



European
Commission



THE SOCIETAL VALUE OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE

Its role in people's well-being,
mental health and inclusion



POLICY BRIEF

November 2023

RELEASING THE POWER OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE BENEFIT OF PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

This field of research focuses on the **role of the Arts and Culture** in improving the resilience and well-being of people and society, in supporting fairness and social inclusion. It highlights their role and importance in opening up **new policy horizons** and translating these into specific policy measures.

The Arts and Culture impact positively on the well-being and mental health of **people of all ages and origins**.

WORRIES ABOUT WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH ON THE RISE

The overall concept of **people's well-being** includes both **physical and mental health**. Mental health issues are impacting an increasing number of people in Europe. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 84 million people were suffering from mental health issues in the EU - **1 in 6 people** - at a cost of EUR 600 billion or more than 4% of gross domestic product¹. The situation has worsened now². Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15-19 after road accidents³.

Isolation and loneliness are increasingly affecting older generations with a severe impact on our societies, the health system and intergenerational cooperation. During the COVID-19 pandemic 26% of the EU population felt lonely, compared to 12% in 2016⁴.

Moreover, according to the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, 27% of workers have reported experiencing **work-related stress, depression, or anxiety** in the last 12 months⁵.

Mental disorders are among the top 10 leading causes of burden worldwide, with no evidence of reduction since 1990. At least 20% of the world's children have a mental health condition⁶.

1 [Health at a Glance: Europe 2018 \(europa.eu\)](#)

2 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/com_2023_298_1_act_en.pdf

3 The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health, Regional brief: Europe, UNICEF, 2021 [SOWC-2021-Europe-regional-brief.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)

4 [New report: Loneliness doubles in Europe during the pandemic \(europa.eu\)](#)

5 See footnote 2.

6 © 2022. GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. Global, regional, and national burden of 12 mental disorders in 204 countries and territories, 1990-2019: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2022 Feb; 9(2): 137-150. doi: 10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00395-3. Epub 2022 Jan 10. PMID: 35026139; PMCID: PMC8776563. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an Open Access article under the CC BY 4.0 license.

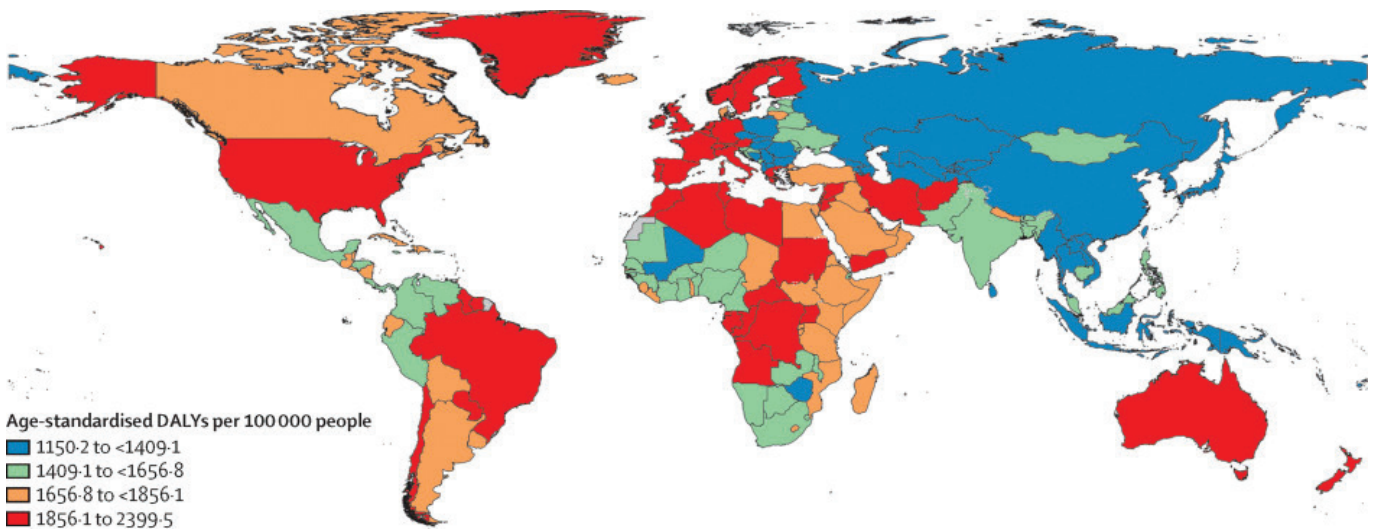


Figure 1: Age-standardised DALYs (disability-adjusted life-years) - per 100 000 people attributable to mental disorders, 2019⁷.

