

COVID19 Update provided by National Museum Organisations

Introduction

The objective of this preliminary survey was to get an overview the status quo of the most relevant issues around the COVID-19 situation and museums. As Europe has reached the 6-month mark in the current pandemic, the Network of European Museum Organisations sought to gauge overall standing across our region, from the perspective of our full-member national museum organisations in Europe. Thus, the results here should be interpreted not as aggregate answers from a collection of museums, rather as an assemblage of answers which reflect the status of museum sectors within European countries.

24 national museum organisations responded, in September and October, 2020, including those from Belgium (2), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.



The results serve not only as a glance into the status quo across Europe, guided by the expertise and overview of national member organisations, but will also inform the focus of NEMO's follow up survey about the COVID-19 impact on museums. The original survey was opened from March to April 2020, in response to the initial closures across Europe and garnered near to 1,000 answers.

With our thanks to our full members for their participation, engagement, and ongoing work in support of the European museum community, we offer this report with the hope that it illuminates our collective challenges and approaches to them, and sparks collaboration and action in aim of shared and sustained pandemic response methods and digital adaptations both within national organisations and the museums they represent.

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Findings

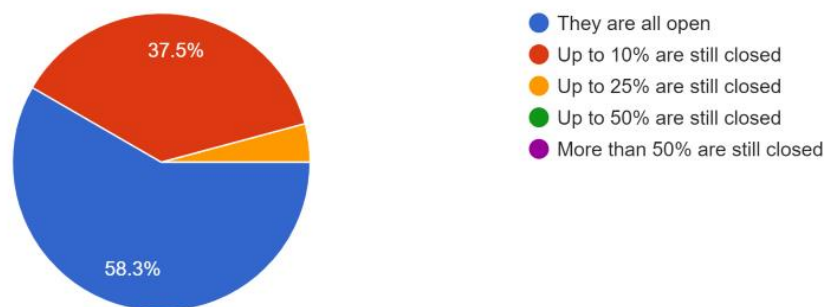
We asked about the current situation in Europe regarding COVID19 response, with a focus on how the situation of museums had changed after re-opening to the public with a focus on economic and digital aspects and an overview on the advocacy that has been carried out by many of the museum organisations.

Current Situation

Most of the museums throughout Europe re-opened their doors following the ease of the 'first wave' and have remained open since. It is worthwhile to note, however, that coronavirus cases are currently rising in states across the continent and we might face another public closure of (parts of) museums again.

Of the museums in your country, how many are still closed?

24 responses



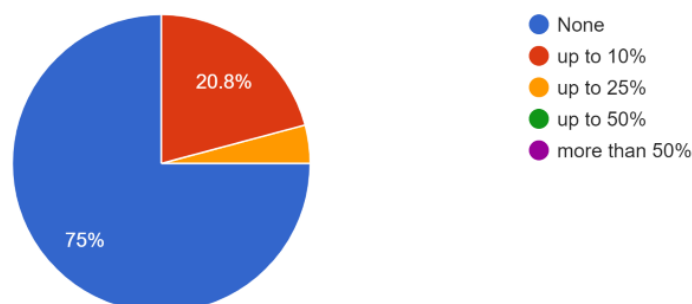
Impact

Fortunately, respondents confirmed that the majority of museums across Europe are not at risk to close permanently. **However, this remains a serious topic of concern, as 5 representatives claimed that up to 10% of the museums in their states may close permanently, with 1 representative fearing for up to 25% of their museums.**

This reality is a substantial increase in comparison to the outlook provided in the first NEMO COVID19 survey during the onset of the crisis from May 2020.

Of the museums in your country, how many are expected to close/have closed permanently due to the crisis?

24 responses



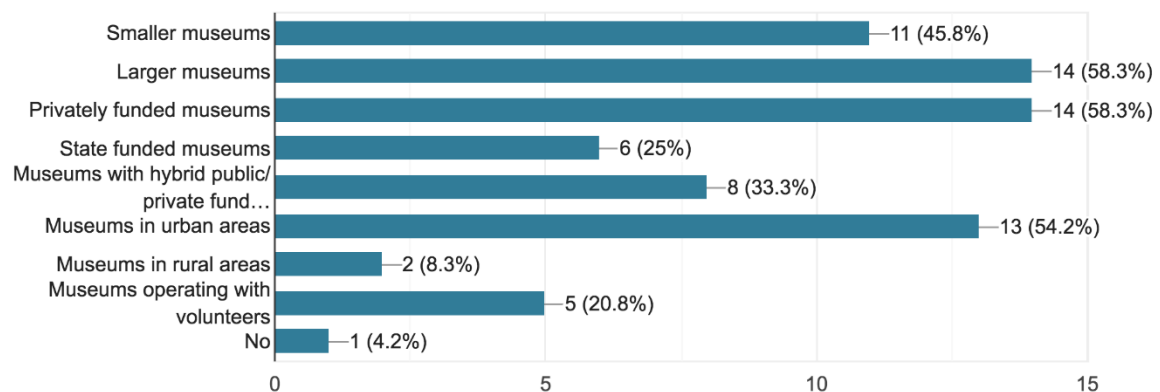
Which museums have been impacted most by the COVID19 situation?

