly as external advocacy, disconnected from those living the conflict, or when risks and dynamics are not assessed, they can distort representation, deepen divisions, or expose communities to harm.

Cross-Case Study Insights

Learning Skills

Increasing creative, cultural and social capital, and potentially creating economic benefit

Learning skills practices emerge as one of the most consistently effective practice-outcomes. Across contexts, they tend to contribute to strengthening individual capacity, employability, and resilience. By combining creative practice with technical, organisational, and media literacy skills, they equip

people to keep working, earning, and organising under pressure. Structural barriers (collapsed markets, displacement, institutional fragility, sanctions) limit how far these gains can translate into sustained livelihoods, but the underlying skills and networks generally endure.

Common Positive Patterns

- Skills training increases confidence, employability, and cultural capital:** graduates moving into paid work, trainees building musical and instrument-making capacity, and artists developing production skills and collaboration competencies.
- Learning environments often support psychosocial wellbeing,** providing structure, purpose, and peer community during crises.
- Media and civic literacy components** help participants navigate disinformation, understand rights, and strengthen cognitive resilience.
- Programmes frequently seed durable peer-learning ecosystems:** social media messenger groups, alumni networks, mentorship loops, and informal ensembles that continue long after funding ends.
- When linked to livelihoods, skills training directly **improves economic resilience,** even when income remains modest or irregular.

Partial or Limited Outcomes

- Structural economic impact is inconsistent.** Even well-trained participants face collapsed markets, weak infrastructure, inflation, visa restrictions or displacement that limit income generation.
- In a number of contexts, participants also **struggled to access equipment, rehearsal space or connectivity** after training, constraining how far new skills could be put into practice.
- Institutionalisation of training programmes often fails** due to conflict, lack of funding continuity, or staffing shortages.
- Some projects **overestimated participants' time, energy, or literacy** under crisis conditions, leading to fatigue, drop-out or difficulties implementing complex skills.
- Opportunities to connect skills to formal education systems, cultural industries, or policy frameworks were only partially realised, **limiting longer-term scaling.**

Pressure Points

- Over-promising outcomes** (especially employment) risks frustration or loss of trust when labour markets cannot absorb trained participants.
- Training designs may inadvertently **exclude marginalised groups** when language, digital access, gender norms, disability, or mobility barriers persist, and instead benefit those already well connected or privileged.
- Without careful pacing and psychosocial awareness, intensive skills programmes can **contribute to burnout,** especially for cultural actors juggling multiple survival responsibilities.
- Heavy dependence on external trainers or online formats** can weaken local ownership and leave gaps when funding or connectivity ends.

Implication

Learning skills interventions are high-yield and highly transferable when grounded in local realities. They work best when content is co-designed, accessible, and paired with concrete opportunities to apply new skills, such as commissions, showcases, micro-grants, residencies, or alumni platforms. In these conditions, learning skills become a backbone of long-term recovery and cultural resilience. When disconnected from real economic and institutional conditions, they still build confidence and capability, but risk frustration, exclusion, or unsustainable expectations.

Practice-Outcome

Learning Skills

Mechanism of Change

Learning-skills practices build individual and collective capacity under pressure. They provide practical tools, structure, and purpose in environments shaped by violence, displacement, or instability. Whether through rapid reskilling in crisis, portable formats for mobility, or peer-based learning for emotional regulation, these practices enhance employability, cultural production, and

confidence. They often operate as low-visibility pathways for expression and connection when explicit communication is unsafe. Over time, they create stabilising micro-infrastructures, sustaining cultural ecosystems and enabling continuity where institutions have collapsed or withdrawn.

Operational Moves

Effective skills-building practices tend to follow a recognisable pattern: they start from accessible, practice-based creative training, layer in digital, civic and organisational capabilities, and then connect participants to peer-learning ecosystems and real application opportunities. What distinguishes

successful practice is not the sophistication of the curriculum, but how well it fits crisis realities – time, energy, safety, access – and whether participants can actually use what they learn. The moves below reflect what practitioners do on the ground, with examples across countries.

Accessible Creative & Technical Skills Training

includes applied arts, crafts and creative training that provides accessible entry points to learning in crisis contexts, functioning as survival mechanisms that foster economic resilience and support the rebuilding of livelihoods.

Creative and technical skills training

» music, instrument-making, theatre production, sound engineering, filmmaking, photography and editing, often leading to concrete outputs such as performances, exhibitions, recordings or community events

Low-barrier, modular formats

» short workshops, mobile labs, hybrid learning, including textile and craft programmes in refugee and displacement settings, emphasising “learning by doing” in crisis conditions

Function in Practice

Creative and technical skill training creates accessible entry points into learning in highly stressed environments, restoring competence, agency and social connection while building practical and market-relevant skills. Strong impact is seen when training is hands-on, output-oriented, linked to real opportunities, and when modular formats allow participation to adapt to disruption and instability.

Digital Capability & Safe Online Practice

include knowledge and skills training that combine content production with media and civic literacy, enabling participants to navigate disinformation and use online spaces as both working and protective environments.

Digital and media capabilities

» content creation, dissemination and platform-based publishing and audience engagement (video, photography, podcasts, social media), online collaboration and remote production, digital archiving of cultural material, and secure communication practices to navigate disinformation and operate safely in volatile environments

Function in Practice

Digital capability and safe online practice enable participants to operate safely and critically in contested information environments, strengthening resilience to propaganda, supporting secure communication and collaboration, and sustaining visibility where digital spaces function simultaneously as risk and lifeline.

Livelihoods-oriented & Entrepreneurial Training

includes learning skills to foster economic resilience and capacity to rebuild livelihoods through applied arts training and creative industry development.

Entrepreneurship and livelihoods training

» product development, craft production, marketing, pricing, distribution, including sales and market access

Function in Practice

Livelihoods-oriented and entrepreneurial training links creative skills to income-generation, however modest or intermittent. It helps participants understand markets, costing and quality, and avoid exploitative intermediaries. In fragile economies it rarely produces full livelihoods, but it can stabilise household income and justify continued cultural practice.

Peer-Learning Ecosystems & Cross-Border Pathways

include peer-to-peer learning that connects people and organisations across contexts, enabling shared learning, collaboration and professional pathways in displacement settings.

Peer-learning ecosystems

» alumni networks, WhatsApp groups, mentorship loops, remote collaboration structures that survive beyond project cycles

Cross-border professional pathways

» residencies, remote mentorship, touring, joint productions, visibility and income opportunities that extend skills into environments with limited mobility or connection

Function in Practice

Peer-learning ecosystems and cross-border pathways transform one-off training offers into sustained learning systems, maintaining motivation and knowledge exchange across displacement while enabling continued collaboration and access to regional and international opportunities.

Embedded Reflective Practice & Conflict Analysis

include integrating research and reflective practice into training that enables participants to engage with conflict contexts, using language-sensitive approaches and carefully sequenced dialogue to inform how cultural work is designed and delivered.

Embedded reflective practice

» facilitated sessions where participants analyse conflict, community dynamics, narrative power, or ethical considerations and learn tools to adapt their practice accordingly

Function in Practice

Embedded reflective practice and conflict analysis links skills to context. Participants think through how their work interacts with polarisation, displacement, gender, and power. This reduces harm, strengthens ethical awareness, and prepares cultural actors to take on leadership roles in civic and peacebuilding processes.

Practical Notes for Implementation

- **Use modular, practice-based formats** suited to low time, stress, or literacy environments.
- **Build in explicit pathways to apply new skills**, such as micro-grants, commissions, joint productions, alumni showcases.
- **Integrate psychosocial awareness**: allow for slower pacing, pauses, and non-attendance.
- **Combine online and offline formats** to mitigate connectivity issues.
- **Invest in local trainers and co-facilitators** so capacity remains when international experts leave.

Enabling Conditions and Risks

Learning Skills-specific Enablers

- **Portable, crisis-proof skills** – filmmaking, textile work, sound production, editing, craft-making scale well across mobility limits.
- **Peer-learning ecosystems** – messenger app groups, alumni networks, and mentorship loops reinforce learning long after projects end.
- **Embedded reflective practice** – linking skills to context (polarisation, conflict, ethics) strengthens agency and reduces harm.

Learning Skills-specific Risks

- **Skills-opportunity gap** – when labour markets collapse, skills without viable pathways can cause frustration or loss of trust.
- **Overload** – participants balancing caregiving, survival tasks, or trauma cannot absorb heavy curricula.
- **Dependency on external experts** – fragile when connectivity fails or international trainers leave.

