



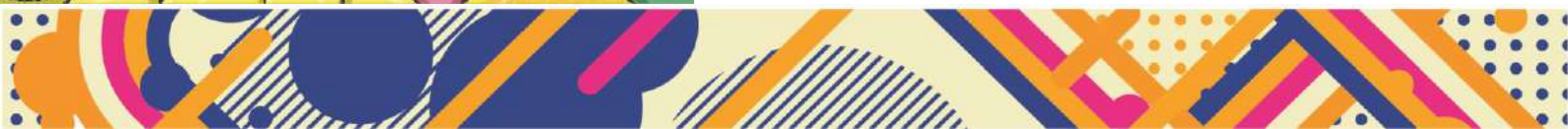
សីកាដា  
cicada

Informal Cultural and  
Creative Industries  
in Cambodia:

Mapping Human  
Resources &  
Socio-economic  
Conditions

---

By:  
YOUNG Sophea,  
SAY Tola  
METH Monthary



## Acknowledgements

---

This research is made possible with the support of various stakeholders. The research team of CICADA would like to thank all artists and workers who spent their time responding to the online questionnaire and in-person interviews. We are grateful for the facilitation offered by the local facilitators and the group leaders in Kampot, Siem Reap, Battambang, Kampong Thom, and Phnom Penh, where in-person interviews were held. We also owe our gratitude to the provincial departments of culture and fine arts and the ministry for supporting our research and providing the list of artists and workers in the mentioned provinces and cities.

*This research is funded by UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD).*

## About CICADA

---

Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy (CICADA) is a recently registered association to represent the cultural and creative sectors in Cambodia (CCIs). The Association was set up via support from UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) and operates under a fiscal sponsorship of Cambodian Living Arts (CLA). CLA has been running since 1998, supporting the development of the arts sector by providing training, funding and resources, producing events and festivals, and leading strategic projects.

CICADA was founded by six representatives of cultural organizations who saw the need for a sector alliance to advocate on common issues, including copyright, artistic freedom and unsupportive financial and tax frameworks. In 2022-23, CICADA has worked on mapping workers in the informal cultural sector and is running an advocacy training program, *Stand for Culture*. It also held a launch meeting to consult with future members regarding their priorities. It is directed by an independent steering committee. The goals of the CICADA are:

- To strengthen ties and promote cooperation between public and private sectors to ensure that our cultural and creative industries are at the heart of political, economic and social decision-making;
- To research, develop and advocate for the sector in order to create a sustainable and inclusive infrastructure for effective national and international interdisciplinary collaborations; and
- To increase and promote community members' professional skills and specialist knowledge through the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

CICADA offers introductory courses on cultural policy and introduces cultural workers to their specific rights regarding intellectual property, freedom of expression, and legal registration. CICADA will also create access to relevant sector information through bimonthly cultural policy briefs and biannual data monitoring reports sharing information about the current situation, trends, and legal developments within the sector. Catalyzed through its Annual General Meetings (AGM), CICADA aims to be an outspoken, evidence-driven representative for the cultural and creative industries vis-à-vis the Cambodian government and private sector, amplified by its members' knowledge, skills, and motivation to be a driving force for democratic participation, accountability, and transparency.

## Executive summary

---

This report aims at understanding the landscape of informal cultural and creative industries in Cambodia, mapping demographic background, education and skills, working conditions, livelihood characteristics, and challenges and career pathways of artists and workers in the informal cultural industries defined as those classified as freelance, self-employment, volunteer, non-full-time, informal owners of enterprise and family business. The study employed online and in-person questionnaire surveys of 414 artists and workers from different parts of Cambodia and conducted unstructured interviews with seven key informants who participated in the survey to understand their concerns, challenges, and prospects.

The study found that most artists and workers in the informal cultural industry are males, as females tend to leave their careers early due to marriage and household and child-rearing duties. We found that a few artists and workers are people with disabilities. Most artists and workers lived and worked in the country's major economic centers, mainly Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Siem Reap. Cultural artists and workers do not have to earn university degrees to work in the industry, as they mainly acquire skills from informal training. While all artists and workers have many skills in the cultural industry, most of them have primary skills in music and performance. The rest worked in the craft and culinary, audio-visual arts, visual arts, and literature and presses.

While a minority of artists and workers self-identified as owners of family businesses, some consider themselves freelancers, self-employed and volunteers who worked without formal written contracts or agreements. Those in self-employment status belong to mostly music and performance arts whose annual incomes are season, and thus, lower than those of the visual arts, audio-visual arts, and craft and culinary whose incomes are, on average, above gross domestic product per capita, attesting that they have significantly contributed to the country's economy. Due to the low-level education and income, music and performance artists and workers are more susceptible to economic volatility, affected severely by the pandemic. Almost all artists and workers claimed they did not receive any support as they were affected by the pandemic. Nearly all artists and workers do not affiliate with any non-governmental and governmental membership organizations or associations as they are unaware of any and whether or not the associations, if exist, can support them during the crisis. About forty-five artists and workers said they were in debt with relatives or microfinance institutions/banks.

Despite their hardships, almost all artists and workers said they would not change their careers. A small number of them said they would change, while the rest are unsure. To enrich their career in the digital technology age, about forty-five percent of artists and workers want to acquire skills in digital technologies. The study observed that all the artists and workers owned and used smartphones and accessed the internet.

The artists and workers in the informal cultural industries face many challenges, most of which are the lack of recognition by different stakeholders even though they have committed to preserving Cambodia's valuable culture and traditions, especially the music and performance artists and workers. The latter have claimed they cannot survive on the income generated from the performance services, but they want to preserve the culture. Almost all artists and workers said they have not benefited from social protection schemes. Given their significant contribution to preserving Cambodia's culture and active contribution to the economy, these artists and workers should be benefited from governmental support.

## Acronym

---

CCIs	: Cultural and creative industries
CICADA	: Creative Industries of Cambodia Association for Development and Advocacy
CIs	: Cultural industries
GDP	: Gross domestic products
ID Poor	: Identification of Poor Households programme
ILO	: International Labour Organization
IFCD	: International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD)
LGBT	: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MoCFA	: Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
NSSF	: National Social Security Fund
SC	: Steering committee
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Table of Contents

---

Acknowledgements	2
About CICADA	3
Executive summary	4
Acronym	5
Why this research: Context and rationale	7
• Objectives and scope	8
• What is a cultural and creative industry?v	8
• Categories of cultural and creative industries	10
• What is an informal cultural and creative industry?	11
Methodology and limitation	13
• Respondents	13
• Target areas	13
• Questionnaire and interviews	14
• Validation workshop	14
• Ethics and data protection	14
• Research supervision	15
Who are they?	16
Education and cultural skills	17
Membership and affiliation	19
Employment and work conditions	20
Livelihoods	25
The impact of the pandemic	30
Challenges and prospects	32
Conclusion and recommendations	35
References	38

## Why this research: Context and rationale

---

In Cambodia, cultural industries (CIs) have contributed at least 1.53% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 91.4% of this contribution results from core cultural activities, and 8.6% of related supply chains, such as equipment, of cultural activities. In 2011, 0.54% of the employed population in Cambodia had occupations in cultural establishments (41,543 people: 58.3% male and 41.7% female). 59.6% held occupations in central cultural activities, while 40.4% held careers in the equipment/supporting related activities<sup>1</sup>.

The contribution of CIs to GDP is already significant, but it considers private and informal cultural activities. The gift of informal cultural activities is underestimated. The informal economy and non-market establishments of CIs, and the activities associated with such industries, have yet to be officially included in the GDP calculation. Like other informal economic activities, informal CIs have not benefited from the official social protection scheme, especially in pandemic-induced crises and other fiscal policies for cultural industries.

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are at the heart of the creative economy. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the CCIs, leaving many jobless, but it also caused the socio-economic change that has prolonged adverse effects on CCI artists and workers. Physical and live performance industries have been the hardest hit, impacting livelihoods, artist mobility, market access and artistic freedom, together with broader repercussions for the value chain of suppliers and service providers (UNESCO, 2021). The pandemic has severely impacted tourism sectors, where artists and workers of CCIs had engaged the most. The pandemic-induced CCI crisis has exacerbated pre-existing trends. It has exposed the pre-existing inequalities and precarity of the CCI in most countries worldwide, especially countries where state social protection schemes for the CCI sector are not in place. The post-pandemic economic recovery has been slow and appears to have been exacerbated by the volatile global economic change. Cambodia's CCI has no exemption affected by such dramatic change.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cambodia- Economy indicator- contribution of cultural activities to GDP, accessed 02 Feb 2022: [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/cdis/docs/cdis\\_analytical\\_brief\\_cambodia\\_2.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/cdis/docs/cdis_analytical_brief_cambodia_2.pdf)

- **Objectives and scope**

This research maps the landscape of the informal cultural industries, focusing on human and organizational resources, socioeconomic conditions, challenges, and prospects of artists and workers in the sector in the country. The analysis of research findings forms not only baseline information about the artists and workers but also provides policy recommendations for non-governmental and governmental stakeholders to address the challenges of artists and workers in the informal cultural sector.