THE POWER OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE FOR PEOPLE’S WELL-BEING AND INCLUSION FOR ALL

The synergies between research on the **Arts and Culture** and the **biological medical research** showcase that investments in the field provide a wide range of benefits to individuals and society. Research and innovation in that regard open new opportunities while supplementing clinical treatments with less costly means.

As mental health issues are impacting an increasing number of people in Europe, the overall objective is to make European societies more **inclusive** and **fairer**. In this regard, socio-economic determinants and inequalities are key indicators for mental health risks and opportunities to improve mental health.

People with mental health problems face a higher likelihood of **social exclusion**, particularly if they belong to marginalised communities, such as people with disabilities or refugees⁸. This phenomenon can be exacerbated if **access to healthcare**, especially to mental healthcare, is either unavailable, prohibitively expensive, or even stigmatised.

An inclusive, life-course perspective that promotes **the Arts and Culture for improving well-being** has the potential to generate the most significant societal and mental health advantages. It is essential for both preventing and reducing risks associated with the **growing mental health challenges** we face.

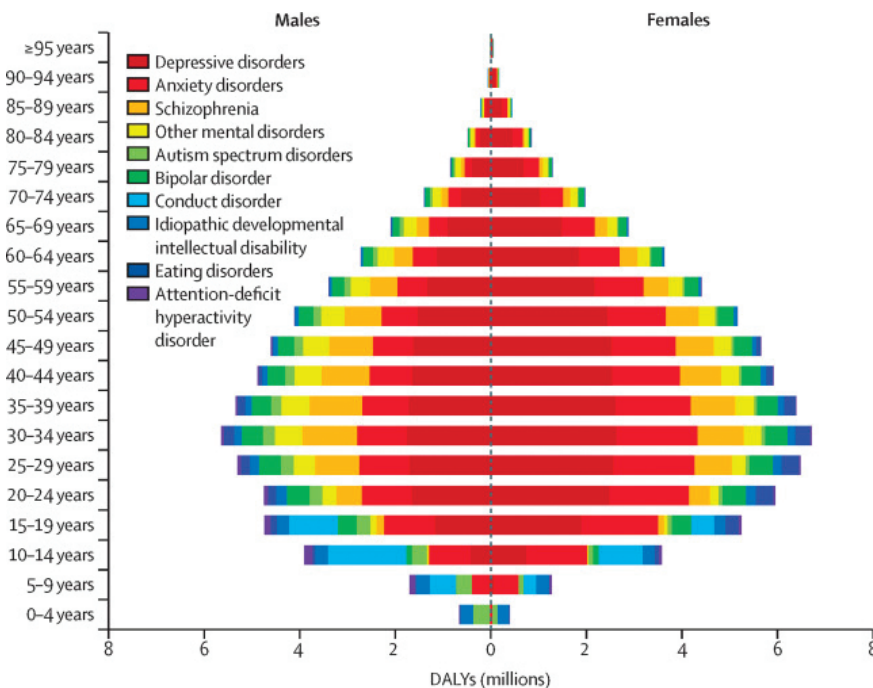


Figure 2: Global DALYs (disability-adjusted life-years) - per mental disorder, sex and age, 2019⁹.

7 See footnote 6.

8 [Combining mental health and education best practices helps migrant children find their feet | Research and Innovation \(europa.eu\)](#)

9 See footnote 6.



Different forms of the Arts provide **multiple creative avenues** and physical spaces to implement **unconventional** and more targeted approaches for different groups in our societies. This goes beyond mere culture consumption and actively involves the general public in art creation, sharing, and experiencing.

To tackle these challenges, foster a policy dialogue between researchers and policymakers and develop policy recommendations, six Social Sciences and Humanities projects received funding through Horizon 2020 under Societal Challenge 6 ‘Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies’: **INVENT**¹⁰, **MESOC**¹¹, **UNCHARTED**¹², **AMASS**¹³, **ARTIS**¹⁴ and **TRACTION**¹⁵.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RESULTS OF EU-FUNDED PROJECTS



The societal value of the Arts and Culture

Adopting a broader approach to Arts and Culture is crucial for individual and community well-being. This approach should focus on **addressing the needs of under-represented and vulnerable population groups’ by designing artistic and cultural activities.**

- Close **proximity and good accessibility of artistic and cultural** activities allow people to attend cultural offerings in their immediate and accessible environment and enjoy an attractive and friendly habitat, for example public parks in the urban area.
- Innovation, such as **Artificial Intelligence technologies and applications**, offer new opportunities, benefits and means that can facilitate the collection of information and data, for instance on the participation in artistic and cultural events at local and regional level.
- Success in the Arts and Culture is closely linked **to engagement in, or even simple enjoyment of these activities.** This success is inter-connected with a sense of belonging and connectedness to social, spatial, cultural and professional groups as well as other communities, and ultimately to society.
- Community well-being increases through **shared cultural experiences**, friendly and respectful interactions, social solidarity, and inclusiveness.
- **Long-term collaboration and mutual learning partnerships between cultural practitioners, healthcare professionals, and community organisations** create impactful programmes. Moving a certain percentage of public healthcare expenditure from the prevention of mental diseases to the promotion of cultural events, is one potential way to assess the economic impact of ‘less pills, more theatre’.