Evidence Signals

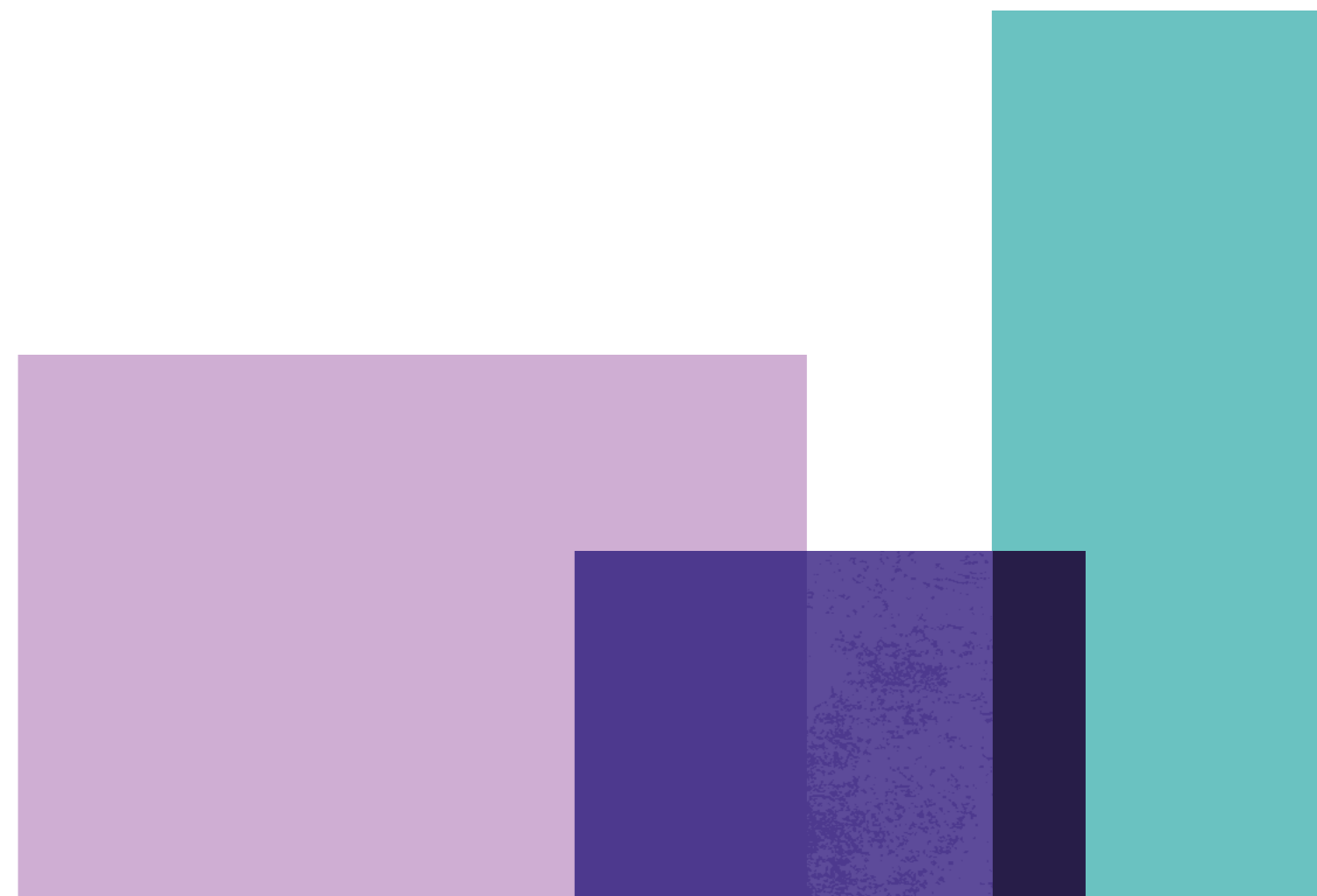
Successful learning skills initiatives tend to show:

- **Increased confidence, capability, and self-efficacy among participants.**
- **Uptake of new skills into paid work, commissions, or independent practice (even when sporadic).**
- **Emergence of peer networks, informal support groups, joint productions, or alumni structures.**
- **Visible improvement in production quality (music, film, craft, media outputs).**
- **Application of media literacy skills to navigate disinformation or polarisation.**
- **Sustained engagement even during crisis or displacement.**
- **Participants themselves initiating and leading new workshops, labs or ensembles using the skills and methods they gained.**
- **New organisational capacity emerging within community groups (planning, budgeting, coordination).**

Transferability

Learning-skills practices transfer well across conflict stages and geographies because they offer portable, practical tools that remain relevant across displacement, instability, or constraint. When locally grounded and matched with viable economic or creative pathways, they strengthen peacebuilding by converting skills into income, structure, and leadership – supporting both personal agency and collective continuity.

These practices also reinforce social cohesion by reducing isolation, fostering trust, and enabling shared responses to stress and uncertainty. When focused on facilitation, trauma-informed methods, or media and information literacy, they equip cultural actors with tools to mediate tension, counter misinformation, and support healing in fragile environments. Their impact depends on realistic pacing, context-sensitive design, and clear routes to application, such as microgrants, apprenticeships, or embedded roles. When training is disconnected from follow-up opportunities or delivered in isolation, it risks fatigue, exclusion, or disillusionment rather than long-term resilience.



Practice-Outcome

Culture as Infrastructure & Institutional Building

Cultural initiatives do not only support individuals, they repeatedly create micro-institutions, infrastructures of culture, and hybrid organisational forms that hold cultural life together when formal systems are weakened, absent, or collapsing. These infrastructures appear in two directions: community-facing cultural institutions built or

maintained in fragile contexts and donor-facing organisational capacities that allow actors to survive within international funding ecosystems. These institutional practices provide continuity, legitimacy, and coordination enabling other practice-outcomes (storytelling, identity and voice, diaspora engagement, learning skills) to function.

Key Operational Approaches

Patchworked infrastructures built from what is available

» “Institutions” are often messaging app groups, shared cloud storage, borrowed classrooms, or diaspora-supported video call hubs. These functioning micro-infrastructures do not resemble formal NGOs, yet reliably hold learning, visibility, and support networks together during a crisis.

Dual-register communication and identity management

» Local organisations learn to speak two languages: one grounded in local culture and community legitimacy, and one tailored to donors’ expectations (applications, reporting, budgets). Organisations tend to translate between these worlds without allowing donor logic to overtake community needs.

Building organisational structures by doing

» Facilitation, budgeting, coordination, and safeguarding are learned through practice, not always through formal training. Each festival, workshop, or heritage walk becomes a moment of institutionalisation: people test systems, refine policies, and create new norms.

Emerging “continuity anchors” – people, spaces, and archives

» Institutions in fragile contexts form around anchors, such as a trusted person (cultural organisers, facilitators), a space (community rooms, refugee centres, small theatres), or an archive (digital libraries, music archives, justice documentation).

Risks and Limits

- Heavy reporting and safeguarding demands risk **reshaping an organisation’s identity**, pushing them to replicate donor language at the cost of cultural specificity.
- Organisations often **hinge on one or two individuals**. When they burn out, are displaced, or face repression, the structure collapses.
- Small teams juggling artistic work, caregiving, safety planning, and survival **cannot always absorb donor-facing tasks**. This can fracture trust or result in exclusion of less bureaucratically fluent groups (women-led, rural, minority-language).
- Top-down, metrics-driven management can **sideline local agency** and turn artists into transactional implementers rather than long-term peacebuilding actors.
- **Spaces are vulnerable** to raids, confiscation, flooding, or bombings. Archives can disappear with electricity cuts or internet shutdowns unless dual systems are used.
- **Different risk environments create asymmetry**: diaspora institutions can speak and fundraise more freely, which may unintentionally overshadow local organisations’ legitimacy.

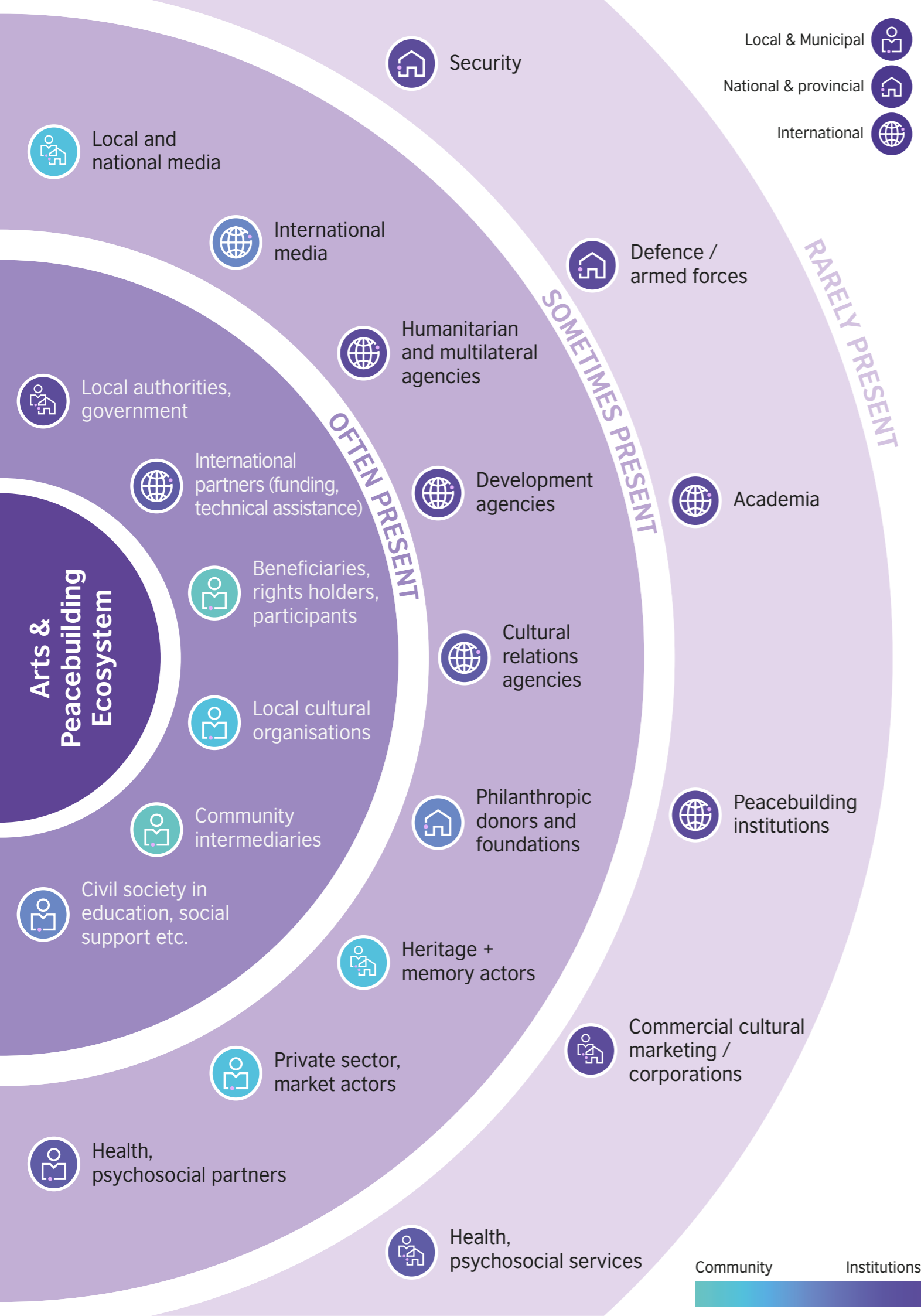
Evidence Signals

- Organisations manage to stay active, even minimally, despite war or repression.
- New policies, safeguarding routines, or community protocols emerge.
- Teams increasingly delegate roles rather than relying on one individual.
- Digital or physical archives grow in a structured way.
- Organisations become reference points for other groups, donors, or journalists.
- Participants begin setting up their own micro-initiatives, echoing the parent organisation’s methods.
- Donors begin to trust local actors with more complex or flexible support.