The research focuses on informal self-employment and informal wage employment categories defined as those who have worked and used to work in the sectors as freelance service providers, short-term contractors, self-employers, entrepreneurs, volunteers without regular payments and those without official registration with governmental institutions (see definition in the following sections). These artists and workers seek work, employment and contracts on seasonal and intermittent bases. This research does not cover those employed in long-term contracts and secured income and social protections, such as health and well-being care.

The online and in-person surveys were conducted from June to October 2022, and data cleaning and analysis were conducted from October to December 2022. Validation workshops to present the initial result of the survey and analysis were held in February 2023 in Battambang and Siem Reap provinces. Incomes reported by artists and workers in 2022 covered up to October or November 2022.

- **What is a cultural and creative industry?**

It is essential to define associated terms and industries to understand informal cultural industries. Culture is known as a “set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001). Cultural industries can be understood as:

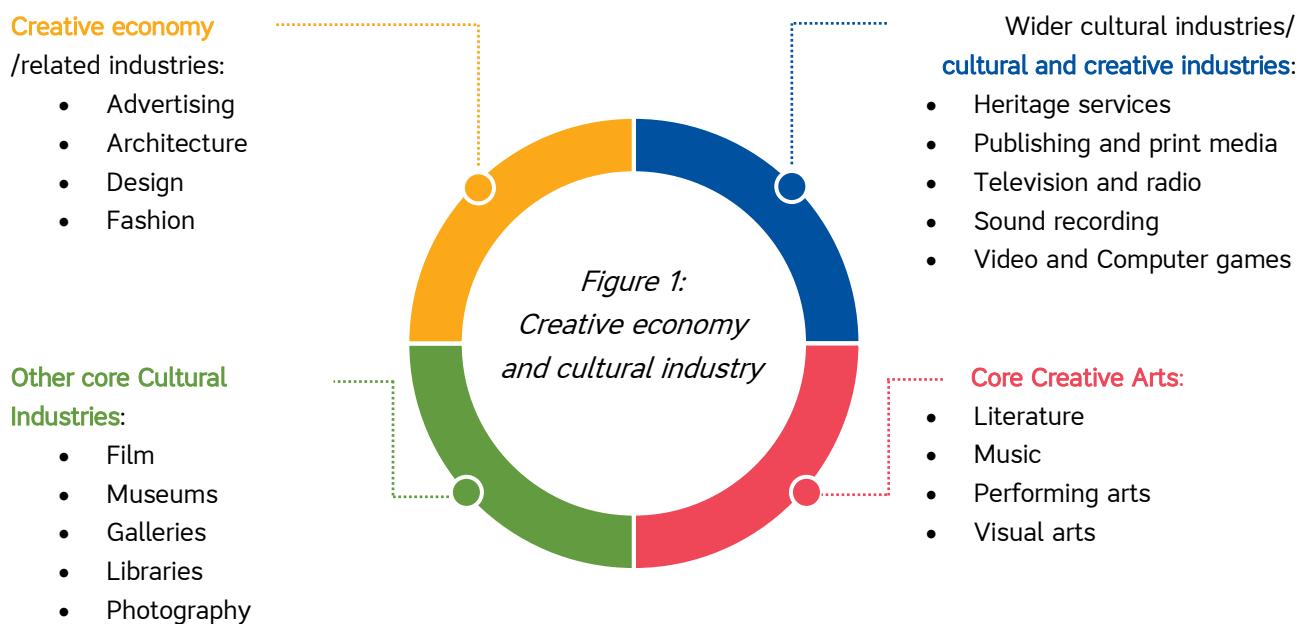
sectors of organized activity that have their primary objective as the production or reproduction, the promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins for example handicrafts, film, performing arts and design<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (N/D). What do we mean by the cultural and creative industries? (Draft). Accessed on 02 February 2022): <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/digital-library/What%20Do%20We%20Mean%20by%20CCI.PDF>



Cultural Industries (CI) are often associated with another term, Creative Industries (CI), which are perceived as those industries that have “their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”<sup>3</sup>. Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are often placed within the ecology of the Creative Economy. The latter encompasses arts, culture, business, and technology. At the heart of the Creative Economy, CCI is a form of business referred to as production, goods and services that can be traded. CCI contains two aspects of culture: other cultural industries and creative arts (see Figure 1).



Source: UNESCO and The World Bank, 2021.

While other core cultural industries include film, museums, galleries, libraries and photography, creative arts comprise literature, music, performing arts and visual arts. Creativity in arts is a succession of thoughts and actions leading to original and appropriate productions (Lubart, 2001). As such, creative arts produce originality and creativity in any arts aspect. Creative and the production of originality and creativity associates what is called “contemporary arts”. In cultural and creative art studies, contemporary arts are loosely used to “refer to the art of the present day and the

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO (N/D). What do we mean by the cultural and creative industries? (Draft). Accessed on 02 February 2022): <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/digital-library/What%20Do%20We%20Mean%20by%20CCI.PDF>

relatively recent past, of an innovator or avant-garde nature”<sup>4</sup>. Contemporary arts are “the art of today”, and as such, it is an interdisciplinary sector that forms parts of CCI.

- **Categories of cultural and creative industries**

This study understands that there are overlaps between cultural and creative industries. Many categories and skills are classified as cultural and creative industries, as presented in Table 1. UNESCO and Word Bank (2021) define seven main categories and several sub-categories of cultural and creative industries.

### Categories of Cultural and Creative Industries

<p><b>Performing Arts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramas</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Dances</li> <li>• Festivals</li> <li>• Feasts and Fairs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangible Cultural Heritage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Festival</li> <li>• Rituals &amp; social practices</li> <li>• Oral traditions</li> <li>• Knowledge, skills &amp; traditional</li> <li>• Crafts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Literature &amp; Press</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Newspapers</li> <li>• Magazines</li> <li>• Libraries</li> <li>• Book fairs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Audiovisual &amp; Interactive media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Film</li> <li>• TV &amp; radio</li> <li>• Streaming</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• Videogames</li> </ul>	<p><b>Designs &amp; Creative Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Architecture</li> <li>• Fashion design</li> <li>• Graphic design</li> <li>• Interior design</li> <li>• Advertising</li> </ul>	<p><b>Heritage &amp; Tourism Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical places</li> <li>• Archaeological sites, natural heritage, and cultural landscape</li> <li>• Museums, tourism activities</li> <li>• Tourism activities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Visual Arts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine arts</li> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Crafts</li> </ul>		

*Table 1: Sub-categories of cultural and creative industries*

Source: Modified from UNESCO and World Bank, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Art term: contemporary art. Accessed 02 Feb 2021: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/contemporary-art>

Based on the context of Cambodia's cultural and creative industries, this study adopted and modified those of UNESCO and Word Bank (2021) and classified Cambodia's cultural and creative industries as below. The study used these categories to classify cultural artists and workers in the informal cultural industries according to their occupations and skills.

- Performing arts: theatres, dances, circuses
- Music: traditional songs, modern songs
- Visual arts: painting, installations, photography, sculptures, crafts
- Audio-visuals: Films, documentaries, video arts, animations
- Literature and press/publishing: Books, magazines, poetry, scripts, libraries
- Craft and culinary arts: Wood, metal, stone, chefs, jewelry, weaving, pottery, leather, culinary arts
- Cultural heritage: cultural and natural heritage, archaeological sites, museums, archives

- **What is an informal cultural and creative industry?**

There is no concrete definition or concept of informal CCIs. The term informal is expressed by the governing body of the art sectors to isolate non-formal CCIs from formal ones. The “informality” is associated with the business and economy of the industry. In the economic context, the “informal economy” is the shadow economy that is not formally registered and therefore not included in official statistical reporting of economic activity (Skovronska, 2021). A market-based production of goods and services, whether legal or illegal, escapes the official estimates of GDP (Smith, 1985). The “informality” is about the legality of activities contributing to the economy.