Of the 24 National museum organisations responding, 14 stated that their **larger museums had been most impacted by the crisis, while 11 claimed smaller museums had been suffering most from the crisis**. 14 respondents claimed that privately funded museums were the most impacted, while 9 answered that state funded museums were most impacted.

The starkest difference was that between museums in urban areas and rural areas. Of the 24 responding museum organisations, **13 stated that urban museums were among the most severely impacted, only 2 claimed rural museums were most impacted**. These results coincide with our original Covid19 survey, in which we acknowledged that the largest museums, reliant on heavy tides of travel and tourism, would be facing dramatic income loss.

Can you judge which museums have been most impacted by the crisis? (multiple answers possible)

24 responses

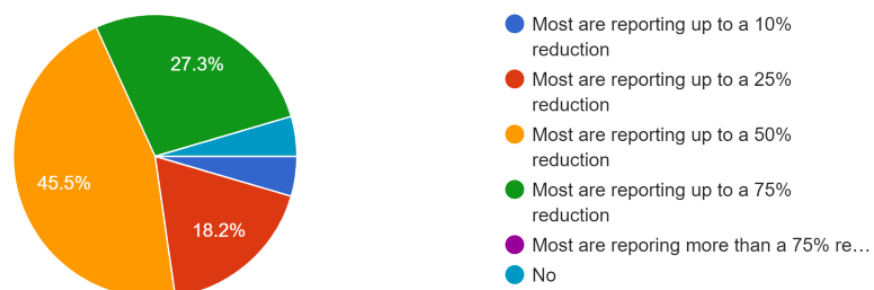


Visitors

Almost half of NEMO's respondents answered that their **museums are facing up to a 50% reduction in museum visitors after their re-opening. Another quarter claim up to a 75% reduction. Some museums have witnessed periods in which museum visits increased, for example we learned that in Norway some museums have had more visitors than in July 2019.**

Have the museums you represent reported a drop in visitors since their reopening?

22 responses



Causes of Visitor Drop

Of the museum organisations responding to the survey, only 1 established that a core cause in drop in visitor numbers was either not discernable or not applicable. **The other 23 all acknowledged the reduction in tourism and travel as a main cause.**

The next 2 most credited causes selected by those same twenty-three respondents were the interruption of the school year (18) and the cancellation of museum projects (16). 1 organisation representative pointed to insufficient funds as a cause.

Response to the Pandemic

Museums have been creative and proactive in their immediate response and ongoing recovery. One major task that was initially demanded of all museums in the onset of the pandemic, was developing a stronger presence online.

Recovery trends

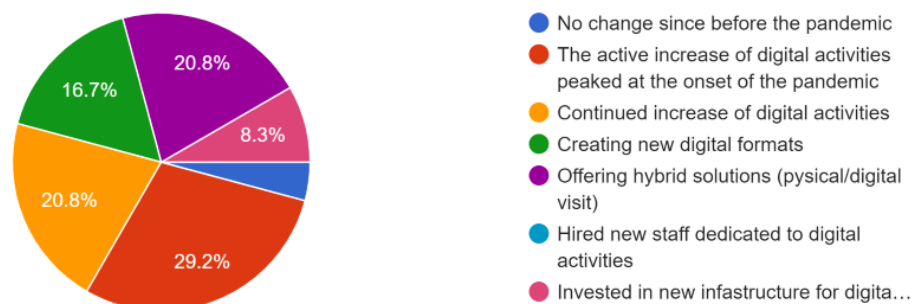
Some early 'recovery trends' from the past months include using spaces (such as gardens) creatively, focusing more on permanent collections and experimenting with digital initiatives. Fortunately, museums do not appear to be shying from collaborative projects through the course of their recovery, as this was only seen as a trend by one national organisation. Taking the time and initiative to evaluate and renovate the museum with sustainability in mind was a noted trend in only 3 states.

Digital development

Almost ¾ of the museums have either continued the increased digital activities, have created new formats, offered hybrid solutions and hired new staff or invested in new digital infrastructure. This is a noticeable development, since most of the museums are facing in parallel a cut in the budget.

Have museums adjusted their digital activities in the past months since the start of pandemic until now?