Transferability

Institutional building is highly transferable but depends on:

- Time (slow, relational processes cannot be rushed);
 - Context-appropriate models (avoid imposing large-NGO templates);
 - Light-touch administrative expectations adapted to fragility; and
 - Support to both community and donor-facing sides of an organisation.
- The transferable element is the principle of patchworked infrastructure: organisations learn to build from what exists – skills, trust networks, informal spaces – while slowly developing the capacities donors require.



Ecosystem Mapping

The ecosystem for culture and arts in the fragile contexts is primarily community-centered

The following stakeholders dominate because they are embedded in local realities, able to navigate risk, and can operate sustainably under fragile conditions:

- **Direct beneficiaries / rights-holders / participants** – artists, displaced communities, youth activists, women, trainees, community participants.
- **Local cultural organisations and NGOs** – trusted intermediaries capable of mobilising communities safely and adapting arts practices to local needs.
- **Community facilitators, youth groups, and informal collectives** – often the main drivers of participation and local social cohesion.
- **Civil society actors in education, social support, or psychosocial services** – integrating art as a complementary tool for dialogue, healing, or resilience.
- **Occasional municipal or government partners** – usually present only where basic administration is functional.

- **International partners** (foreign governments, multilateral and bilateral consortia, INGO) – provide structural funding, technical support, or visibility, but remain relatively hands-off in direct engagement.

Stakeholders that appear in the real-life cases more rarely but still significantly contribute to the overall culture for peacebuilding landscape include:

- **Humanitarian / multilateral agencies** – UN agencies, WFP, etc.; mostly at interface level, occasionally present.
- **Media and international press** – regional/international media that frames narratives.
- **Private sector / market actors** – micro-business partners, craft/product channels; present but limited.
- **Heritage protection / memory actors** – archives, memory practitioners, heritage NGOs.
- **Philanthropic donors and foundations** – contribute flexible, early-stage or politically sensitive support; occasionally present, typically behind-the-scenes.
- **Health / psychosocial partners** – health services, trauma specialists; rarely present but sometimes referenced.

This research makes an important distinction between *stakeholders* and *personas*. Stakeholders are the actors who actually appear in real cases: local cultural organisations, community groups, civil society actors, occasional municipal partners, and international funders with light operational footprints. Their involvement reflects grounded capacities, existing trust networks, and the ability to navigate sensitive environments. In contrast, personas represent a broader set of generalised potential or theoretical actors identified during the design phase, such as defence and security institutions, formal peacebuilding bodies, cultural relations agencies, private-sector actors, academia or large cultural institutions – some of which rarely appear in practice.

Personas active or partially present in real cases

- **Arts / culture persona** – central and driving force (artists, cultural institutions, museums).
- **Peacebuilding persona** – occasionally present via dialogue practitioners, conflict mediators, social cohesion projects.
- **Development cooperation persona** – visible via donors (EU, NED, etc.), though often operating from HQ and funding agendas.
- **Cultural relations / diplomacy persona** – present but selective (British Council, cultural diplomacy arms in consortia).
- **Civil society / local NGO persona** – present as implementers and community connectors.
- **Humanitarian / multilateral persona** – mainly present at interfaces with displaced populations.

Personas largely absent in practice

- **Defence persona** (military / armed forces) – largely absent from cultural projects; few direct linkages with defence actors.
- **Security persona** (militia, counter-disinformation units, intelligence) – mostly peripheral; security logic occasionally shapes project design (safeguarding, censorship risk) but security actors are not co-creators.
- **Full-scale development HQ operational teams / bureaucratic field offices** – they exist as funders but are not frontline co-creators of arts-led interventions.
- **Research / academia** – referenced but not systematically integrated.
- **Private commercial cultural marketing / big corporate players** – present to a small degree (market channels), not as system players.

Their absence is shaped by contextual constraints, misalignment with community-level dynamics, limited operational flexibility, or safety considerations. This distinction reveals how fragility compresses the cultural ecosystem: while many actors could in principle contribute, only a small, locally embedded group consistently engages at present. Understanding the gap between existing stakeholders and possible personas is therefore critical for designing realistic, context-sensitive cultural and peacebuilding interventions.



Above Sudanese artist Sarra Saeed performs at the European Development Days in Brussels, marking the finale of the British Council's Artivism in the Horn of Africa programme, which supported artists from Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan to develop as social change-makers. Copyright British Council

Stakeholder Personas



The following persona portraits illustrate the key characteristics of the stakeholder groups that are vital to the peacebuilding process. These groups are categorised by their core competencies, assets, and areas of influence, highlighting typical behavioural patterns. Additionally, the identified entry points for engaging with arts and culture in fragile contexts outline the most effective and promising opportunities for peacebuilding initiatives within the cultural sphere.

Cross-Persona Insights

While these personas are not typically analysed through an arts and culture lens, this framing helps to clarify how different actors engage with cultural practices in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and where opportunities and limitations lie.

Across the personas, the following patterns can be observed:

- Arts and culture are used both as a tool (for communication, influence, prevention) and as a space (for dialogue, expression and relationship-building), often in parallel.
- Arts and culture contribute to social cohesion, trust-building, resilience and community engagement, but are rarely embedded as a core or long-term component of policy, programming or security frameworks.
- Many actors recognise the value of arts and culture, but lack the skills, experience or training to apply them effectively, particularly in areas such as facilitation, conflict sensitivity, safeguarding, and arts-based approaches.
- Arts and culture are frequently shaped by political, security or donor-driven priorities, with risks of instrumentalisation, politicisation or securitisation, which can affect independence, representation and long-term impact.

Importantly, across personas, this work happens under fragile conditions, with limited resources, short-term funding, institutional instability and shifting political priorities. At the same time, actors support others, try to keep spaces safe, and manage fatigue and, at times, stress and trauma themselves.



Arts & Culture

The research confirms what practitioners already know: this work has peacebuilding impact whether or not it is framed that way. The gap is not in the practice – it is in how it is recognised, protected, and resourced.



Cultural Relations

The evidence shows that trust, legitimacy, and social cohesion – the foundations of peace – are built through the kind of long-term, people-to-people cultural work you already do.



Peacebuilding

The relational, community-level work that makes peace durable is already happening through cultural actors – often in the same spaces, with the same communities, towards the same goals. The question is whether it is planned for or only recognised in retrospect.



Security

Cultural life is already on the radar – as a warning signal, a resilience asset, a risk surface. The evidence suggests the more productive question is not how to monitor it, but how to avoid undermining it.



Defence

Culture is already present in the doctrine – in heritage protection, civilian trust, mission legitimacy. The evidence suggests the gap is not in recognition but in whether that translates from reactive responses into something more proactive and embedded.



Development Cooperation

Culture tends to appear as a cross-cutting reference rather than a substantial area of action – and when it does, it is often reduced to an output. The evidence suggests it is closer to a condition for whether development goals hold at all.