Based on the notion of the informal economy, informal CCIs can be understood as the exchange of cultural and creative goods and services in the industry that is not officially registered by the state entities (Skovronska, 2021); it is yet recognised as a contribution to the formal economy of the nation. Workers in the informal cultural industries can also be classified as informal employment. To borrow the definition of ILO's informal economy, informal work consists of self-employment and wage employment. Each of these is defined as:

*Informal self-employment:*

- employers in informal cultural enterprises/association
- own account workers/artists in informal cultural enterprises/organizations
- Family workers/artists in informal and formal cultural enterprises/organizations
- members of informal cultural producers

*Informal wage employment:*

This includes employees, artists and workers hired by formal or informal cultural enterprises without social protection contributions or being paid by the formal or informal cultural enterprises to access social funds. The following categories are considered informal wage employment:

- employees of informal cultural enterprises
- casual or day artists/workers/and performers
- voluntary, temporary, or part-time cultural workers/artists
- paid domestic cultural artists/workers
- contract artists/ workers whose salaries/payments are not registered by the state payroll and social protection system.
- unregistered or undeclared artists/workers

Based on the concept of CCIs and informality, this study focused on the two aspects of employment and opportunities in the informal cultural industries: informal self-employment and informal wage employment. These two types of cultural workers/artists also include “individual freelancers” who do not work based on a fixed-term or permanent employment/contract for any organizations, companies, or enterprises either officially or informally registered with the state institutions. These individual freelancers are informally or formally recognised (registered: membership) by the state institutions or private entities in the cultural industries, but they are not legally registered in or entitled to the state's social protection schemes. This is not only because they do not have a personal tax file number but also because there is no existing mechanism or procedure for these workers to declare their income and pay income tax.

## Methodology and limitation

---

- **Respondents**

The study is based on the responses of 414 respondents. These respondents were randomly invited to partake in the survey using the following approaches:

- Snowball: asking respondents to refer to another respondent to respond to the online questionnaires and in-person interviews;
- Random approach: the research team distributed links to online questionnaires and publicly called for responses from potential CCI workers; and
- If CCI workers and artists could not access the online questionnaires but expressed interest to partake in the survey, the research team approached them to conduct phone call interviews.

At the time of the survey, the research team did not know and had existing demographic information on CCI artists and workers: their contact and where they live; the invitation to attend the survey was very random. There could be more potential CCI artists and workers that we could not reach, but resources and time have restricted us not to find and invite them, especially from other remote areas, to partake in the study.

- **Target areas**

The study aims to cover representatives from all provinces in the country. However, due to time and resource constraints, this research targeted areas where cultural artists and workers are most populous. The research team encouraged all artists in other provinces with fewer artists, such as those in Mondulhiri, Ratanakiri, Steung Treng, Kratie and Preah Vihear provinces, to participate in the survey through online questionnaires, phone interviews and in-person interviews. Artists who attended the survey were mainly from Battambang, Siem Reap, Kampong Speu, Phnom Penh, Kampong Thom and Kandal, which many believed to be homes of CCI artists and workers. To minimize bias, the research team also contacted artists in remote provinces, such as Oddar Meanchey, Pailin, and Koh Kong, to participate in the research. Given this coverage, this research presents considerable representative views and opinions of the country's defined cultural artists and workers in the informal cultural industries.

- **Questionnaire and interviews**

With regular consultations with the steering committee of CICADA, the research team developed a standardized questionnaire based on the framework and concept of informal cultural industries and the study's objectives. The questionnaire covered demographic information, livelihoods, challenges and issues, and career prospects of artists and workers. The questionnaire was used to interview artists and workers in person and distributed on social media and websites to call for online responses.

During the in-person interviews taking place in Phnom Penh, Kampot, Kampong Thom, Battambang, and Siem Reap, the research team took the chance to ask the seven group leaders and other artists and workers about their concerns and challenges in their career pathways and the context of the cultural industry in the country. Together with questionnaire responses, the analysis of concerns, challenges and suggestions from this study's recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

- **Validation workshop**

To ensure consistency of the CCI survey and analysis, the research team organized two validation workshops in Battambang and Siem Reap, where 19 artists who participated in the survey met with the research team. The team presented the preliminary findings to the participants and asked for feedback and comments to validate the findings. The research team also asked artists and workers about their concerns and challenges in their careers in the industry.

- **Ethics and data protection**

This research has committed to complying with the ethical standards of social research. All respondents consented voluntarily to participate in the online surveys and phone and in-person interviews. Respondents' identities, such as names, dates of birth and photos, were not collected to ensure ethical compliance. Data presented in this report are anonymized. Where personal data, such as contact information, are provided voluntarily by respondents, the CICADA will retain and store the information in password-protected devices for one year after the survey result is published publicly. After one year, CICADA will destroy all relevant personal data. The report will be available online on the CICADA website.

- **Research supervision**

The research was conducted by the CICADA executive research team comprising a research lead, a research coordinator and research assistants whose research activities were under the oversight of the CICADA's steering committee consisting of the CICADA director and steering committee who have many years of work experience in cultural and creative industries in Cambodia and the region. The research executive team reported to and consulted the steering committee throughout the research process to ensure rigorous research results and ethical compliance.

## Who are they?

Two-thirds of cultural artists and workers are males even though, culturally, cultural arts and performance are females' works.

Two-thirds of cultural artists and workers are males, while a minority belongs to other genders, which could be lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) (Fig. 1). Males remain the dominant gender even Cambodians perceive that, culturally and generally, arts and performance activities are females' works. Our interaction with artists and workers suggested that female artists and workers left their occupations in culture earlier than males, especially when they got married and assumed child-rearing duties. 71.7% of artists are married, and 22.7% are single (Fig. 3). A small number of these artists are either divorced or have partners. While cultural artistic works are believed to be for people with non-disability, about 7.2% of the surveyed artists claim they are artists with disabilities, mostly physical impairments.

The artists and workers are from several provinces of Cambodia but mainly live and work in Battambang, Siem Reap, Kampong Thom and Phnom Penh (Fig. 4). Other artists live elsewhere but work in Phnom Penh and Battambang. 59 artists told us that they live in Phnom Penh, but about 79 artists work in Phnom Penh. In Battambang, where 92 artists live, only 81 artists said they work in the province. Phnom Penh and Siem Reap are popular workplaces for artists to work in as they are both touristic and economic centers of the country. Surprisingly, two artists have worked internationally.

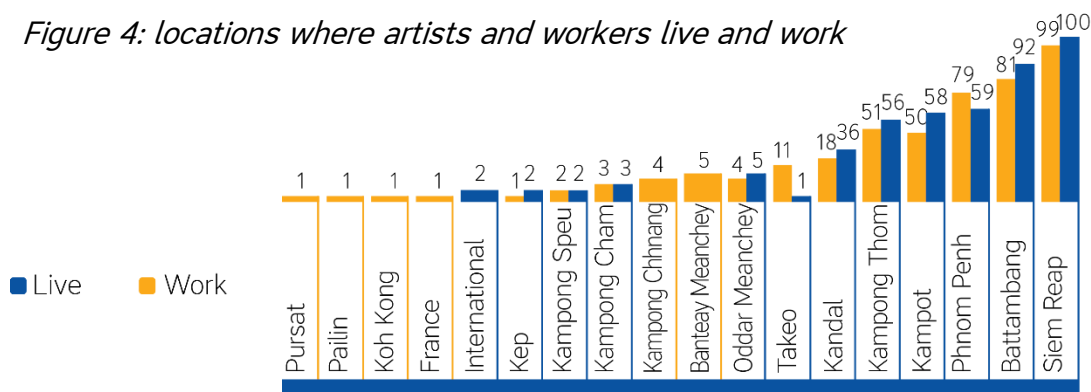


Figure 2: Gender of artists and workers



Figure 3: marital status of artists and workers

Figure 4: locations where artists and workers live and work





## Education and cultural skills

A majority of artists and workers do not need university degrees to work in the informal cultural industries. Their skills and practices are passed on through informal training from one generation to another.

A majority of informal cultural artists and workers (74.4%) obtained or finished basic education (primary to secondary schools) (Fig. 6). Most of the cultural and creative workers are educated up to the primary school level (28%), whereas 25.4% of them finished secondary school. 21.7% of cultural and creative artists obtained or finished a high school level of education. 5.3% claim they are illiterate (unable to read, write and compute), and 5.1% obtained informal education (such as reading and writing). A minority of artists were educated at university-level education, obtaining or finishing associate's degrees (2.4%), bachelor's degrees (10.1%) and master's degrees (1.9%). This result suggests that working in cultural industries, especially in music and performing arts, does not require a university degree. Being musicians, singers, and performers required informal training and learning. 78.3% reported that they learned by themselves or were trained by their relatives or parents, whereas the rest (22.7%) were trained formally (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: How artists and workers acquired their skills

