

REPORT

Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the activities of museums all over the world, threatening their financial survival and the livelihood of thousands of museum professionals. [The International Council of Museums](#) responded to the emergency by quickly adapting its work to better respond to the difficulties of its network. With the support of our partner organisations and the expertise of our International Committees, we drew up recommendations on how to deal with forced closures and advocated on behalf of museums, calling on policy and decision-makers to urgently allocate relief funds to assist museums and their professionals.

In order to gather information about how the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak is affecting and will effect the cultural sector in the short and long term, ICOM launched a global survey to analyse the impact of lockdowns. The survey covered 5 themes: the current situation for museums and staff, expected economic impact, digital resources and communication, museum security and conservation of collections, freelance museum professionals.

This report analyses almost 1,600 responses from museums and museum professionals in 107 countries, across five continents, which were collected between 7 April and 7 May 2020.

An important aspect that came to light was the disparity of the responses received from different world regions (as defined by ICOM's regional subdivisions), which will be analysed in more detail in the "Participant Profile" section. For this reason, the global data is accompanied by data broken down by region, where possible.

We do not claim that this data represents all museums but the responses received do highlight a widespread climate of uncertainty about the future of cultural institutions, and the need for governments to respond with equal strength to ensure the future of museums and the invaluable cultural heritage they hold - as museums are an essential part of the identity of peoples and nations, a vital element for the communities they serve and pivotal drivers of local development.

Summary of findings

In April 2020, **almost all museums around the world were closed** because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to 94,7% of respondents.

During the lockdown, **many museums enhanced their digital activities**. Although almost half of the respondents replied that their museum already had a presence on social media or shared its collections online before the lockdowns, the digital communication activities analysed by the survey increased in at least 15% of the museums. In particular, **social media activities increased for more than half of the museums surveyed**.

Most museum professionals worked from home: in 84% of museums, the large majority of the staff is working remotely during the lockdowns.

The employment situation for museum employees seems comparatively stable. Still, in 6% of cases temporary contracts were either not renewed or have been terminated.

However, **the situation for freelance museum professionals is alarming**: 16,1% of the respondents said they have been temporarily laid off, and 22,6% have not had their contracts renewed. **The freelance sector is very fragile**: 56,4% of the respondents stated that they will have to suspend the payment of their own salary as a result of the crisis, and 39,4% said their firms will have to reduce the number of staff.

Similarly, **almost all museums around the world have had to reduce their activities** as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic: **nearly one third will downsize, and more than one in ten may be forced to close permanently**. In relation to museum programmes, 82,6% of the respondents anticipate a decrease and 29,8% expect downsizing in the relevant departments. Finally, 12,8% of participants fear that their museum might close.

The **closures will particularly affect the regions where museums are recent and few**, and where structures are still fragile: **in African, Asian and the Arab countries** 24%, 27% and 39% respectively, fear that museums may close, compared to only 12%, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10% in North America and 8% in Europe.

In general, the **security and conservation of heritage in museums continued throughout the lockdown**: about 80% of the respondents said that security and conservation measures were maintained or increased to cope with the lack of staff members on-site. However, **in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean these measures were considered to be insufficient** by almost 20% of the respondents.

1. The situation for museums and their staff

Worldwide, **94,7% of participants said that museums in their country were closed between 7 April and 7 May 2020.** The vast majority of respondents stated that their institution shut its doors to the public around mid-March. Some differences emerge when comparing the situation in different regions of the world, but still **at least 85,3%** of museums in every region have been closed due to COVID-19.

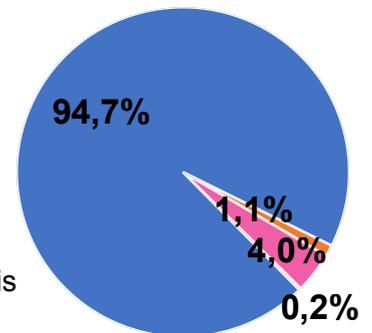
At the time the survey was conducted, a higher percentage of museums in Asian, African and Arab countries were fully open or were open on a voluntary basis as they were at different stages in the health crisis. In North America, and in particular in the United States, the figure for “open/closed on a voluntary basis” can be explained by the different measures implemented by each Federal State.