Persona

Arts and Culture

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: arts and cultural organisations • artists • independent cultural spaces • community art groups

Competencies & Assets: socially engaged arts • access to local communities • creative production • use of physical or digital cultural spaces • interdisciplinary methods

Area of Influence: creative skills • imagination • reflection • building connections • infrastructure for getting together • visibility • collective memory and trauma processing

Potential Impact: healing • reconciliation • plural understanding • strengthened community cohesion • reinforcing stereotypes and superficial narratives • elitism

Characteristics and Trends

- Growing use of participatory approaches across disciplines; increased value placed on community-engaged work.
- Precarious funding and budget cuts, especially impacting independent and grassroots sectors.
- Lack of recognition of the role of arts and culture in other fields, difficult to show impact to stakeholders in many contexts
- Culture is not recognised as a standalone SDG, but it is acknowledged as supporting multiple other goals; growing advocacy to include a culture goal in the post-2030 agenda.
- Many artists are socially active and address major societal issues, including armed conflict, climate change, far-right extremism, social justice, and economic inequality
- Growing attention to decolonising cultural practice and recognising decolonisation as a broader social and political process.
- Rising prominence of hybrid, digital, and flexible artistic practices and ways of working

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Arts and culture are often treated as a delivery tool for external agendas rather than for their own value
- Preserving cultural heritage becomes a vital aspect
- Only a small proportion of arts and culture organisations work strategically on peacebuilding
- Fragile contexts have limited timeframes to track impact
- Often required to fit within programmes developed by donors or non-arts-related professionals
- Huge demand for facilitation and mediation skills, ability to work with trauma; yet few professionals have access to adequate training
- Cultural workers frequently face a double burden: supporting others while managing their own fatigue and distress – a condition also observed among peacebuilding and development practitioners working in similar contexts
- Peacebuilding work is carried by some arts and culture professionals in one-to-one mode, not only via institution

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Social cohesion and inclusion initiatives
- Community cultural centres and neighbourhood-based projects
- Arts-based facilitation and trauma-informed healing practices
- Collaboration within formal and non-formal education spaces
- Cultural heritage and memorialisation programmes
- Creative documentation of lived experience
- Artistic research exploring local knowledge, identity, and resilience

Risks

- Arts and culture reduced to tools for external agendas, with risks of over-securitisation or political appropriation
- Focus on short-term outputs or products at the expense of process and continuity
- Tension between survival and development – many cultural actors must balance basic needs with creative work
- Lack of culture-sensitive cross-sectoral platforms and initiatives



Persona

Cultural Relations

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: Ministries of Foreign Affairs/Culture • foreign cultural institutes • embassies and diplomatic missions • transnational networks

Competencies & Assets: long-term cultural networks • good understanding of local context and potentially conflict dynamics • facilitating cultural exchange and professional connections • physical spaces to host events and gatherings • programming and curation • relative safety to conduct alternative cultural activities • professional development • bilateral agreements with host country and/or diplomatic support or protection

Area of Influence: shaping narratives • influencing perceptions • people-to-people connections for co-creation • opportunities for cultural mobility • access to cultural intermediaries

Potential Impact: partnership building (especially with cultural actors) • space for debate and dialogue • politicised narratives • reinforcing elitism

Characteristics and Trends

- Growing strategic convergence between soft power and mutual understanding approaches; culture is framed as both dialogue and influence.
- Visible shift from cultural diplomacy to cultural relations in Europe; blurred lines with cultural cooperation approaches.
- From a foreign affairs perspective, culture is seen as a soft power tool for trust, influence, and geopolitical positioning.
- From a cultural relations perspective (e.g. foreign cultural institutes), culture is seen as a space for dialogue, mutual understanding, and trust-building.
- Increasing focus on transnational cultural relations, moving beyond the nation-state-to-nation-state focus. This approach acknowledges less formalised institutions and individuals involved in these processes and emphasises multi-directional exchanges and dialogue, transcending national boundaries.

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- EU/UK-based cultural institutes increasingly interested in engaging in peacebuilding, but lack strategic coordination, operational flexibility, and strategies to adapt approaches
- Growing interest in protecting artists at risk; occasionally providing safe havens; increasingly pursuing service contracts as implementing organisation
- US public and cultural diplomacy rarely integrated with peacebuilding efforts and focused on messaging and changing perceptions; some isolated activities used arts-based approaches in prevention and community engagement.
- Russian cultural/public diplomacy is strategically deployed in authoritarian and fragile states (notably across the Sahel and Central Africa) as an explicitly anti-Western counter-model.
- Overall, rarely well-funded long-term strategies and highly dependent on national funding and political shifts

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Contribute to multi-dimensional conflict analyses, including a cultural lens
- Act as intermediary between communities and other local and international stakeholders
- Convene emergency coordination group meetings with cultural actors working on the ground
- Offer a safe and protected space for artists and cultural actors to convene, create, and discuss

Risks

- Very prone to political shifts, both operationally and strategically
- Official strategies pursued can be highly political, favouring certain groups and narratives
- Often reliant on the personal priorities, interests, and efforts of individual directors or staff.
- Reduction in funding can lead to collapse of long-term networks and relationships
- Little to no recognition within wider crisis infrastructure; not perceived as a peacebuilding actor
- Staff rarely trained in peacebuilding methodologies or experienced with safeguarding protocols



Persona

Peacebuilding

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: peacebuilding NGOs • conflict resolution institutes • mediation platforms • field-based facilitators • international bodies

Competencies & Assets: facilitation of dialogue and group processes, conflict resolution and mediation • strategic communication, contextual analysis and systems thinking • ability to work with complexity, contradictions, and multiple narratives • trauma-aware and conflict sensitive practice

Area of Influence: negotiations and dialogue processes • research, academia and media narratives • community-based group work and social cohesion initiatives • national and transnational cultural and peace platforms • donor policy advisory • early warning/action systems • design for peace processes

Potential Impact: mutual understanding and respect across divides • plural, non-binary perspectives on peace and justice • strengthened relational trust and social repair mechanisms • inclusive peacebuilding approaches • conditions for sustainable peace

Characteristics and Trends

- Peacebuilding discourse is increasingly process-oriented, relational, and community-driven, rather than outcome-driven.
- Growing emphasis on local agency, participation, resilience, and ownership.
- Peace is understood as dynamic and contextual, not a fixed or universally defined outcome.
- Academia and media often promote contradictory or competing interpretations of peace, reflecting political, ideological, or donor-driven frames.
- There is a noticeable tension between formal peacebuilding frameworks and informal, relational practices (including cultural and artistic ones).

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Arts and culture are widely recognised as valuable but “soft” tools – often peripheral to mainstream peacebuilding policy and donor agendas.
- Art is primarily perceived as a medium for dialogue, empathy, trust-building, reconciliation, memory work, and trauma processing.
- Despite producing outcomes aligned with core peacebuilding goals (social cohesion, reconciliation, inclusive participation), cultural work is rarely acknowledged as strategic peace infrastructure or as part of conflict transformation architecture.
- Peacebuilders often understand the value of arts-based approaches but lack skills to design intentional, well-thought-out interventions, may avoid engagement to maintain perceived neutrality, and often do not see themselves as leaders or conveners of cultural dialogue processes.

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Facilitated dialogue through cultural practices (music, visual arts, performance) as non-formal reconciliation tools; pairing artists with trained mediators or facilitators
- Creation of safe and brave spaces for contested narratives and identities
- Arts as a means to address collective identity, memory, and public space
- Capacity-building grounds: trauma-informed facilitation skills for artists; arts-based dialogue methodologies; advocacy tools to position culture as peace infrastructure

Risks

- False neutrality: avoiding engagement can reinforce existing power imbalances and silence affected communities.
- Harmful dialogue framing: attempting to “hear both sides” in asymmetrical conflicts (victim–aggressor dynamics) can cause retraumatisation and ethical harm.
- Instrumentalisation of art: treating cultural activities as symbolic add-ons rather than strategic, process-based interventions.
- Imposed justice models: failure to assess what “justice” and “peacebuilding” mean locally can generate new conflicts.
- Skill gaps: lack of trauma-informed and culturally sensitive facilitation can undermine safety and trust.
- Under-recognition: continued marginalisation of arts risks losing effective, community-rooted peacebuilding mechanisms.



Persona

Security

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: police and law enforcement • intelligence services • internal security bodies

Competencies & Assets: intelligence analysis • investigations, law enforcement, and crime prevention • community policing and procedural justice • interagency coordination • protection of civilians and critical infrastructure (and heritage) • community trust-building • data governance and rights-based compliance

Area of Influence: public order and prevention • early warning and threat assessment • documentation of crimes • information-sharing networks • protection of social cohesion and public trust

Potential Impact: safety and security • protection of cultural symbols and shared heritage • mitigation of radicalisation, identity-based violence and disinformation • accountability and justice pathways for victims

Characteristics and Trends

- Culture is increasingly understood as a dual domain: a resilience asset (community cohesion, prevention, trust) and a risk surface (radicalisation, disinformation, identity mobilisation), as well as a symbolic target in hybrid conflicts.
- Security frameworks, such as the EU's updated Internal Security Strategy, increasingly treat community arts as “social infrastructure” that prevents the isolation of vulnerable youth and builds resilience, but operational guidance remains limited beyond “whole of society” rhetoric.
- Instrumental, not intrinsic: The value of arts and culture is often perceived in terms of its utility to security outcomes (e.g. stopping crime, preventing terrorism) rather than its intrinsic humanitarian value.
- As hybrid threats span cultural, media and digital spaces, demand is growing for transparency, co-creation and safeguards to prevent securitisation of cultural life.

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Culture can be seen as a “warning signal” – changes in artistic expression or attacks on specific sites are monitored as signals of possible instability.
- Cultural and digital spaces are monitored for hybrid threats, radicalisation signals, and disinformation trends.
- Protection and engagement remain uneven, creating perceptions of bias and raising concerns around freedom of expression.
- Engagement is often mediated or facilitated through institutional partnerships to avoid propaganda optics, protect consent and freedom of expression, prevent mission creep and securitisation of culture.

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Cultural property intelligence and heritage protection mechanisms
- Community engagement and trust-building via cultural partners
- Co-created counter-narrative and debunking strategies
- Artistic practice / interventions for dealing with trauma, community healing and veteran rehabilitation
- Artist liaison officers and youth diversion programs via cultural partners

Risks

- Over-monitoring of the arts for security threats can lead to self-censorship but also over-instrumentalisation.
- Perception of bias: protect one group, one heritage of whom, but not the other
- Corruption, treating specific cultural genres as criminal, suppression of dissent under “extremism” labels, and profiling.
- Community backlash, legitimacy loss, negative effects on artists and venues.
- Evidence and information misuse, data protection breaches, corruption and facilitation of illicit trafficking.