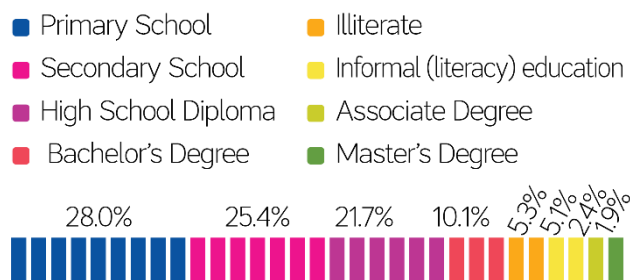
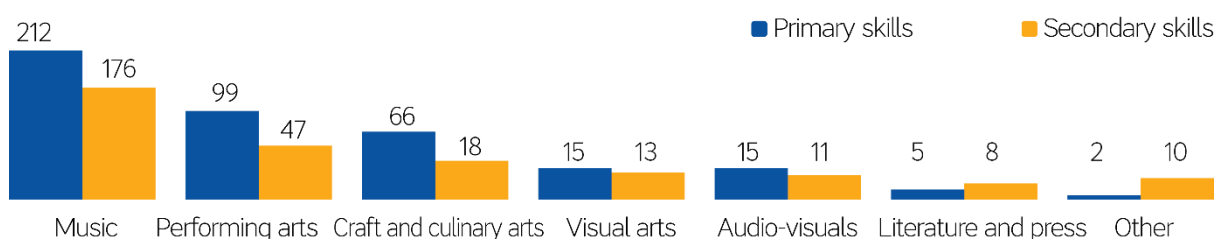


Figure 6: Educational levels of artists and workers

Cultural artists and workers have multiple skills. More than half of the artists categorized their primary skills as musical aspects (51%) as they are traditional and modern song singers and musical instruments players (Fig. 7). Music categories are also classified as the secondary skills of the artists, especially those in performing arts, craft and culinary and visual arts etc. The second most popular skills are performing arts, up to 23.91% categorized themselves within this category, and about 11.3% consider performing arts their secondary skills. Craft and culinary arts (those who worked on wood, metal, stone, chefs, jewelry, weaving, pottery, leather, cooking and culinary artistic activities) ranked third place, having 15.9% and 4.3% of the artists consider these categories their primary and secondary skills, respectively. These three popular categories of skills in cultural arts appear to be driven by the tourist markets and traditional and ritual requirements. Those categories and skills in cultural industries that are less attractive are visual arts, audio-visuals, and literature and presses.

Artists and workers possess many skills, but music and performing arts are their primary and secondary skills, and they tend to acquire the skills through informal, but less expensive, training.



*Figure 7: Primary and secondary skills of artists and workers*

## Membership and affiliation

Most informal cultural artists and workers are not members of any not-for-profit organizations and associations, nor of the state-run organization (93%). 7% report that they are members of associations (29 artists), mostly affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) or the provincial departments of the ministry. Those with membership in organizations are males (68.90%), while the rest are females. This membership is reasonably proportionate to the gender of artists, having more males than females.

When asked why they are not members of or affiliated with any organizations, several answers were provided, but most of which was that they were not aware of any membership organizations. Of those who have membership (29 respondents), 45% of them work in the music category, audio-visuals (21%) and literature and press (14%).

"We are not aware of any governmental and non-governmental membership organizations that we should be affiliated with to represent us and our interests. We are often contacted through our group leaders in our village."



Figure 8: membership status of artists and workers

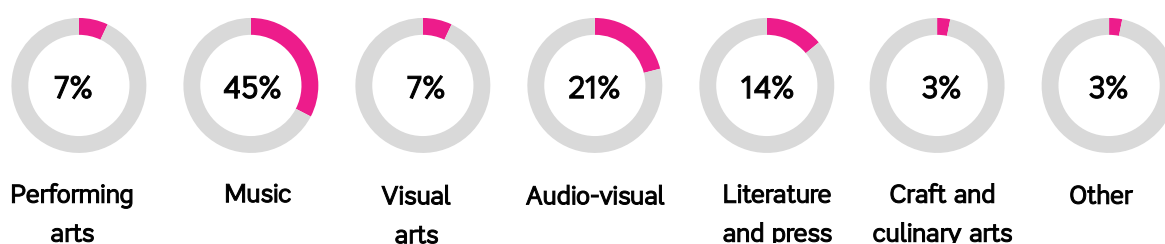


Figure 9: categories of artists and workers with membership

## Employment and work conditions

A majority of cultural artists and workers are self-employed (86%), claiming that they are freelance and independent performers, singers, service providers, and creators/producers, whereas 4% of them considered themselves entrepreneurs, such as owners of their business or family business (Fig. 10). These artists categorized themselves as freelance but affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (3%), and the same percentage classified as workers with salary but no contracts, working for small businesses with regular payments. A very small percentage of CCI workers are fixed-term contract and part-time artists (1%) and volunteers (2%).

Most artists and workers are self-employed, and they are mainly working in music and performing arts.

- Self-employment 86%
- Entrepreneur/owner/family business 4%
- Salary but no contract 3%
- Freelance but affiliated with MoCFA 3%
- Volunteer 2%
- Fixed-term contract 1%
- Part-time 1%



Figure 10: Working and employment conditions of artists and workers

Of 86% (356) of self-employed artists and workers, 50% are classified as music category and 19% in performing arts. Craft and culinary categories (9%) are ranked the third most popular self-employment category, and visual and audio-visual arts are in fourth place (Fig. 11).

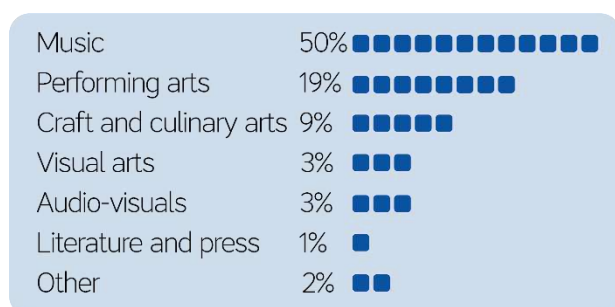
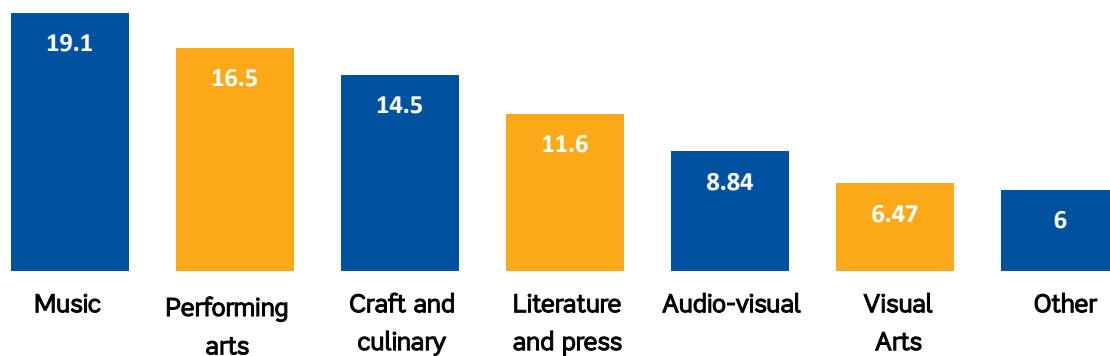


Figure 11: artists and workers with self-employment status

On average, informal cultural artists and workers have experience of at least six years in their sector. Those in the music category have at least 19.1 years of experience, while those in performing arts have average years of experience of 16.5 years, followed by the craft and culinary arts (14.5 years). The artists with the longest years of experience are in craft and culinary arts (60 years) and followed by music (58 years) and performing arts (55 years). These suggest that some artists have worked in the sectors for their entire lives.

On average, artists and workers in music and performing art categories have the longest year of experience in the industry. Some artists and workers have worked in the sector as long as 80 years.



*Figure 12: Average years of work experience of artists and workers*

In the past six months (2022), about 70% of the artists said they worked, while about 30% did not work. Of the 70% employed artists, 59.10% are males, and about 10% are female. This indicated that the unemployed rate during the last six months of 2022 was high (almost 30%), mostly males as they are the majority of artists and workers (Fig. 13), and thus, they inevitably faced financial hardship in the last six months.

For those who worked in the last six months of 2022, they worked about 14.5 days per month on average. Some of these workers worked up to 30 days per month, while some worked around just one day per month.

All artists said 90% of them worked without formal/written contracts, while 10% of them (male: 7%; female: 3%) said they have written contracts or agreements for their employment or services. Informal contracts, such as verbal agreements or issuing receipts to artists and workers to confirm payment, were practiced by those who worked without formal or written contracts. As males are the primary workforce of informal cultural industries, they account for most workers working without contracts.

Up to 90% of artists and workers worked for their clients without written contracts or agreements.