10 EU funded project under Horizon 2020: INVENT - European Inventory of Societal Values of Culture as basis for Inclusive Cultural Policies. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870691/>

11 EU funded project under Horizon 2020, MESOC - Measuring the Social Dimension of Culture. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870935>

12 EU funded projects under Horizon 2020, UNCHARTED - Understanding, Capturing and Fostering the Societal Value of Culture. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870793>

13 EU funded projects under Horizon 2020, AMASS - Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870621>

14 EU funded projects under H2020, ARTIS - Art and Research on Transformations of Individuals and Societies. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870827>

15 EU funded projects under H2020, TRACTION - Opera co-creation for a social transformation. More information: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870610>



Social prescription is a non-medical approach where healthcare professionals prescribe social and cultural activities to improve the well-being and quality of life of individuals. It is becoming increasingly popular.



Museums offer an environment for individuals to engage with art, culture and history, which can have positive effects on mental health and well-being.



Some initiatives have been implemented in various countries worldwide (for example Arts on prescription' in Belgium and the 'Arts and Health' programme in Ireland) highlighting the recognition of the Arts as a valuable resource for holistic care.



Positive impact of the Arts and Culture on people's well-being, mental health and loneliness, and inclusion for all

- **The Arts can change minds.** After visiting an exhibition on climate change, visitors will be more aware of environmental problems and more prone to engage in a cause, that is meaningful to them.
- **Multi-disciplinary consortia combining Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines and Science, Technological, Engineering, Arts and Mathematic disciplines** produce the most successful research results for well-being, fostering community involvement, empowerment, and social integration.
- Theoretical driven **approaches that combine various disciplines and use both empirical and systematic methodologies have produced tangible research results** that facilitate connection between cultural policies, including on the Arts. Co-creation is a key aspect of cultural policy: it helps to create new arts, encompassing voices from all communities.
- **Arts-based social activities bringing together professional artists with non-professional ones from disadvantaged backgrounds** enrich performances, artistic practices and their impact.
- Specific types of artistic experiences **make people feel better, less anxious, and less stressed.** Contemplating a piece of art can have an impact on the well-being of viewers. This also applied to watching online art during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **The transformative power of community involvement,** as well as the Arts and Culture, offer people new means of expression, empowerment, and social integration.
- **More tailor-made tools for specific community initiatives and art forms** provide new resources enabling real-time collaborations and connections between people, and allow performing pilot studies and evaluations of arts-based activities in different countries.
- **Systematic literature reviews can help inform future policy design** by identifying gaps in and obstacles to arts-based social activities to enable a wider transfer and up-scaling.



THE WAY FORWARD : THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF RESEARCH ON THE ARTS AND CULTURE

Assessing the **positive impact of the Arts and Culture on people's well-being and inclusion for all** is part of the future policy design for socio-economic transitions to build a more resilient and fairer Europe. The above-mentioned specific policy recommendations can influence investment in future research and innovation to:



Improve the **understanding** of people's well-being and mental health



Deliver **solutions tailored** to specific needs, groups of people and situations



Provide **evidence to support effective policies**



Design **new tools** and provide creative ways to improve people's well-being and their mental health



Promote an **inclusive and fairer European society**



Support the implementation of the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health

The Arts and Culture provide powerful and effective means to reach out to people affected by mental health problems, or to those who are living at the margins of society. Investments in these fields, along with biomedical research, promote good physical and mental health, prevent illness, support treatments, and **create high economic returns** compared to actual medical care and treatments.

More on the Arts and culture for people's well-being, mental health and inclusion?

- **Workshop 'Societal value of Arts and Culture and the impact on Well-being, Mental Health and Inclusion for all' 21.6.2023** - Online event: <https://youtu.be/i98jUW1RZZw>
- **Session 'The power of the Arts for people's well-being' – R&I Days 2022 – 29.9.2022**
Online event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb85faH5A-w>
<https://council.science/events/arts-well-being/>



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