Persona

Defence

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: armed, joint task forces • stabilisation missions • civil-military cooperation units

Competencies & Assets: protection of civilians • civilian harm mitigation • civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) • risk communication • cultural competence training • heritage protection during operations • compliance with international humanitarian law • coordination of veteran and community recovery

Area of Influence: stabilisation operations • local de-escalation mechanisms • mission design and rules of engagement • force protection integrated with community protection • logistics enabling civilian access to services

Potential Impact: mission legitimacy • reduced civilian casualties • enhanced resilience (to misinformation and propaganda) • durable civil-military trust and channels • conditions for post-conflict recovery.

Characteristics and Trends

- Growing integration of heritage protection into military doctrine (e.g. no-strike lists, site mapping), though still uneven and often reactive.
- In defence policy, culture is primarily treated as an operational and legal condition, shaping rules of engagement, force posture and civilian harm mitigation.
- Increasing recognition that mission success and legitimacy depend on civilian trust, social cohesion, and protection of life, alongside heightened awareness of disinformation and influence operations.
- Expansion of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) to include cultural liaison functions, rapid-response heritage teams, and community engagement roles (e.g. Blue Shield/NATO pilots; ICCROM/UNESCO).
- Defence actors broadly recognise that culture matters, yet remain institutionally cautious about deep engagement, as artistic freedom and military logic do not fully align.

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Arts and culture are primarily used as trusted local channels for safety messaging and risk communication, including explaining rules of engagement, humanitarian corridors, and civilian protection measures.
- Heritage protection focuses on no-strike lists, emergency responses, and post-damage assessments rather than proactive cultural continuity planning.
- Arts-based approaches are increasingly present in veteran and community recovery programmes, though they are rarely institutionalised.
- Engagement with cultural actors is typically short-term and partnership-based, relying on external cultural authorities for legitimacy and consent and rarely embedded into mission design or long-term stabilisation strategies.

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Support morale and collective endurance under threat, strengthening the will to resist through cultural expression
- Use crowdfunding, performances, or sales to mobilise resources in support of defence and military needs
- Using arts to explain safety protocols and civilian protection measures
- Civil-military cooperation through cultural activities that support trust-building and de-escalation
- Arts-based rehabilitation for veterans and affected communities, linked to psychosocial care and long-term recovery
- Joint cultural heritage protection cells (ops + legal + cultural authority); rehearsal-of-concept (ROC) drills for site evacuation/protection
- Pre-deployment training on cultural rights, freedom of expression, and engagement ethics

Risks

- Propaganda optics and manipulation concerns when military co-brands cultural content.
- Cultural harm from uninformed engagement; misreading symbols, politicising narratives
- Securitisation of cultural life; pressure on artists to align with mission narratives.
- Heritage protection gaps: incomplete site lists, collateral damage or looting
- Disinformation backlash: counter-messaging perceived as coercive, undermining credibility



Persona

Development Cooperation

Persona Profile

Usual Actors: development agencies • international NGOs • UN system actors • development consultancies

Competencies & Assets: planning • community engagement • relationships with national governments and international organisations • presence (either direct or through partners) in many fragile contexts

Area of Influence: policy change • contribution to structural change and emergency support in beneficiary countries • integrating cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, youth, other)

Potential Impact: adaptation of development programmes and projects to cultural and linguistic contexts • community engagement through creative practices • recognition of local memories and narratives • establishment of facilities for cultural engagement • support to social cohesion and continuity where formal institutions are weak or disrupted

Characteristics and Trends

- Alignment with global agendas (SDGs, human rights frameworks, humanitarian-development-peace nexus).
- Current reduction of international aid, in many countries, in the context of reduction in public spending, geo-political re-prioritisation, and rise of right-wing discourses.
- Place of the arts and culture has tended to be secondary, although with varying attention throughout the years; frequent references to cultural diversity and cultural aspects as cross-cutting issues, rather than as substantial areas of action.
- Results based management, and indicator-driven accountability dominate programming.

Current Relationship with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Some development cooperation agencies (e.g. AECID, SIDA) have integrated arts and culture in their strategies and actions, including some in fragile contexts.
- Development cooperation involves a diverse range of organisations, including some whose scope includes elements of cultural relations and cooperation as well, thus rendering an integration of arts and culture in the context of fragile contexts easier.
- However, overall there are some communication difficulties within development agencies to fully appreciate the relevance of the arts and culture beyond a primarily instrumental, ad-hoc approach, something that the Culture and Development Work Stream within the Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation aims to address.
- Another obstacle to further integration concerns the limited place of culture in the SDGs, given that most organisations in this area are primarily guided by the SDGs and similar frameworks.

Entry Points to Engage with Arts and Culture in Fragile Contexts

- Contribution of creative practices to the achievement of core goals in development cooperation, including inclusive social development, health and wellbeing, sustainable tourism.
- Extensive literature and good practices available, which could inspire more structural approaches.
- Some networks (e.g. Practitioners Network, #culture2030goal) and international organisations supportive of the inclusion of culture in sustainable development frameworks, including in fragile contexts.

Risks

- Potential disregard of artistic / cultural quality and long-term process development, with a more 'instrumental' approach to the role of culture in development cooperation.
- Reduction in funding for international development cooperation, with narrower focus on fields seen as top priority.
- Need for adequate training of development stakeholders on cultural awareness and recognising cultural diversity.

Final Remarks

Arts and Culture as Peacebuilding – So What?

Throughout this research, one insight recurs across contexts as different as Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, the Baltic States, Colombia and Northern Ireland: **arts and culture are not peripheral to peacebuilding**. They are part of the infrastructure that allows societies to endure rupture, negotiate meaning, sustain continuity and imagine the future.

Cultural actors work under the same threats and constraints as their communities, often with limited resources, yet they still find ways to connect, make sense and imagine. In many cases, they become social innovators in times of crisis.

Across the contexts examined in this research, arts and culture practice works along the full peace continuum:

- In active conflict, it sustains identity, protects memory and enables survival networks.
- In displacement, it bridges homeland and diaspora communities.
- In fragile prevention settings, it strengthens civic dialogue, media literacy and social cohesion.
- In post-conflict environments, it helps societies negotiate contested histories and imagine shared futures.

Across these stages, cultural actors consistently operate as:

- narrators when truth is contested,
- connectors when trust has fractured,
- archivists when memory is under attack,
- conveners when dialogue seems impossible,
- innovators when institutions collapse.

They frequently step into leadership roles that exceed any formal mandate, assuming mediation, civic coordination and narrative-stabilising functions where institutional capacity has weakened.

The practice areas analysed in this report – storytelling, identity and voice, diaspora engagement, learning skills, and institutional building – reveal clear outcome pathways: rebuilding trust; preserving narrative continuity under threat; documenting and curating lived experience; strengthening inclusion and civic participation; sustaining transnational networks; and reinforcing local institutional resilience. **The choice of art form or genre matters less than the outcome pathway it serves:** whose narratives are held, whose voices are heard, which relationships are repaired or sustained.

A Realistic Framing

This research does not argue that culture creates peace in isolation, nor that any single cultural approach can travel unchanged across contexts.

Arts and culture do not replace justice processes, political settlements, humanitarian response, security guarantees or economic reform. These mechanisms operate within broader social environments shaped by trust, legitimacy, narrative recognition and civic space. Where these relational conditions are weak, formal agreements and institutional reforms struggle to endure. Cultural practice contributes at this foundational level.

In contemporary conflicts, which are increasingly identity-driven, digitally mediated, and transnational, cultural dimensions are not peripheral to escalation or resilience. Heritage destruction, symbolic targeting, and narrative warfare illustrate that culture already functions as a site of contestation. The same domain that can be weaponised also carries capacity for repair.

Culture as Infrastructure – Not Merely an Instrument

One of the central contributions of this research is the framing of culture as infrastructure. Here, infrastructure refers not to physical assets or outputs, but to systems of relationships, institutions, memories and capacities that shape how societies endure rupture and reorganise after a crisis. The focus shifts from what cultural interventions

produce to how they function: as durable relational foundations for cohesion, trust, and legitimacy.

This includes informal relational networks and formal institutional capacity – cultural organisations, community spaces, hybrid governance arrangements and cross-border partnerships that enable continuity during escalation and transition. When cultural ecosystems weaken through repression, displacement, underfunding or cynical instrumentalisation, the enabling environment for peacebuilding weakens with them. Peace agreements may reduce violence and development investment may rebuild infrastructure, yet without relational repair and shared meaning-making, peace remains precarious.

Agency, Legitimacy and the Recognition Gap

Across case studies, initiatives that sustained local agency were more legitimate and durable than externally imposed models. Cultural peacebuilding proved most resilient where communities retained authorship over their stories, identities and future orientation. Projects rooted in co-creation and local ownership were more likely to maintain trust, withstand political pressure and endure beyond funding cycles. **“Nothing about us without us”** appears here not as a slogan but as a structural condition of effectiveness. In fragile contexts, agency is not an accessory to peacebuilding, it is a precondition for it.

The gap identified across cases is therefore not one of relevance but of integration.

Cultural ecosystems clearly influence social cohesion, legitimacy and resilience, yet fragmented evidence and limited translation into policy-relevant frameworks constrain recognition. In several contexts, arts and cultural actors did not frame their work as peacebuilding, even where its impact on peace was clear, further reinforcing the invisibility of their contribution within formal systems.

The ecosystem at this intersection already spans cultural workers, community groups, peacebuilders, development actors and, increasingly, security and defence stakeholders.

What remains rare are spaces where these actors meet around the potential of arts and culture for peace – through cross-sectoral platforms, joint analysis and shared practice.