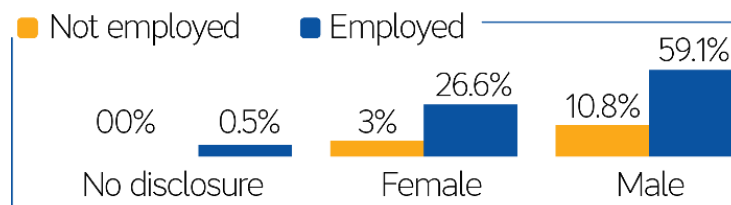


Figure 13: Employment in the past six months by gender

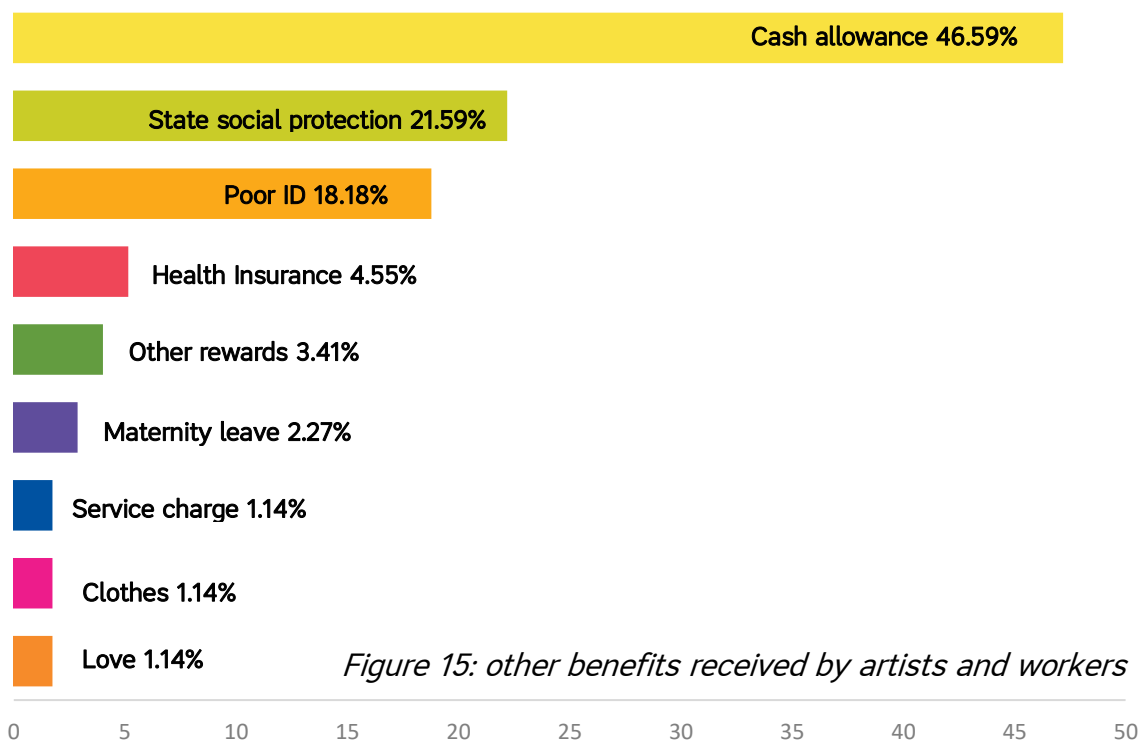


Figure 14: Contractual and working conditions

Cultural artists and workers provided different answers when we asked about the other benefits they received besides service fees. 78.74% of the artists said they have never received any benefits from their employers or clients. This could be due to the nature of freelance and informal services provided to their clients and when they do not have written agreements. 21.26% (88 artists) confirmed that they received a variety of benefits, but only a few of these benefits were categorized as social benefits or protection: health insurance (4.5%=4 artists), maternity leave (2.27%= 2 artists), state social protection (21.59%=19 artists), poor identity card (ID poor) (18.18%= 16 artists), while the rest said they received cash allowance/tips (46.59%=46 artists) and other in-kind contribution from their clients. Those with poor IDs considered poor artists, especially those in remote areas. Those who have social protection cards (ប័ណ្ណសុខាភិបាល/

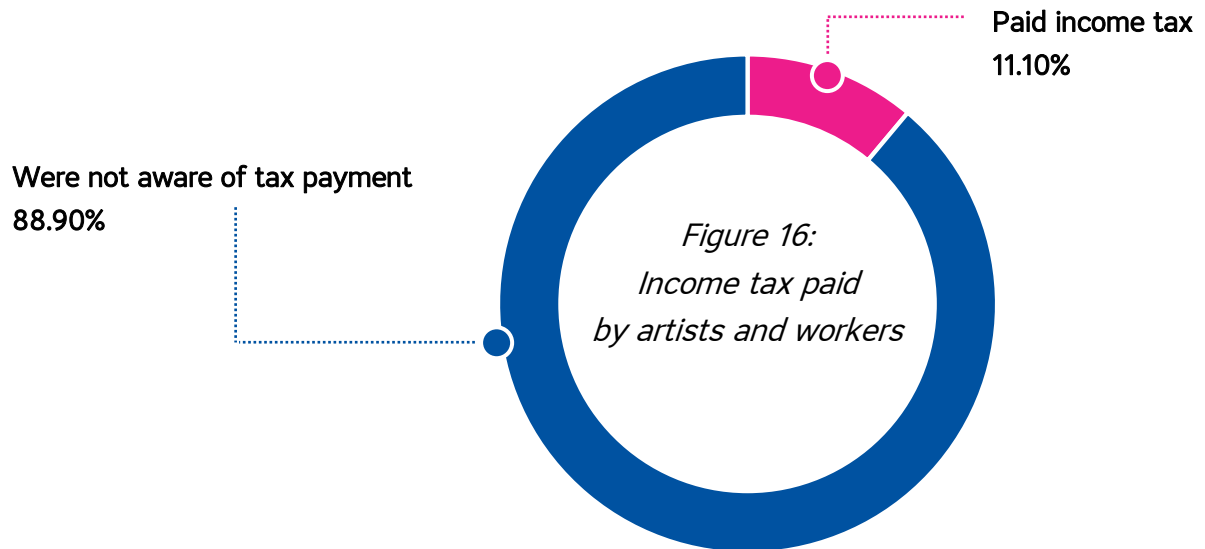
NSSF) or equity cards (ប័ណ្ណសមធម៌) tend to be artists affiliated with the MoCFA, and those with health insurance belong to artists with fixed-term contracts. This result indicated that poor households and artists also play a major role in the cultural industry.

Most cultural artists and workers never received any benefits, such as insurance and social protection, other than service fees from their clients or employers. Some artists and workers are poor.



Since most artists are freelance, almost 90% of them said they were not aware of any requirement to pay tax on the income they earned from their performance services and or selling goods. Due to the informal and irregular nature of the services (especially singing, dancing and performance at events or ceremonies), there are no tax deductions for artists, including those in music and performing arts. (It must be noted that there is no existing procedure for self-tax declaration in Cambodia). Around 11.10% of them said they paid tax on their income. These artists can be freelancers, business owners and those working with fixed-term contracts. Tax payments can be paid by employers or clients who withheld tax before paying the artists.

Almost 90% of all cultural artists and workers have never experienced deduction service fees for tax purposes.





## Livelihoods

Cultural artists and workers mainly got hired for service and performance and sold their cultural products through network and friend connections (76.40%). 15% of cultural artists and workers said they got hired to perform and produce artistic works as someone or an organization approached them directly. While 5.10% said they sold their artistic products and goods based on the market, including promotion, a very few of the artists and workers said they got hired through open competition (3.60%).

All cultural artists and workers tend to get employed through network and friendship. Networks are important for them.

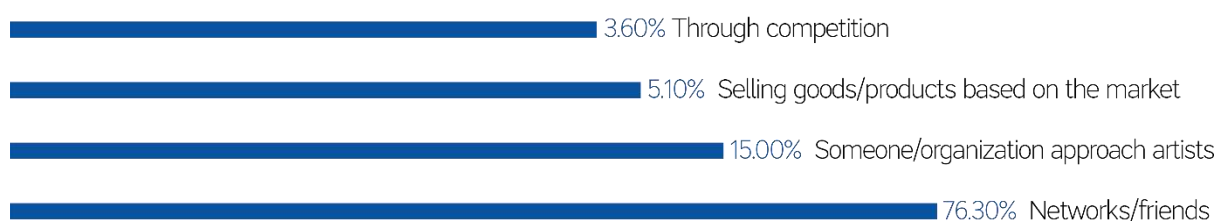


Figure 17: How artists and workers get employed

Most artists and workers said their main occupations are cultural industries, but it is not surprising to learn that 25.10% of their incomes were from non-cultural sectors. The latter could be those located in remote areas where cultural works are seasonal, and their livelihoods depend on seasonal agricultural activities. 50% of the artists and workers said their main incomes are from the cultural sector, whereas 24.40% said their income from cultural and non-cultural industries was the same. This result suggests that at least 25.10% of artists and workers did not rely wholly on the cultural work for livelihoods maintenance.

Cultural industries are not the only source of income for artists and workers to sustain their livelihoods. Artists and workers survive by working in other sectors, mainly farming.

