



Brussels, 29.1.2021  
SWD(2021) 16 final

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**

*of the*

**Commission Recommendation of 27 October 2011 on the  
digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation**

{SWD(2021) 15 final}

## *Background to the evaluation*

The Commission Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2011/711/EU) is the Commission's main policy tool for digital cultural heritage. Its aim is to optimise the use of information and communication technologies to unlock the full economic and cultural potential of Europe's cultural heritage.

Some of the challenges facing the cultural heritage sector when the Recommendation was adopted are still present today, but additional challenges have arisen since. In a context driven by an urgent need to protect and preserve European cultural heritage at risk, by major technological advances and by an evolving cultural heritage sector, the Commission launched an evaluation of the Recommendation. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess whether the Recommendation had delivered as expected and whether it still meets the current needs, expectations and challenges of the cultural heritage sector, of its users and of the public in general. In particular, the Commission has assessed the Recommendation's implementation in terms of its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and EU added value.

As part of the evaluation, the Commission consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including public authorities of the Member States, cultural heritage institutions, the Europeana ecosystem, research organisations and academia.

## *State of play of implementation*

The Recommendation's state of implementation varies across the Member States.

Although a majority of Member States have centralised national digitisation strategies for cultural heritage at ministry level, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach. There are various ways in which Member States pool resources and competences together to achieve economies of scale for digitisation. This can be done by establishing digitisation and competence centres, consolidating the digitisation process, organising training and sharing best practices, or by sharing services or facilities such as repositories. Most Member States promote preserving the public domain status of cultural heritage after digitisation through various initiatives, despite uncertainty and limited knowledge of the topic in the sector. With regard to Europeana, the quantitative targets have been achieved (and largely exceeded). On digital preservation, overall, a majority of Member States report a variety of combinations of action plans, strategies and initiatives for the long-term preservation of digital cultural heritage material.

## *Main findings of the evaluation*

### *a) Effectiveness*

The Recommendation has been largely effective, but it needs to be revised to make it even more effective. This is supported by the feedback from the consultation activities.

More particularly, the Recommendation led to a general improvement in digitisation, online access and digital preservation, resulting for instance in the adoption of national strategies and/or funding programmes for digitisation and domain-specific initiatives; a greater number

of public-private partnerships; more visibility and exchanges among the cultural and heritage institutions .

However, there are several issues (e.g. lack of adoption of technical common standards and approaches, insufficient digital literacy and skills, insufficient funding) that need to be addressed to make it more effective.

#### *b) Efficiency*

Respondents to the online public consultation gave positive feedback on the Recommendation's efficiency, with most of them considering that the benefits are significant and justify the costs.

The Recommendation provided an opportunity for more discussions, exchanges and collaborations for the cultural heritage sector, resulting in more visibility and better prioritisation and thus triggering more funding.

Society as a whole has benefitted: cultural heritage institutions have benefitted because they have been able to attract and leverage funding, collaborative networks and wider resources and expand their audience; governments have benefitted from growth in cooperation and information sharing; creative sectors, teachers, students and the public in general have benefitted from a wider access to digitised cultural heritage resources.

#### *c) Relevance*

The consultation activities revealed a general acknowledgement of the Recommendation's relevance in meeting the needs identified at the time of its adoption.

Socio-economic changes, significant technological advancements and legislative changes create a different context for cultural heritage institutions, which must now be taken into account in policy responses. Therefore, the Recommendation needs to better reflect the huge potential of advanced digital technologies (e.g. 3D digitisation) or emerging technologies (e.g. virtual reality or augmented reality). Moreover, it is important to harness the power of data for the benefit of the cultural heritage sector (e.g. through common data spaces). The need for advanced digital literacy and skills have become key to cultural heritage institutions, in a context where the COVID-19 pandemic has made more compelling the importance of finding new ways of working and connecting to audiences. Intangible and born-digital cultural heritage will also need to be taken into account in any future revision of the Recommendation.

#### *d) Coherence*

Overall, the Recommendation is consistent with several other policy interventions in different fields, such as culture/cultural heritage or copyright. In particular, the Recommendation is consistent with the New European Agenda for Culture, the Council Work Plan for Culture covering the period 2019-2022, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, the Digital Agenda for Europe and its successor the Digital Single Market strategy, the Directive on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market, and the Directive on open data

and the reuse of public sector information. However, the Recommendation would need to be aligned with the priorities of the new digital strategy ‘Shaping Europe’s Digital Future’ to create a Europe fit for the digital age and with ‘A European strategy for data’.

*e) EU added value*

The Recommendation’s added value consisted in increasing digitisation and online access to cultural heritage resources, as acknowledged in the consultation activities.

It significantly helped to raise awareness within and beyond the sector and promote internal and cross-border forms of collaboration as well as exchanges of experience, knowledge and useful tools between the Member States. The Recommendation provided a forum for discussion and cooperation, leading to increased visibility and additional funding opportunities for cultural heritage institutions.

*Overall conclusions*

The evaluation process has pointed to a considerable number of aspects for the future course of action. This is because the cultural heritage landscape has changed significantly over the past years, with new needs, but above all new opportunities arising.

The COVID-19 crisis has underlined once more the need and importance of improving online access to the use/reuse of digitised cultural material for the cultural heritage institutions.

A persistent challenge for the cultural heritage sector before the crisis, funding has become even more stringent in the current context for many cultural heritage institutions and even more vital to their survival.

The cultural heritage institutions need to seize the opportunities offered by advanced and emerging digital technologies through a more widespread adoption of 3D, augmented reality/virtual reality, artificial intelligence, etc. This would also improve significantly the quality of the digitised cultural heritage resources. With higher quality data, high-value data sets could be created and shared in the cultural heritage sector, thus helping to develop a functioning data space.

Broadening the scope of the Recommendation to cover key cultural heritage that has been marginally addressed or not addressed at all (e.g. immovable, born-digital and intangible) would create a more complete framework of action for the cultural heritage institutions.

Advanced digital literacy and skills have become paramount for cultural heritage institutions to be able to engage in advanced digitisation and make their collections available online in high quality.

Europeana must play a more prominent role in enabling cultural heritage institutions to seize the opportunities provided by digital transformation in the cultural heritage sector.

European efforts to further digitise and broaden online access of cultural heritage have been recognised at international level. Further partnerships in the field would help in finding shared

responses to common challenges and exchanging best practices as well as showcasing and promoting European culture, European values and European success stories.

The extent to which Member States alone will address such key issues is not certain, particularly in light of the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and thus of declining budgets. However, the evaluation analysis points to a situation where an EU intervention supporting the efforts of the Member States has had a strong impact.