

The changing role of authors' societies in an ever-changing world

A story of 200 years and counting

“Change is the only constant in life” — Heraclitus

The house of creators

GESAC, through its 32 author society members (collective management organisations), represents more than 1 million creators from all sectors, be it music, audiovisual or visual arts, from across the EU and EEA. As such GESAC is the largest organisation representing authors and their societies at EU level.

Authors' societies are founded and run by their members, the creators, which makes them well and truly the house of creators. But societies are also essential players in the creative industry and perform a role that is firmly in the public interest: they facilitate access to the broadest possible repertoires of creative works, streamline rights clearance, and ensure appropriate remuneration for creators.

Authors' societies have constantly evolved and improved in their 200 hundred years of existence, thanks to some guiding principles that guaranteed their continued relevance both for creators and the users of creative works.

When it comes to the implementation of European copyright/authors' right policy, authors' societies prove to be the best option for restoring public confidence in creators' rights in a rapidly changing digital economy.

Authors' societies have already played a safety net role for creators during the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, and they are ready to play a key role in Europe's recovery from the current economic crisis, and in rebuilding a vibrant creative market for all.

FIND OUT MORE: <https://authorsocieties.eu/>





The guiding principles of collective management

What keeps authors’ societies relevant?

1. Empowering individual authors through collective negotiation

Creators and other rightsholders entrust authors’ societies to grant licences to users on their behalf. Users are the services and platforms who use or spread the work, usually on a commercial basis.

In turn, societies include the rightsholders in the collective effort to negotiate the best conditions for the use of their works. By organising as collective management entities (authors’ societies), creators can negotiate better conditions than they ever could individually, and give consumers the widest possible access to creative content.

By uniting under a single collective voice, creators also ensure that their rights are protected, and their opinions heard in policy discussions.

2. Streamlining rights clearance and providing legal certainty for users

We all encounter different kinds of users in our daily life: online music services or bars and restaurants, VoD services or TV and radio, to name but a few. They make use of music, visual arts or other types of creative works as either the main purpose of their business or to enrich their services.

Educational institutions, cultural heritage organisations, as well as many other general interest institutions also use creative works as part of their public service. They need the legal certainty and easy rights clearance for the day-to-day use of creative works, in compliance with authors’ rights and as responsible players. Without collective management, the only alternatives for most would be either to not use any creative works or use them illegally, because clearing all rights individually is impossible. Neither option is desirable.



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3. Providing broadest access to creative works for everyone, everywhere

Easy rights clearance with fair remuneration for creators also enables all services and users to offer their consumers, and the public at large, access to any creative works wherever and whenever they want. Public demand for broader access to culture and creative works is growing exponentially and it is collective management organisations’ duty to facilitate this by providing a culturally diverse repertoire, allowing even the smallest and niche repertoires to reach the public, while also ensuring a fair return for all creators regardless of their fame or popularity.

4. Ensuring independence of creators

Authors’ societies are not-for-profit organisations and as such enable creators to manage their rights without being coerced by big media conglomerates or giant tech platforms guided by commercial interests. By entrusting part of their rights to their societies, authors are empowered to make the best professional decision about who their partners are in the sector, knowing that the money collected by societies is paid back to rightsholders in direct proportion to the use made of their work.

5. Nurturing talent and cultural diversity through dedicated funds

Authors’ societies promote cultural diversity and the development of new generations of creators through the financing of cultural activities. In some cases, societies also provide pensions and financial help for creators facing difficulties.

32
Societies

27
Countries

1 million+
creators

€5.7 billion
royalties collected in 2019

€234 million
invested in social & cultural activities in 2019

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Collective management

The best option for a changing legal and economic environment

A European model governed by EU rules

For a long time, EU legislation on authors' right/copyright have considered collective management a key model for effective and efficient implementation of authors' right/copyright. This is one of the reasons why more than 60% of global CMO revenues are generated in Europe.

A milestone in EU legislation, the 2014 CRM Directive regulates the sector, harmonising at the highest level the standards on transparency, governance and accountability of collective management organisations. This Directive also fixes rules for cross-border management of musical rights in the online environment. The importance of collective management is recognised as a trusted and adapted model for the future.

“Collective management organisations play, and should continue to play, an important role as promoters of diversity of cultural expression, both by enabling the smallest and less popular repertoires to access the market and by providing social, cultural and educational services for the benefit of their rightholders and the public.” — CRM Directive 2014

The growing role of authors' societies in recent copyright/authors' right framework

Authors societies are dedicated to addressing the needs of today's changing business models and evolving ways of accessing cultural and creative works. Therefore, they were at the forefront of the recent reforms to legal framework. They are indispensable in many aspects and their growing role is reflected in the recently adopted EU legislations, namely the 2019 Copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive (CDSM) and the Broadcasting Directive.

The main improvements made to the legal framework within this reform either directly require collective management or promote it as one of the best ways of implementation, as it guarantees the necessary balance in public access to culture, freedom to conduct business and fair remuneration of creators.

A safety net in times of crisis

A sustainable economic model for the future

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an unprecedented economic toll on Europe's cultural life and the well-being of its creative community. European authors' societies have stepped in to support their creators and users during this difficult period, and in the process have found innovative ways to promote public access to culture.

Authors' societies as first aid during the hardest period of pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis has been devastating for the whole cultural sector. From venues to rightsholders and right down to the individual creators themselves, no one has been left untouched by this crisis.

Authors' societies have assumed as much of the burden as possible on behalf of their creators. They were quick to mobilise with supportive measures; hundreds of millions of euros were made available and distributed to creators through support grants or advance royalty payments, dedicated campaigns to promote creative works and encourage the streaming of cancelled events, the development of live-streaming licensing schemes to allow creators to continue performing and interacting with fans.

Societies adapted working practices to help business partners stay afloat during the crisis, while also investing in hackathons and other innovative projects to develop ways to future-proof the industry.

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Collective management has proven itself as a resilient and indispensable model for the sector in general and for creators in particular