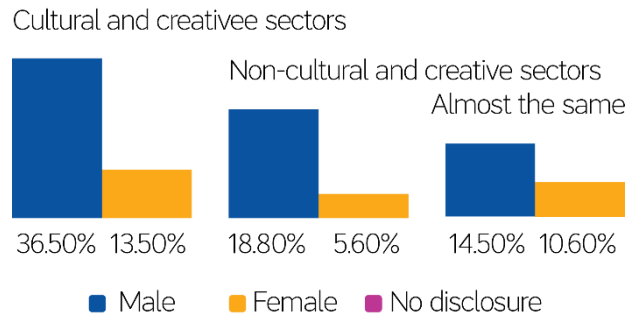


Figure 18: Primary sources of income of artists and workers

As presented above, there were more male artists and workers than females. However, women tend to charge more per day (up to \$40, about \$5 an hour)<sup>5</sup> compared to men, \$29 per day (Fig. 19). Those other gender artists earned or charged service fees of \$5 per day on average.

Women artists and workers appear charge a service fee per day more expensive than men, but their incomes are seasonal, and women tend to leave cultural industries earlier than men. Some said, “the service fee could not cover the expenses to perform the service”.

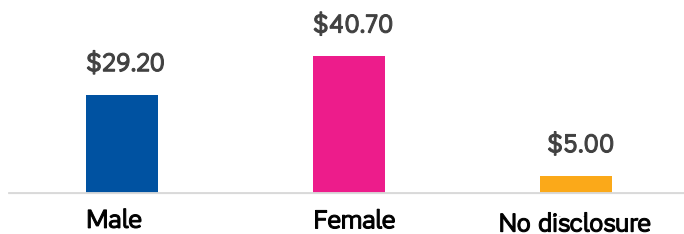


Figure 19: Service fee charged per day by gender

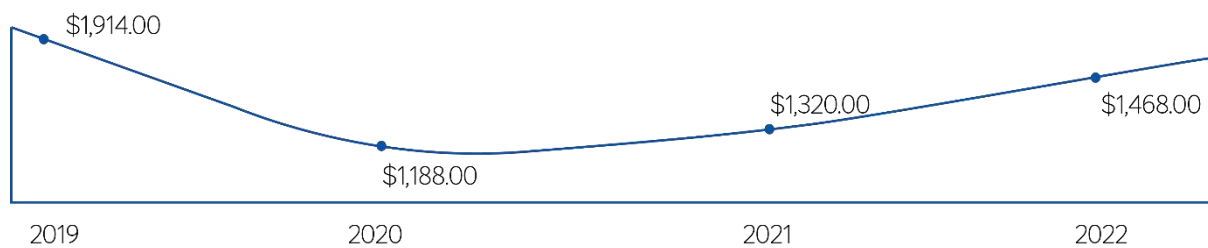
The survey indicates that the average annual income<sup>6</sup> of the cultural artists and workers plummeted significantly from 2019 (\$1,914) to 2020 (\$1,188), but it gradually increased from \$1,320 in 2021 to \$1,468 in 2022 (Fig. 20). The decline in income and slow increase are due to the economic volatility induced by the pandemic. In 2019, the income earned by artists and workers was slightly above Cambodia’s gross domestic

<sup>5</sup> Our team observed that female artists and workers earned and charged less expensive fees compared to men. However, the finding may indicate that any female artists and workers who charged more expensive (especially group leaders), can cause higher average fee charged by all women artists and workers given the small number of female artists and workers responded to the questionnaires.

<sup>6</sup> This income refers to total revenue they earned rather than net income (after expenses).

product (GDP) per capita (\$1,671)<sup>7</sup> in the same year. The average earning in 2021 was significantly lower than the average GDP in 2020 (\$1,577). While the average country's GDP recovered to \$1,625 in 2021, the artists and workers remained lower. The slow improvement can be due to the slow improvement of domestic and international tourists and the slow domestic economy recovery. Regardless of the change in their annual income, artists' and workers' income per year have proven that they are active economic persons, contributing to the economy of the country.

The trend of annual income earned by individual artists and workers declined significantly in recent years, and the ability to recover is very slow due to myriad reasons. Regardless of the change in their income, artists' and workers' annual incomes have proven their active contribution to the economy.



*Figure 20: Trend of the estimated annual income of artists and workers from 2019 to 2022*

While the income of artists and workers was comparable to the GDP per capita, there are discrepancies in income earning among artists and workers in informal cultural categories. Performing arts earned the lowest (\$1,125 in 2019, \$259 in 2020) compared with music (earned \$1,676 in 2019, \$713 in 2020) the second lowest, and visual arts, the third lowest income earner (Fig. 21). Those artists and workers in other categories (selling goods and film producers) and craft and culinary arts were ranked the highest earners in cultural industries. In 2019, those in other categories earned up to \$4,850 while craft and culinary arts generated around \$3,000 a year. In the same trend, all workers in all categories have their income declined significantly in 2020. Despite the gradual improvement from 2021 to 2022, their income has not been restored to that before the pandemic, 2019.

<sup>7</sup>World Bank Database. Accessed 15 February 2023:  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2021&locations=KH&start=2015>

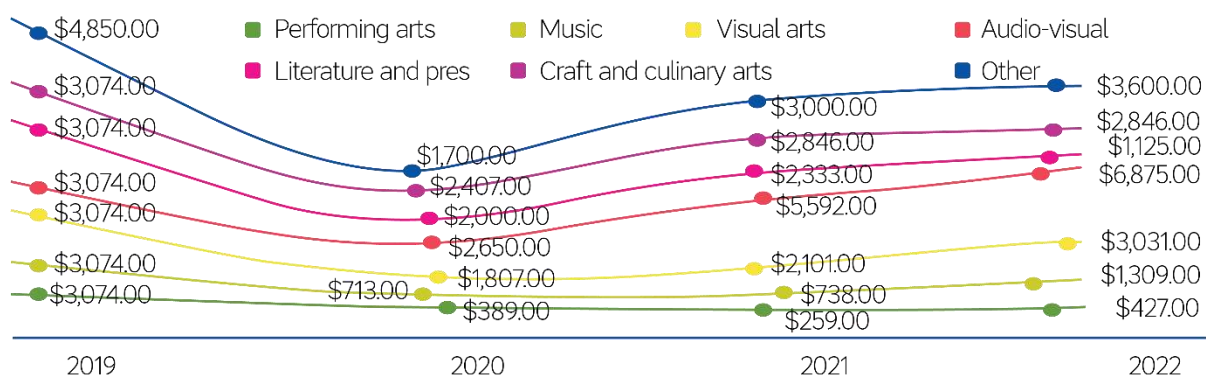


Figure 21: Trend of average annual income earned by artists and workers in each cultural industry category

Performing arts and music artists and workers earned the lowest amount of annual income compared with other categories. Their average annual income is significantly lower than Cambodia's gross domestic product per capita.

The income of the cultural industries varies depending on their employment or income generation conditions. Those who are freelance and affiliated with MoCFA earn the lowest income (\$330-\$586), while self-employed artists earn the second lowest, between \$953 to \$1,814 a year. Those in family business or entrepreneur categories tend to earn more up to \$6,586 a year. Intermittent fixed contract artists could earn up to \$10,000 per year (Fig. 22).

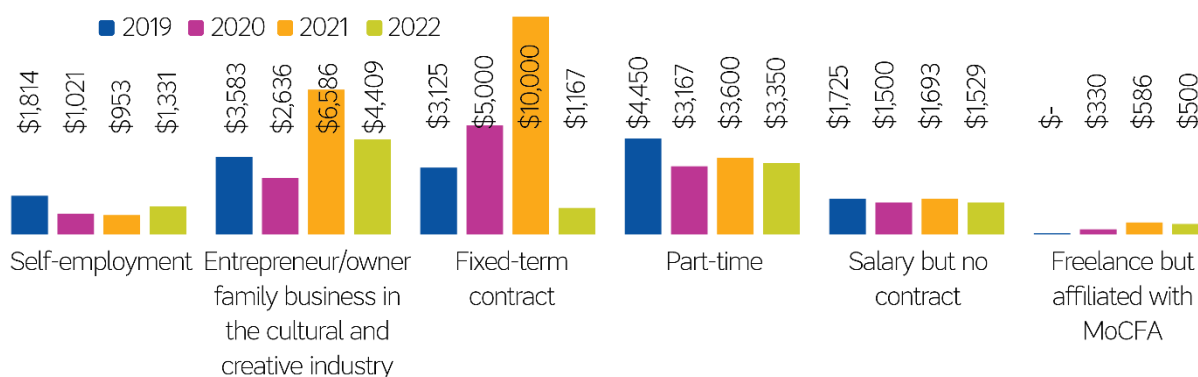


Figure 22: Income earned by categories of artist employment conditions

Regardless of their income generation activities and employment conditions, 45.8% of all artists and workers (a majority of which are males) are in debt as they borrowed money from different sources, including money lenders, relatives, microfinance institutions and banks (Fig. 23). The rest of the artists and workers said they are not in debt. As almost half of the artists and workers are in debt, 80.60% of these artists (58.70% of which are males) said they do not save money either in cash or in their bank accounts. 19.40% said they have saved in cash or their bank accounts.

