

Collective Singing: at the Heart of Revitalising Society in Europe

As a source of **psychological, physical, social and educational benefits**, collective singing is a core component of revitalising society in Europe. The pandemic has had ill-effects on both an individual and a societal level, including challenges to physical and mental health, social isolation and limited educational opportunities. Serving to counteract these challenges, collective singing cultivates health and wellbeing, enhances social inclusion and supports the development of diverse skills.

Now more than ever, it is critical to recognise what collective singing has to offer, both in response to the difficulties of the pandemic and for the long-term benefit of the people of Europe.

With **37 million people enjoying the benefits of singing in Europe**,ⁱ it is vital that people can keep singing as Europe reopens, following the loss of their fundamental right to express themselves through a participatory cultural activity.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, it is also necessary that others are made aware of how collective singing can improve their health and well being.

Most urgently, collective singing must form part of the “**whole-of-society approach to promote, protect and care for mental health**”, as advocated in the UN policy brief on [COVID-19 and the need for action on mental health](#). This brief laments the critical impact on mental health and psychosocial support delivered at the community level, including through cultural programmes. In alignment with the European Parliament report, we request recognition of “the fundamental role of culture for society, the well-being of EU citizens and the economy, and to translate this recognition into financial and structural support”.ⁱⁱⁱ

The proven benefits of collective singing include:

Psychological Benefits - provision of a healthy outlet for the expression of feelings and self-expression, increase in energy, development of individual identity, improved interpersonal communication

Physical Benefits - improved respiratory function, cardiac function, neurological and immunological functioning

Social Benefits - enhanced sense of social inclusion, improved social skills

Educational Benefits - improved reading and language skills, improved symbol reading and decoding, intellectual engagement with music and realisation of musical potential^{iv}

Yet, in 2020, the cultural and creative economy lost approximately 31% of its revenues. Performing arts (-90% between 2019 and 2020) and music (-76%) are the sectors most impacted.^v As a practice for which online alternatives are inadequate due to latency issues, and the bad image that it has received, **collective singing has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic**. Large numbers of

freelancing professionals have experienced the loss of the fundamental basis of their working existence.^{vi}

Despite the concerted efforts and remarkable creativity of operators in the sector, eventually fewer and fewer singers are prepared to pay for online rehearsals. In combination with the toll of so many concerts being cancelled over the course of more than a year, this has put the survival of many choirs and ensembles at risk, both amateur and professional. This causes the loss of opportunity for cultural expression as well as the loss of talent from the sector. Furthermore, this has a direct impact on the health, wellbeing and cultural fulfilment of people throughout Europe, as described above.

Beyond reinforcing the sector, now is the time to amplify its strengths and empower its operators to contribute in different ways to the revitalisation of the society of Europe.

We are grateful for the steps that have been taken at EU level to support the cultural sector thanks to the efforts of many in the EU institutions. This includes the increase and top-up of the Creative Europe budget and the targeted funding for culture under other programmes. This also goes for the loans and grants made available to Member States under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

We, along with our colleagues from over 110 pan-European networks, have repeatedly urged governments to dedicate at least 2% of the Recovery Fund to culture and to engage with the representatives of their cultural communities in the design and implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs).^{vii} **Now** that the allocation of funds has been put forward by Member States, **we ask that ratification and implementation of plans and programmes be carried out without delay.** We request that **adequate funds be made both available and accessible** to an under-resourced sector. This is needed across the cultural ecosystem and ought not to be restricted to digitisation efforts.

As NRRPs have been developed under unusual pressure and time constraints, we call for the employment of a **dynamic approach to the provision of support** to the collective singing sector. We call for a **responsive and adaptive approach to the sector's needs** and to keep dialogue open. The way in which provision of support is managed at this stage will determine how successfully individuals can access the benefits of collective singing across Europe for years to come.

The benefits of collective singing underpin the priorities of the European Union and Member States for the long-term future.

The European Choral Association - Europa Cantat, on behalf of the collective singing sector, represents a strong strategic partner for the realisation of the long-term aims of the EU and Member States. The benefits of singing are in clear alignment with established EU priorities (such as the **social, economic and external dimensions** of the [European Agenda for Culture](#); Priority B: **Cohesion and Wellbeing** of the [Work Plan for Culture](#)), educational competences (such as key competence 8: **Cultural awareness and expression** of the [Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#)) and the aims of the

upcoming [Porto Santo Charter](#), which will encompass **diversity, social cohesion and citizenship**, by thinking strategically about the role of intersecting culture and education policies.

The benefits of collective singing are also fundamental building blocks of the **Sustainable Development Agenda**, including SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 10: Reduced Inequality among others.

The European Choral Association - Europa Cantat, in partnership with other European and international cultural networks, is focused on a sustainable future for Europe and for the cultural sector, for example, through leading on **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** in the Erasmus+ project [SHIFT](#). Collective singing organisations across Europe can be counted upon as civil society partners in the long-term pursuit of a sustainable future (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals).

In light of the above, we therefore kindly request that you:

1. Recognise the **physical, psychological, social and educational benefits** that collective singing has for individuals and society, both in terms of the transition out of the pandemic and as an essential element of a **sustainable future**, with particular regard for the critical need to support people's wellbeing and mental health.
2. Empower professionals and organisations in the collective singing sector to contribute to the economic and social recovery of Europe, by ensuring that **financial support is available, accessible and adequate** as we transition out of the pandemic and beyond. This includes the need for the timely distribution of recovery funds to the sector, the continued allocation of resources at complementary administrative levels and the provision of funding opportunities on an ongoing basis.
3. Maintain an open dialogue with the sector to ensure appropriate support that is **responsive and adaptive** to the needs of operators in the field of collective singing, in order to achieve a **sustainable and inclusive** realisation of the benefits of singing as a participatory cultural activity for individuals and society across Europe.

ⁱ European Choral Association - Europa Cantat, [Singing Europe](#), 2015

ⁱⁱ Article 27 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ European Parliament, [DRAFT REPORT on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU](#), April 2021

^{iv} European Choral Association - Europa Cantat, [Benefits of Singing Campaign, 2021](#)

^v EY, [Rebuilding Europe. The cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis](#), January 2021, p. 6

^{vi} European Choral Association - Europa Cantat, [Collective Singing is an important part of culture and the economic ecosystem, and an essential part of many people's lives](#), Press Release - Statement on Covid-19 and Collective Singing, December 2020

^{vii} Culture Action Europe, [Secure a future for cultural life in Europe](#), March 2021