On Instrumentalisation

In one sense, this report acknowledges the inevitability of instrumentalisation – culture and the arts may frequently be valued for their contribution to other purposes, or for how they can engender action. At the same time, artistic and cultural practice carry intrinsic value. It is also true that some actors may already use arts and culture for propaganda, exclusion or harm. And when “impact” becomes the only driver, what is exploratory, critical and generative in cultural practice risks being lost. Yet in fragile contexts, cultural practice is rarely neutral. When communities are brought together

through creative work to consider shared identity, loss or memory, there is an intention there: to repair, to reflect, to record, to connect. In that sense, some degree of instrumentalisation is already present.

The question, then, is not whether arts and culture are used instrumentally, but how, by whom and with what safeguards.

Recognition of culture as infrastructure does not subordinate it to policy goals. It acknowledges that cultural ecosystems already shape the social foundations within which peace processes unfold, and that any engagement with them must protect artistic autonomy, embed safeguarding and resist reducing culture to a mere behavioural lever.

Structural Patterns

Several structural patterns recur across contexts:

Timing of engagement: Where identity and narrative are central drivers of fragility, the absence of cultural expertise from early-stage prevention and design processes reduces the ability to recognise and respond to conflict.

Time horizons: Short-term funding cycles clash with relational processes such as trust-building, memory work, and institutional continuity that unfold over longer periods. What endured across cases were not only organisations but relationships: trusted practitioners and long-standing partnerships signalling continuity in volatile environments.

Safeguarding: Working at the nexus of culture and conflict carries ethical risks. In contexts shaped by trauma, repression and disinformation, cultural actors often operate under exposure. The research highlights the double burden borne by art, cultural and peacebuilding practitioners who both live through fragility and support others within it. Where safeguarding is episodic rather than embedded, legitimacy and trust erode.

Translation: Practice-based knowledge in arts and culture is rich but fragmented. Without structured interfaces between creative practice and peacebuilding, development and security frameworks, insight struggles to travel upward into policy architectures. Overly complex evaluation and reporting systems can further burden fragile operating environments rather than support learning.

Principles: Carefully designed international and translocal exchanges can deepen reflection on conflict and resilience, but – like any peacebuilding intervention – they must be grounded in care, do-no-harm and trauma-sensitive principles.

Finally, a Question of Strategy

The evidence presented in this report makes one point clear: arts and culture already shape the foundations of peace processes across the conflict continuum. The practical recommendations that follow set out what it means to take this fact seriously in policy, funding and practice.

The strategic question is whether peace, development and security frameworks are prepared to recognise this structurally rather than rhetorically – to situate culture and arts within analysis, prevention, resilience and institutional recovery design, rather than at the margins of implementation.

The intersection of arts, culture and peacebuilding is still relatively new in terms of framing and broader multi-stakeholder engagement. There is a nascent but vibrant space for communities of practice and methodologies, for multi-stakeholder programmes and cross-sectoral policymaking, for research and academic collaboration, and for communication campaigns and public events acknowledging the peacebuilding role of the arts and culture.

Peace is not built only through negotiation tables, budgets or security deployments. It is also built in relationships, memory, records and archives, shared practice and imagination. Recognising culture as peace infrastructure is therefore not symbolic. It is a choice about how seriously the social foundations of peace are taken.

Recommendations

Treat culture as core infrastructure for peace, not a peripheral tool

All actors should recognise arts, culture, and cultural heritage not merely as instruments for communication or social cohesion, but as foundational infrastructures of peace, shaping identity, trust, memory, and legitimacy across conflict, transition, and recovery phases. This requires moving beyond ad-hoc or symbolic engagement toward collaboration and funding across as well as structural integration in peacebuilding, development, security, and governance frameworks.

Embed cultural expertise and local ownership across the full programme cycle

Cultural actors and local expertise should be involved from design to evaluation to anchor local ownership, not only at the implementation stage. Programmes are more effective, legitimate, and conflict-sensitive when they are co-designed with local cultural practitioners, community leaders, and informal networks that understand social dynamics, risks, and histories.

Value learning, adaptation, and failure as part of responsible practice

Actors should integrate reflective, qualitative, and context-sensitive learning frameworks that recognise complexity, unintended effects, and failure as integral to working in fragile contexts. Success should be assessed not only through outputs or reach, but through changes in relationships, agency, resilience, and local capacity over time. When possible, provide flexible and process-orientated MEL tools, and provide training to stakeholders on using them. Share learning with others.

Invest in long-term, flexible engagement rather than short-term project cycles

Peacebuilding through arts and culture requires time, continuity, and trust. All stakeholders should move beyond short-term or crisis-only interventions and adopt long-term, adaptive approaches that can respond to shifting political, security, and social conditions while maintaining relationships and institutional memory.

Translate cultural practice across sectors while protecting artistic autonomy

Effective collaboration depends on the ability to translate cultural practice into policy-relevant language (e.g. resilience, prevention, social cohesion) without reducing art to a mere instrument. All actors should support mutual legibility across sectors – culture, peacebuilding, development, security – while safeguarding artistic freedom, experimentation, and critical expression.

Prioritise safeguarding, ethics, and “do-no-harm” across all engagements

All actors operating at the nexus of culture and conflict should adopt robust, conflict-sensitive safeguarding and ethics frameworks, including informed consent, risk mitigation, anonymity, and control over dissemination. Protection of participants, artists, and communities must take precedence over visibility, outputs, or narrative objectives.

Safeguard participants of cultural activities online

Keeping artists and participants safe both online and offline is a key aspect of cultural work in fragile settings. Actors that have online activities should consider implementing a digital safety kit: adopt tiered and revocable digital consent, minimise personally identifying media, co-author moderation rules with communities, and plan takedown and redaction pathways.

Recommendations

How to Read and What to Keep in Mind

The following recommendations are grouped in **nine thematic clusters** to guide readers through different aspects of programming. Not every recommendation fits neatly into each category and many are relevant across.

Each recommendation features **stakeholders tags** that are grouped into one more lead actors to whom it is primarily addressed and several other relevant parties that are or should be concerned with it. We did our best to identify the most relevant parties, but of course recommendations can also be useful for other stakeholders that are not mentioned.

Each cluster is also organised into three segments that signal the **level of complexity to implement**:

- **quick wins** refer to activities that could be trialled relatively easily without significant additional resources.
- **intermediate actions** require more planning, more resources, and the engagement of more stakeholders as it addresses more complex processes.
- **systemic shifts** are changes that involved entire organisational models and institutional attitudes, and might thus require several levers to realise.

This organisation is explicitly not a step-by-step manual or a sequence of suggested actions. **Each recommendations stands on its own.**

Within each segment, you will also find a section that encourages you to consider aspects that can help your translation of these recommendations into implementation.

You will notice that several recommendations are also applicable for work in fragile settings that is not related to culture or the arts. We still mention them as we believe it is important for the cultural sector to be aware of these basics and implement them.

Ultimately, each recommendation needs to be critically assessed and adapted based on your specific context. Then, you can explore what resources you would need and which partners you would need to engage. We hope that this granularity and guidance helps you to identify the set of recommendations most relevant for your work.

Recommendations

Contextualisation & Co-Design

Co-designing with communities, grounding research in local cultural logics, and embedding culture in recovery planning are not optional steps – they are what makes interventions legitimate, conflict-sensitive, and durable.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Arts & Culture Peacebuilding ICR Development Public Authorities

Partner with local communities to co-design dignity-based creative work
that functions as relational infrastructure, allowing societies to reflect their lived experiences and identities

- CONSIDER**
- Building shared understanding on consent, crediting, and confidentiality; using short participation agreements
 - Working with local languages and culturally appropriate vocabulary
 - Sequencing engagement: low-visibility trust-building before high-profile activities

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Peacebuilding ICR Development Security

Align peacebuilding interventions with local cultural and community realities
treating culture as a foundational social infrastructure rather than a peripheral add-on

- CONSIDER**
- Integrating arts-based methods into dialogue and reconciliation processes
 - Funding co-leadership models where cultural actors are equal leads
 - Sustaining cultural engagement across the continuum – before, during, and after acute violence
 - Working with local researchers, cultural mediators, and community-based media across the full process

Research ICR Peacebuilding

Ground knowledge production in local cultural logics and histories of conflict
to generate context-sensitive knowledge and avoid the imposition of external frameworks

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Public Authorities Security Development ICR Peacebuilding

Involve local cultural actors in designing recovery, resilience, and social cohesion plans
recognising culture as a core component of local development

- CONSIDER**
- Institutionalising co-governance councils with decision-making power
 - Establishing cultural liaison roles bridging cultural and governance actors
 - Mapping and protecting local cultural infrastructure as essential public goods

ICR Public Authorities Arts & Culture Development

Embed inclusive participation of local cultural actors and communities across the full programme cycle
from design to evaluation, to ensure local ownership

Recommendations Communication

Making cultural work visible, legible, and protected matters – from sharing local voices authentically to translating cultural impact into policy-relevant language.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Arts & Culture Peacebuilding ICR

Share local voices and experiences
through authentic storytelling to restore recognition and agency, countering the erasure or distortion often present in conflict narratives

Public Authorities ICR
Arts & Culture Development

Publicly highlight and recognise cultural initiatives
that contribute to peacebuilding, using a cultural relations approach grounded in mutuality and equitable partnership

CONSIDER

- Assessing security risks before sharing stories publicly and applying layered visibility protocols
- Highlighting peace-supporting cultural initiatives by using accessible formats (zines, short films, podcasts) and partnering with media for wider dissemination
- Involving local cultural actors in recognition design for contextual relevance and to avoid tokenism
- Holding community debriefs and townhalls, and using press statements and social media to explain security-related cultural measures transparently