Almost fifty percent of the artists and workers are in debt. At least eighty percent of artists and workers do not have savings either in cash or in their bank accounts.

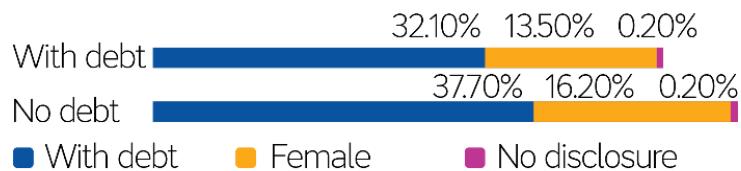


Figure 23: indebtedness status of artists and workers

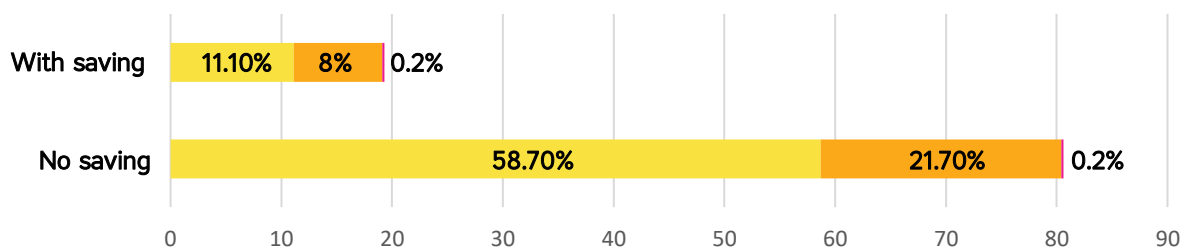


Figure 24: Arts and workers with and without saving.

## The impact of the pandemic

At least eighty percent of artists and workers were severely affected by the pandemic. Those in music and performing arts are affected severely, becoming the most vulnerable artists and workers in the informal cultural industry.

Corresponding with the downward trend of income generation from 2019 to 2022, the artists and workers were adversely affected by the pandemic (Covid-19). 84.24% of artists and workers (of which 59% are males) were severely impacted by the pandemic, whereas 10.24% and 6% of them said they were affected at moderate and minor levels, respectively (Fig. 25). Of those artists and workers affected severely by the pandemic, 47% of them were in the music category, 22% were in performing arts, and 10% were in craft and culinary arts (Fig. 26). This indicates that those who earned less (performing arts and music artists and workers) tend to be more vulnerable as their livelihoods were severely affected by the pandemic. Meanwhile, those who earned more, such as audio-visuals, craft and culinary, and visual arts, tend to be less likely to be affected by the pandemic.

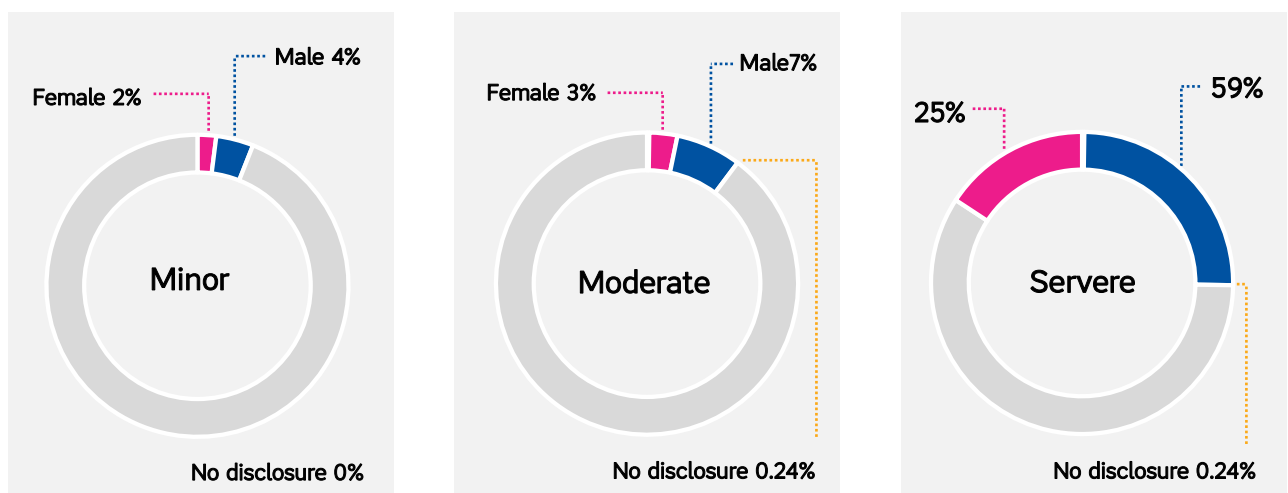


Figure 25: the degree to which the pandemic affects their livelihoods and occupation

Those who earned less annually, especially those in performing arts and music categories, tend to be affected severely by the pandemic-induced economic crisis. These artists and workers are prone and critically susceptible to adverse economic change.

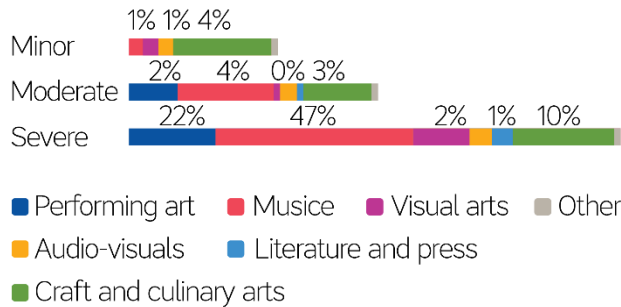


Figure 26: severity of adverse impacts of the pandemic on each category of the cultural industry

Most artists and workers said that they did not receive any support for their livelihoods (88.80%), especially during the lockdown period (Fig. 27). Around 10% said they received support during the lockdown from commune councils and the government programs including cash for poor households. Those who have ID poor tend to receive cash allowances distributed by the government. The support includes rice, food, cash and other supplies. Those who did not get support from the government reached out to friends and relatives for cash and non-cash support to survive the lockdown, during which gatherings for performance and singing were restricted.

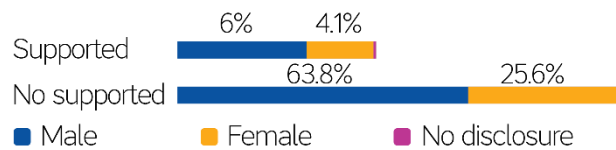


Figure 27: Support by different actors during the lockdown

## Challenges and prospects

Given the immense digital and economic change in the past few years, such changes have affected the livelihoods of cultural artists and workers in the informal cultural industries. As we asked about their future endeavors, including career pathways and developments, most of the artists and workers (72%) said they would not change their career to a non-cultural industry, even 22% of them were inclined to switch their occupations to something else (Fig. 28). The intention has been induced by their inability to maintain their livelihoods given irregular employment and payment in the informal cultural sector. The rest of the artists and workers were unsure if they should opt out for another occupation.

At least twenty-two percent of artists and workers are likely to switch their careers to other sectors for the betterment of their livelihoods.

As digital technologies play important parts in artistic works and communication, 45.64% of all artists and workers expressed that they want to learn digital technology skills to enhance or develop their career in the cultural industry (Fig. 29). Those who want to acquire skills in digital technologies tend to be artists and workers under 40 years old. While 39.12% of them said they do not want to acquire digital technology skills, 14.74% said they were unsure as to how learning skills in digital technologies would benefit their career in the future. Those who do not want to learn said they are too old or do not see how skills in digital technologies enrich their artistic and performance practices, especially those in the performing and music categories.

Almost half of the artists and workers want to acquire skills in digital media and technologies for networking and enhancing their career prospects in the cultural industry.



Figure 28: perception of artists and workers whether or not they should change their occupation



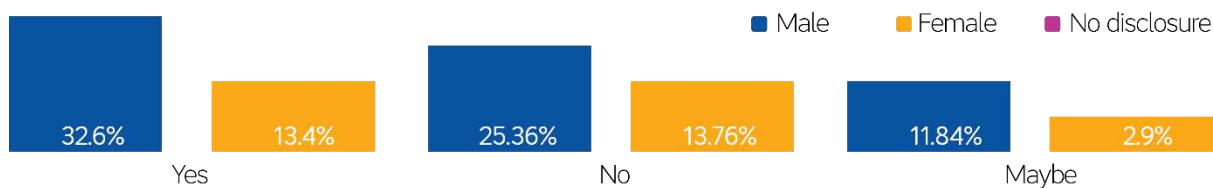


Figure 29: Willingness of artists and workers to learn digital technologies to enhance their career

Working in the cultural industry means preserving our invaluable “culture values and traditions” but such commitment has never been appreciated or recognized by relevant stakeholders either through financial or non-financial support and inspiration.