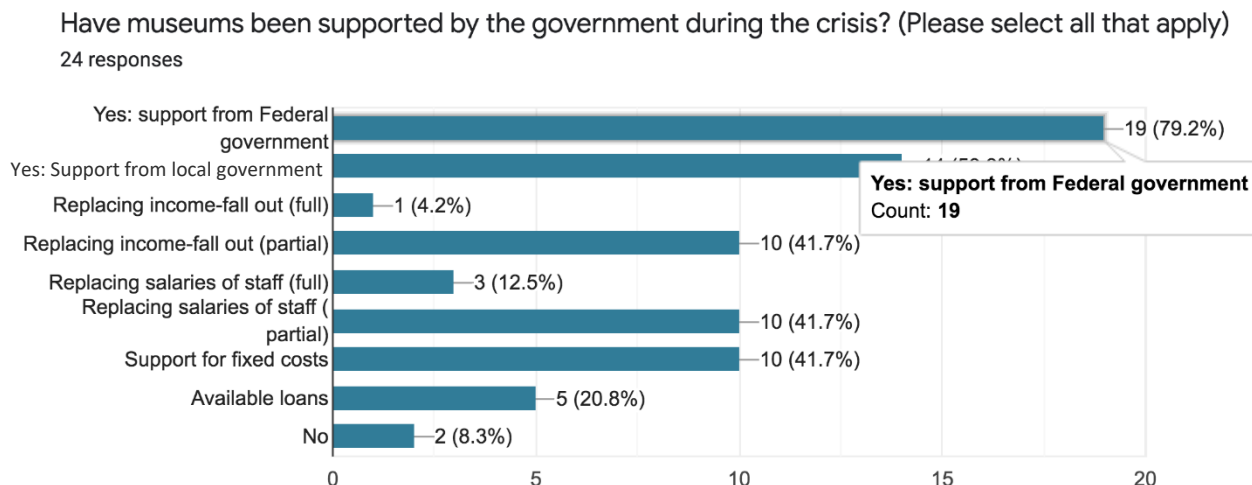
24 responses



Government Support

19 out of 24 representatives answered that museums in their countries are receiving support from the federal government. Of those 19, 16 are also receiving from their local government. 2 organisations answered that their museums have not received any government support.

The support has been granted mostly for replacing the income fall-out of the museums, to cover staff salaries partially and fixed costs.



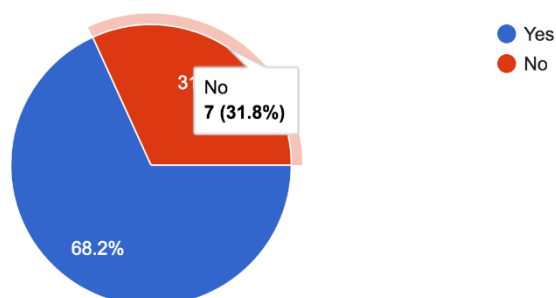
Only 1/4 of the respondents suggested that the government support extended to their museum is expected to continue for more than one year. Almost 40% were uncertain of how long the support would last.

Advocacy

15 national museum organisations have been actively consulted by relevant state agencies about support schemes for museums.

Have you – as a museum organisation – been consulted about the support schemes for museums in place by relevant state agencies?

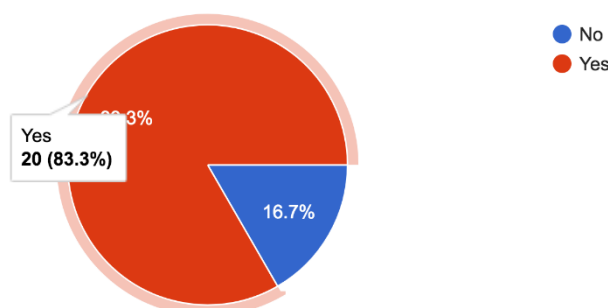
22 responses



20 of the respondents have started conversations with museums and stakeholders (such as funders) in their countries about the future of museums.

Have you started a conversation with the museums or other stakeholders (such as funders) in your country about the future of museums?

24 responses



Topics being discussed

During conversations with state agencies, one of **the most recurring topics has been the economic survival of museums**. The least prevalent topic was increased emergency preparedness.

The focus points of the conversations were listed as follows (multiple answers possible):

1. Economic survival of museums: 17 respondents (81%)
2. Enhanced digital solutions for museums: 12 respondents (57.1%)
3. New metrics of success for museums: 8 respondents (38.1%)
4. Increased emergency preparedness for museums: 4 respondents (23.8%)
5. Other: 6 (28.8%)

**including recognition of independent museum workers, sustainable management, new administratively territorial reform, making sure that the public has confidence in a safe visit to the museum, and boosting visitor-focus (news groups, regional/ local visits)*

Support from NEMO

The members would like to get **help and support to advance digitization and assistance in political lobbying to ensure continued government support**. Therefore, comparative examples would be useful to collect best practices and arguments in order to exert an effective influence on governments. Also, training to generate funds, especially EU funds, could help to improve the situation. Overall, one would like to have a better overview of European cultural policy.

The next steps that NEMO is going to take is to publish a **wider survey addressing all museums that will put a focus on the issues that have emerged during the crisis**. This is on the one hand a close look at the Income losses, its consequences and mitigation, the development of digital museum offers, and the questions related to a “new normal”, including the re-assessment of museum priorities and success criteria. Results are expected by December 2020.

If you want to get in touch with your colleagues in Europe who have responded to this survey in order to share insights and strategies, data and contacts, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us!

The NEMO office
October 2020