Public Authorities Security ICR Peacebuilding

Publicly explain cultural protection and security measures
to prevent the securitisation of cultural life and ensure transparency in how culture is integrated into safety protocols

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Peacebuilding Research ICR Development

Document, share, and mainstream creative peacebuilding methodologies
to build a durable community back-up system that persists even if formal institutions collapse

CONSIDER

- Using open systems for sharing methodologies to encourage adaptability
- Developing multilingual, user-friendly formats for grassroots organisations with limited resources
- Establishing strategies for ethical dissemination, contextual framing and follow-up

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Peacebuilding Public Authorities
ICR Development

Develop shared language and translation tools that make the peacebuilding impact of cultural work legible
to donors and policymakers

CONSIDER

- Developing translation interfaces that map cultural outcomes to policy relevant narratives (i.e. social cohesion, security or transitional justice)
- Protecting artistic voice and framing when cultural work enters institutional communication channels
- Establishing communication channels between security forces and local artists and communities

Recommendations Creative Practice

How arts-based methods are applied – with what safeguards, pacing, and facilitation – shapes whether they repair or cause harm.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Arts & Culture ICR Peacebuilding Development

Use storytelling across diverse artistic forms
to foster empathy, challenge monolithic stereotypes, and create safe and brave spaces for difficult conversations

Arts & Culture ICR Peacebuilding

Revisit previous creative works with communities over time
to renegotiate meaning as conflict contexts evolve

CONSIDER

- Applying trauma-informed creative consent to maintain participant control and minimise re-traumatisation
- Using humour or irony to help communities maintain psychological distance from violence
- Providing low-visibility spaces for initial re-engagement to ensure participant safety

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Arts & Culture ICR Development
Peacebuilding Public Authorities

Commission collaborative, cross-community cultural projects
to serve as visible reconciliation milestones and build institutional bridges

Peacebuilding Public Authorities
Arts & Culture ICR

Support community-led, culturally rooted memory initiatives
that offer plural perspectives on contested histories and resist top-down, binary reconciliation models

CONSIDER

- Designing projects as micro-infrastructures (shared studios, labs), not one-off events
- Facilitating rituals, creative archives, and community exhibitions
- Sequencing engagement, e.g. intra-group safe spaces before cross-community settings
- Adopting rotating community stewardship and tiered-access archives for sensitive memory work
- Partnering with specialised psychosocial and arts providers

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Public Authorities Development Security
Arts & Culture Peacebuilding

Fund arts-based programmes for trauma recovery and rehabilitation
specifically targeting affected communities, veterans, and marginalised groups as part of core psychosocial recovery

CONSIDER

- Applying hybridity as design principle, i.e. both analog/digital to ensure memory preservation during internet shutdowns
- Using storytelling and voice outputs systematically for ongoing learning
- Pairing artists with trained mediators to ensure a do-no-harm approach during high-impact interventions

Development ICR Peacebuilding Arts & Culture

Integrate creative, evidence-based approaches into the design, implementation, and evaluation of development programmes
recognising culture as a key infrastructure for resilience and social recovery

Recommendations

Cultural Mobility & Capacity Development

People, skills, and knowledge need to move – across borders, sectors, and contexts. Building the facilitators, exchanges, and peer networks that sustain locally led practice is an investment in the relationships that make cultural work possible.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Security Public Authorities ICR Peacebuilding

Train personnel in cultural rights, freedom of expression, and partnership ethics
using a trauma-informed and conflict-sensitive lens

ICR Arts & Culture Development

Facilitate long-term mobility and exchange across conflict and diaspora contexts
focusing on mutual learning, reflection, and long-term solidarity

CONSIDER

- Including pre-deployment training on cultural property protection and engagement ethics
- Training personnel to recognise weaponisation of culture and counter identity-based disinformation
- Prioritising longer-term programmes and establishing return loops so mobility benefits home communities

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Arts & Culture Peacebuilding ICR Development

Develop a pool of facilitators and peer mentors
equipped for trauma-aware, culturally sensitive, and arts-based engagement in fragile environments

Peacebuilding Arts & Culture Public Authorities ICR Development

Strengthen the enabling infrastructure
that allows cultural professionals to safely sustain locally led peace initiatives

CONSIDER

- Providing specialised training in arts-based dialogue and conflict transformation
- Facilitating structured peer learning within and between conflict contexts
- Integrating "care-for-the-caregiver" protocols for practitioners living through the same crises
- Providing pooled safety, legal, and psychosocial support for practitioners
- Creating mobile studios and digital tools that adapt as context shifts

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Peacebuilding Development Research Arts & Culture Security

Establish practice-based, cross-disciplinary training programmes
involving arts, public health, human rights, and security to nurture holistic peacebuilding

ICR Public Authorities Development Peacebuilding

Advocate for the legal recognition of cultural professionals
in national and international frameworks to ensure access to protection, mobility, and rights

CONSIDER

- Working with governments and institutional partners to create flexible mobility pathways, including visa facilitation, residencies, safe travel
- Investing in local cultural infrastructure as public goods with community governance to serve as continuity anchors
- Engaging a diverse range of professionals in joint problem-solving labs

Recommendations

Inclusion & Diversity

Inclusion is not an add-on – it shapes who benefits, who is heard, and whose resilience is strengthened.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Public Authorities ICR Development Peacebuilding

Systematically monitor and audit participation and equity
in practice to ensure cultural resources function as essential social infrastructure for all

CONSIDER

- Tracking demographic and intersectional data (including displacement status) and iteratively adjusting outreach
- Integrating qualitative feedback to capture impact on community dignity and belonging
- Establishing accountability mechanisms where communities can safely report exclusion and methodological violence

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Arts & Culture ICR Development Peacebuilding

Embed inclusion as a foundational structural pillar
from conceptualisation to final outcome to address the deep-seated social inequalities that often drive conflict

Arts & Culture ICR Development Public Authorities

Prioritise inclusive representation and leadership
across the entire cultural ecosystem, ensuring minority and underrepresented voices are participating in decision-making roles

CONSIDER

- Conducting regular safety-risk assessments on participant visibility
- Auditing programming, staffing, and procurement to actively include marginalised and at-risk groups
- Adopting co-leadership models, becoming equal partners from diverse backgrounds, not instruments of delivery
- Using multilingual and accessible formats to reach rural and digitally excluded groups

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

ICR Development Peacebuilding Security Public Authorities

Integrate cultural sensitivity and local evidence
into all conflict transformation approaches, treating culture as a foundational element of sustainable peace

Development Peacebuilding ICR Arts & Culture

Adopt flexible institutional eligibility criteria
to recognise the role of informal groups, grassroots coalitions, and micro-infrastructures for societal resilience

CONSIDER

- Decentralising access, adapting to local languages, and valuing diverse informal leadership styles
- Balancing equity and equality within emergency interventions to avoid reinforcing existing power imbalances
- Simplifying due diligence and compliance requirements for grassroots organisations to enable rapid responses
- Partnering with trusted local intermediaries who understand local risk and trust dynamics

Recommendations

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

Bridging the measurement gap, building adaptive evaluation frameworks, and investing in open-access knowledge loops are what allows cultural work to be resourced, improved, and taken seriously.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

ICR Development Research
Peacebuilding Arts & Culture

Establish open-access knowledge loops
to disseminate practice-led insights and lessons learned, bridging the gap between grassroots innovation, academic theory, and policymaking

Arts & Culture ICR Development Peacebuilding

Bridge the measurement gap
by translating cultural outcomes into the interdisciplinary language used by peacebuilding, security, and development sectors

CONSIDER

- Building mechanisms to convert internal donor reports and evaluations into "living documents" or peer-reviewed articles accessible to practitioners
- Publishing anonymised datasets and open-source MEL toolkits when and where security allows

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Peacebuilding Development ICR Security Arts & Culture Public Authorities

Integrate culture as a structural component of multi-dimensional conflict analysis
moving beyond "negative peace" to address underlying social and identity frameworks

CONSIDER

- Involving cultural actors in conflict mapping to identify narratives and identity frameworks sustaining violence
- Conducting cultural harm audits to prevent unintentional reinforcement of divisions or stereotypes
- Providing MEL training for artists focused on trauma-sensitive and narrative documentation
- Planning community revisits to assess the long-term durability of interventions

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Arts & Culture ICR Development Peacebuilding
Public Authorities Security

Support long-term, adaptive evaluation frameworks
that value relational processes, complexity, and collective meaning-making over simple numerical outputs

ICR Development Peacebuilding
Arts & Culture Public Authorities

Invest in proportionate, process-oriented MEL systems
that are accessible to grassroots organisations and patchwork peacebuilding coalitions

CONSIDER

- Using process-oriented metrics that value the *how* as much as the *what* – for creative and social impacts alike
- Implementing simplified emergency-mode reporting for crisis contexts and internet shutdowns
- Decentralising MEL and allowing communities to define their own criteria for success and dignity
- Creating reporting cultures that make honest documentation of failure safe and remove reputational penalty

Recommendations

Cross-Sectoral Recognition & Partnership

Culture sits at the intersection of peacebuilding, development, security, and defence – but rarely at the table.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Arts & Culture ICR Peacebuilding Development

Build cross-sectoral partnerships and alliances at local and regional level
that connect cultural, peacebuilding, development, and security actors around shared practice

CONSIDER

- Joining and contributing cultural expertise to local coordination mechanisms, such as humanitarian clusters, peacebuilding platforms, development working groups
- Creating local joint working groups that bring together cultural actors, educators, peacebuilders, and security actors to share practice and align approaches

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Security Public Authorities ICR Arts & Culture