The data analysis indicates that the most vulnerable cultural artists and workers are those in the performing arts and music categories, including traditional and modern performing arts and music. These artists and workers earned the lowest as the demand for such skills was seasonal. Some have said, “we cannot survive by performing and singing, but we love and need to preserve our Cambodian culture and traditions”. The cultural value and prices are more valuable than the income they should earn. Some artists and workers said, “the fee paid by the organizers is lower than the expenses to perform at the event, but we took the job to preserve the invaluable culture”. While this is considered the scarification of the artists and workers, not many people and institutional stakeholders value their effort. No appreciation and recognition, such as respect and non-materialistic support, were awarded to these artists and workers, including those with disabilities. These artists said, “no incentives, such as financial and non-financial support, provided to them to continue working in the sector”.

Some artists and workers said they want to leave the cultural industry because “no incentives, such as financial and non-financial support, are provided to them to continue working in the sector.”

Despite the commitment to preserving Cambodian cultural values and their contribution to the economy (attracting tourism, employment, contributing to major and community festive events, contributing to household income, supporting activities etc.), all cultural artists and workers, both low- and high-income earners, have not been compensated or protected by social insurance or relevant institutional stakeholders. Those artists and workers in performing arts and music categories are poor, some of which were recognized by the government's poor household identification program (ID poor), proving with having ID poor cards. These artists and workers are not given access to state social protection schemes, using access to free public health care.

Most cultural artists and workers live across Cambodia but provide services in provinces with major economic activities, such as Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Battambang, Kampong Thom and Kampot. While most cultural artists and workers are connected to social media, with the ability to use smartphones, group leaders facilitate their employability. No central platform allows individual artists and workers to connect and access networks across the country and provinces. As indicated in the survey, most cultural artists and workers are unaware of formal or informal networks facilitating their access to news, information and resources related to cultural skills. Likewise, their requests, such as looking for places/venues to train younger generations and to rehearse their performance, are not heard or acknowledged by governmental and non-governmental institutional stakeholders.

Gender issues in the cultural industry become critical based on the research team's interactions with artists and workers. This study found that most artists and workers are males, since married women are no longer allowed (by husbands or relatives) to pursue their careers. Some male artists claimed that "it is the end of their performance and singing careers when they are married, pregnant and in child-rearing duties".

"it is the end of their performance and singing careers when they are married, pregnant and in child-rearing duties".

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

This study sought to understand the informal cultural resources of artists and workers, mapping their demographic background, education and skills, livelihood characteristics, and challenges and career pathways. The survey of 414 artists and workers revealed that, while it is generally perceived that women tend to play a significant role in cultural preservation in the country, the majority of artists and workers in the cultural industry are males. This could be due, on the one hand, women tend to enter the informal cultural industry at early ages and leave the industry earlier, especially when they get married and assume child-rearing responsibilities, and due to the limited skills in the industry acquired by the women artists and workers, on the other.

Informal cultural artists and workers possessed many cultural skills but were primarily trained in music and performance arts, the dominant categories in the cultural industry in the country. While artists and workers possessed different levels of education, those of the music and performance arts obtained basic primary and secondary education levels, while other cultural industries, such as audio-visual, craft and culinary and visual arts, tend to obtain higher education. Music and performance artists and workers acquired skills in the sector from informal training, such as by their parents, relatives and friends in the communities, rather than attending formal training.

Almost all artists and workers are not aware of any membership organizations to which they should be affiliated. Their contact and network tend to be relatively informal, contacting through group/community leaders in each community, while the connection across different categories of cultural industries across the country was limited even though almost all artists and workers used or owned smartphones with access to the internet. This limitation has restricted the cultural artists and workers from exploring and exposing to the wider cultural industry in the country and Southeast Asia, limiting their opportunities to develop and grow in their careers.

Income generation activities of informal cultural artists and workers are diverse but are mainly classified as “freelance” or “self-employment”. A small number of them are owners of family and small enterprises. Craft and culinary, audio-visuals and visual arts tend to generate more income, making them less vulnerable to economic change, as testified by the pandemic. Those in self-employment, most of which are music and performance arts, tend to generate lower income compared to other categories, such as visual arts, audio-visual, craft and culinary. Coupled with the lowest level of income due to the seasonal nature of the service they provided and low level of education,

music and performance arts and workers tend to be more vulnerable to economic change, as attested by the pandemic and slow economic growth. The pandemic adversely affected music and performance artists and workers severely compared to visual arts, audio-visual, and craft and culinary practices. Regardless of the change in annual income due to economic change and the pandemic, artists and workers of informal cultural industries are active economic populations, contributing significantly to the economy as proven by their annual income, some of which were above the gross domestic product per capita. Their activities have indirectly contributed and supported to the economy.

Most music and performance artists and workers argued that the fee generated from their services was not sufficient, and as such, they must depend on other occupations to maintain their livelihoods. However, these artists and workers are still working in the sector, given their commitment to preserving the country's cultural values and traditions that cannot be compensated by the fee provided by their clients. They argued that their commitment has never been recognized or valued financially and non-financially by the relevant stakeholders. A majority of artists and workers said they have not benefited from social protection schemes, including being recognized by the ID poor program and having equity cards; the majority of artists and workers said they do not have access to such support from the state. During the lockdown, due to the spread of Covid-19, they did not receive any support.

In spite of the financial and non-financial challenges they are encountered, many artists and workers said they would not give up their careers and interest in the sectors, while a minority consider changing their careers to other industries. Around fifty percent of the artists and workers would like to acquire skills in digital technologies to enhance their careers and services, while the rest, especially older artists and workers, did not see the benefit of having the skills.

Given the findings, this study would like to convey and recommend the following points to relevant stakeholders:

- The survey found that artists and workers have contributed to the Cambodian economy, as attested by their ability to generate sustained income per capita. However, these artists and workers have not been supported by any social protection schemes, such as equity cards and ID poor cards, even though they have striven to maintain and preserve Cambodia's invaluable culture and traditions. There should be a social protection or insurance scheme for these artists and workers, especially those working in music and performing arts who travel very often to perform elsewhere far from their community.

- Maintaining Cambodia's invaluable culture requires financial and non-financial incentives to support artists and workers to preserve cultures and pass their experience and relevant skills in cultural industries to the next generations in their communities, districts and provinces. Governmental and non-governmental institutional stakeholders should provide incentives, such as grants and training programs, to support groups of artists, workers, and those who want to enter the cultural industry careers.
- Artists and workers lack access to information and opportunities as they live and work in different locations without proper representation. While most artists and workers are connected and facilitated by their group leaders in each village, commune and district, the leaders per se have very limited connection with governmental and non-governmental organizations to support their activities.
- There is a need to create a digital platform that allows all artists and workers to communicate and connect to share information and resources and explore opportunities related to cultural and creative industrial activities. Regular news should be shared on the platform that artists and workers from all walks of life, skills and areas can access. The platform will also allow artists and workers to express their opinions and share information that are essential for their careers and livelihoods.
- To all stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) and the provincial department of culture and fine arts, there is a need to empower and value women's participation in cultural and creative industries in order to sustain and maintain women's roles in the informal cultural and creative economy. This can also be done through emotional support or motivation from MoCFA and or the communities.
- Digital technologies have influenced every aspect of the Cambodian economy and culture. Artists and workers have access to the internet and social media, but most artists and workers have limited capacity to use technologies to benefit their careers. At least 45% of the artists were interested in learning digital media and technologies to enrich their careers.

## References

---

Lubart, T. I. (2001). Models of the creative process: Past, present and future. *Creativity research journal*, 13(3-4), 295-308; Botella, M., Zenasni, F., & Lubart, T. (2018). What are the stages of the creative process? What visual art students are saying. *Frontiers in psychology*, 2266.

Skovronska, I (2021). Creative industries and the informal sector: Ukrain's experience. UNCTAD. Accessed 02 Feb 2022:  
[https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/DITC2020\\_Contribution\\_UNCTAD%20Illicit%20Trade%20Forum\\_Skavronska\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/DITC2020_Contribution_UNCTAD%20Illicit%20Trade%20Forum_Skavronska_en.pdf)

Smith, J.D (1985): Market motives in the informal economy, in: Gaertner, W. and Wenig, A. (eds.): *The economics of the informal economy*, Heidelberg: Springer Publishing Company, pp. 161-177.

UNESCO (2001). *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2021). *Cultural and creative industries in the face of COVID-19: an economic impact outlook*. UNESCO. Accessed 02 Feb 2022:  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377863>

UNESCO & World Bank. (2021). *Cities, Culture, Creativity: Leveraging Culture and Creativity for Sustainable Urban Development and Inclusive Growth*. UNESCO and World Bank: Washington DC

With the support of



**unesco**

Diversity of  
Cultural Expressions



For more information, please visit:  
[www.cicadakh.org](http://www.cicadakh.org)