Partner with cultural authorities and artists
to integrate heritage protection, emergency response, and safe-space maintenance into national stabilisation and recovery protocols

CONSIDER

- Establishing joint cultural liaison and artist officer roles to bridge communication and co-design safety messaging
- Recognising cultural and digital spaces as early warning environments where changes in artistic expression or attacks on heritage can signal instability
- Providing skills-based cultural training as a bridge from immediate survival to longer-term civic engagement
- Establishing return loops (mentoring, shared archives) so displaced communities benefit their home communities

ICR Development Arts & Culture Public Authorities

Integrate creative practice into youth and livelihoods programmes
to generate cultural capital and economic resilience that outlast institutional collapse

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Peacebuilding Development Research
ICR Arts & Culture

Mainstream culture as a foundational, constituent part of development and peacebuilding frameworks
recognising artistic practice as active agents in dialogue, resilience, and legitimate knowledge production

CONSIDER

- Recognising culture as a structural pillar of the HDP Nexus with dedicated programme lines that survive political cycles
- Establishing pooled multi-donor funds for cultural peacebuilding across sectors
- Embedding cultural expertise and artistic rights into mission success criteria, stabilisation mandates, and de-escalation mechanisms
- Auditing and documenting cultural harm following security incidents
- Institutionalising cultural expertise within security and development missions with a formal mandate alongside civilian protection and heritage mandates

Security Public Authorities ICR Development

Institutionalise cultural heritage and artistic rights protection
in security and defence protocols as a strategic imperative for operational legitimacy and mission success

Recommendations Resourcing

Short funding cycles and rigid structures that don't respond to emergency situations are among the biggest barriers to sustained impact.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Public Authorities ICR Development Arts & Culture

Provide, support, and maintain existing multi-functional community spaces
as relational infrastructure that shapes how societies survive and recover from conflict

CONSIDER

- Mapping and resourcing micro-infrastructures (peer networks, story circles, borrowed spaces) that function when formal institutions weaken
- Investing in continuity anchors (trusted facilitators, community spaces) that serve as stabilising nodes in fragile contexts
- Implementing flexible funding mechanisms for cultural and creative practice

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

ICR Development

Public Authorities Peacebuilding

Establish emergency response protocols for cultural funding
to enable rapid adaptation and maintain visibility for local agency during crises

ICR Development

Peacebuilding Arts & Culture Public Authorities

Support cultural practice through local intermediaries and transnational diaspora networks
when compliance or due diligence constraints limit direct funding

CONSIDER

- Developing emergency playbooks to reduce improvisation under pressure during sudden escalations
- Allocating resources for care work and continued contact, including remote engagement structures
- Adapting rapidly in crisis through simplified contracting and reporting, such as photo evidence and witness attestations
- Establishing an emergency fund or flexible envelopes of money to prevent a complete operational freeze when banking or internet systems collapse
- Routing support through trusted intermediaries, such as regional hubs, local fiscal sponsors, and diaspora networks
- Resourcing translocal teams with remote collaboration budgets and secure tooling

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Public Authorities Arts & Culture

ICR Development

Develop and implement continuity strategies for cultural spaces
to ensure they function as essential services during emergencies

Development ICR Security Public Authorities

Integrate the arts-culture-resilience nexus
into long-term funding mechanisms, supporting the wider cultural ecosystem as essential resilience infrastructure within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

CONSIDER

- Developing pooled multi-donor funds to ensure continuity beyond short project cycles
- Financing longer-term programmes with adaptive learning loops and "pause/resume" clauses for shocks
- Formally recognising community cultural spaces as essential services during emergencies with specific safety protocols

Recommendations Safeguarding

Protecting people from harm is not a procedural requirement – it is a condition of trust and legitimacy.

Lead actor Relevant party

QUICK WINS

Peacebuilding Public Authorities ICR Development Arts & Culture

Adopt immediate protective measures for cultural workers and content
including safe-passage protocols, digital safety practices, and local mediation

CONSIDER

- Activating safe-passage protocols for at-risk cultural workers during escalations
- Implementing a "digital safety box" with tiered revocable consent and minimal personally identifying media
- Providing "care-for-the-caregiver" resources for staff living through the same crises

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS

Peacebuilding

ICR Arts & Culture Research

Establish a structural, trauma-informed safeguarding framework and sustain safe and brave spaces for cultural expression
that function when formal systems fail

Peacebuilding Security Public Authorities

Research

Protect cultural life from politicisation and securitisation and minimise harm
through institutional firewalls, independent audits, and risk assessments

CONSIDER

- Protecting cultural data by default with explicit redaction and takedown pathways
- Creating institutional firewalls against propaganda, misinformation, and mission branding
- Conducting regular audits to prevent weaponisation of cultural sites
- Instituting independent ethics focal points and confidential reporting channels
- Requiring post-incident public accountability for any misuse of cultural activity
- Mandating transparent reporting of collateral damage to tangible and intangible heritage

SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

Peacebuilding Development

ICR Security

Implement rights-based intelligence protocols
that strictly limit the monitoring of cultural and digital spaces

Security Public Authorities ICR Development

Mainstream culture into national recovery and preparedness strategies
as a structural pillar of development

CONSIDER

- Defining and publicising "no-go" surveillance zones in cultural venues
- Requiring strict justification for any monitoring with robust privacy safeguards
- Embedding arts and heritage in municipal recovery strategies
- Recognising that endorsement by a single authority may undermine legitimacy in divided contexts

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Acknowledgements

Research Company

edgeandstory

edgeandstory is a creative studio for data-driven insight into arts, culture, heritage, and the creative industries in the context of sustainable development. edgeandstory designs evaluations, conducts research, crafts strategy, and facilitates cultural policy processes that expand learning and impact. edgeandstory wants to challenge the status quo and spark imagination for better futures with culture at its core.

in collaboration with Lanka.pro

Lanka.pro Collective explores ecosystemic solutions inspired by culture. A special area of interest includes the creative economy in Ukraine in the context of recovery and shaping the future. Lanka.pro creates products that enhance professionalisation of the field and connect independent practitioners, communities, and policymakers.

Core Research Team

Lina Kirjazovaite

Lina is a researcher and policy expert with a background in cultural relations, cultural management and political science. She is a co-founder of Culture Policy Room and is currently a Fulbright fellow at the University of Southern California with over 15 years of professional experience working with EUNIC, British Council and other cultural relations organisations. Lina has extensive experience working with policy makers and practitioners, in policy development in the areas of culture, cultural and creative industries, culture and development, culture and fragile context, youth, and education.

Kateryna Kravchuk

Kateryna is a dialogue practitioner and systems innovations lead with a background in economics and culture studies. Since 2012 she has worked as a researcher, methodologist and mentor in the field of culture and sustainable development. Kateryna is a member of International Association of Facilitators, co-founder of UA IDG Network and Lanka.pro Collective.

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Anna is a strategic manager in the field of culture and creative industries with a background in applied linguistics. She joined various global teams as a programme manager and communications professional. For 10 years she was leading the creative

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Jordi is a researcher, consultant and trainer in the field of cultural policy, sustainability and cultural relations, with particular focus on areas including cultural rights, cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to the SDGs. In 2021 he authored the report Cultural Relations: Key Approaches in Fragile Contexts on behalf of the British Council, EUNIC and ifa, including 11 case studies from several world regions, as well as an analysis of the enabling factors, challenges and the theory of change on how cultural relations can contribute to peace and stability in fragile contexts.

Kai Brenner

Kai is the Founder and Director of edgeandstory, a creative studio for data-driven insight into arts, culture, heritage, and the creative industries in the context of sustainable development. You might find him documenting violations of artistic freedom in Southeast Asia with ArtsEquator, evaluating the membership experience of the contemporary circus and outdoor arts network Circostrada, exploring the relationship between culture and sustainable development for the British Council, or co-designing a new work plan for culture and arts for ASEAN. Kai is from Germany, lives in Cambodia, and writes the cultural policy newsletter curious patterns.

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Lily is an independent consultant and researcher specialising in policy, research, curriculum development, and training within the domains of education, politics, gender, culture, and arts. She holds a Masters in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies and is a Fulbright Scholar.

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Myat is a cultural and creative industry researcher with background in arts management, curating, art writing and research.

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Yarka is an artist and graphic designer with a background in applied arts. She is a co-founder of the family business of hot enamel jewelry Enamel Koziy and Lanka.pro Collective. Yarka creates crafts inspired by authentic cultures and develops visual concepts for change-making initiatives and projects.

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Bassel Nwelaty is a Program Manager and Cultural Specialist working at the intersection of arts, research, artistic freedom, and the safety and protection of artists across the Arab region and its diaspora. He is experienced in leading documentation and cultural heritage projects, research-based initiatives, and cross-sectoral collaborations that bridge culture, policy, and public life. His work focuses on fostering inclusive engagement, supporting cultural production in contexts of crisis and censorship, and advancing the role of public institutions in shaping collective memory and defending cultural rights.

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Culture researcher and practitioner in heritage, cultural diplomacy, cultural tourism. Her roles included strategic communications at Ukrainian Institute and Rokvit Urban Coalition. Currently Tetyana is a Senior Advisor on Culture and Identity at the Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine and lecturer at Ukrainian Catholic University.

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Bozhena is a culturologist and cultural manager. Her roles included managerial positions at the culture department of Lviv city council and Center of Cultural management. In 2015 she co-created and became the first director of Jam Factory Art Center. Currently Bozhena is an operational director at Insha Osvita.

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Arts and culture that address fragility and conflict are not simply *peacebuilding*. They are actively building infrastructures of peace, and are thus *peace building(s)* – figuratively, but often also literally.

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