Status of museums in your Country

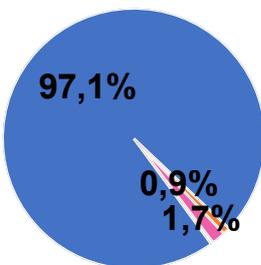
World

Closed	94,7 %
Open	1,1 %
Open/closed on a voluntary basis	4,0 %
Other	0,2 %

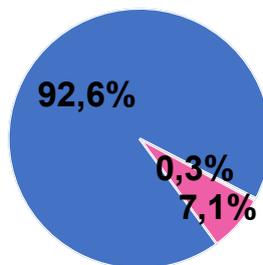
- Closed
- Open
- O/C on a voluntary basis
- Other



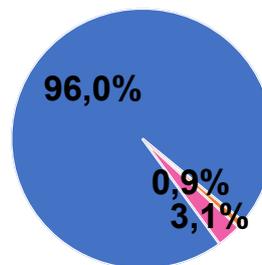
Europe



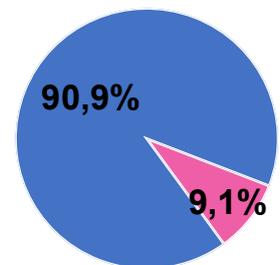
North America



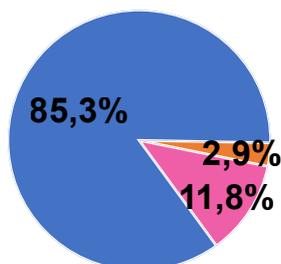
Latin America Caribbean



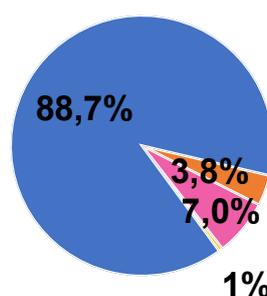
Arab Countries



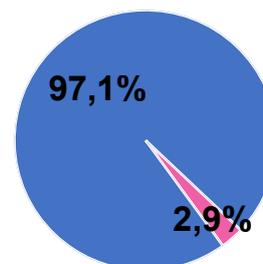
Africa



Asia



Pacific

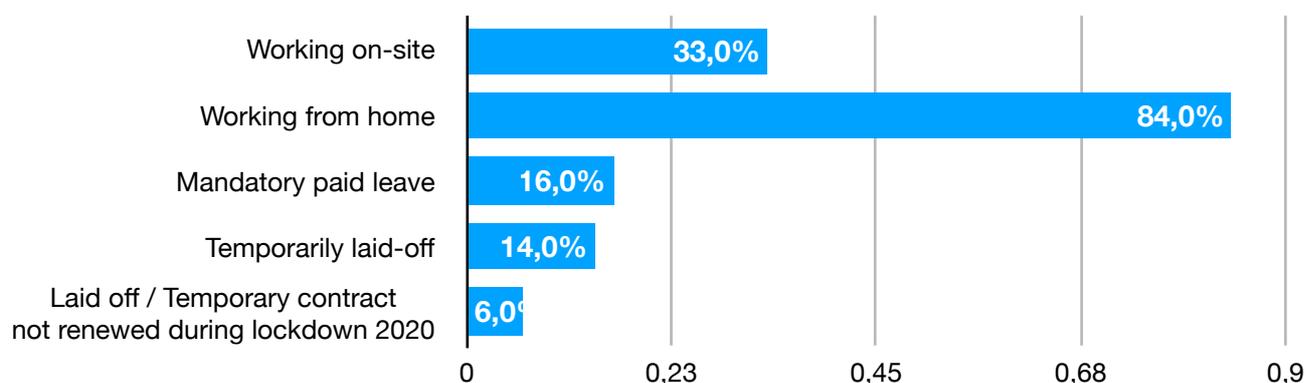


The situation for museum staff

To ensure their safety and to comply with the containment measures put in place by governments, the vast majority of museum staff have had to leave their workplace. Despite regional variations, the global data highlights the significant difficulties that museum professionals are experiencing worldwide, not only in ensuring that their institutions' essential activities continue to take place, but also in economic, social and psychological terms.

A total **81,5% of participants stated that less than 25% of staff currently work on-site at the museum.** To get a sense of the short-term economic impact of the crisis, 14% of respondents said that at least some of their museums' employees have been furloughed, and 6% have been either laid-off or their temporary contracts not renewed since the lockdown.

What is the current situation of the staff?

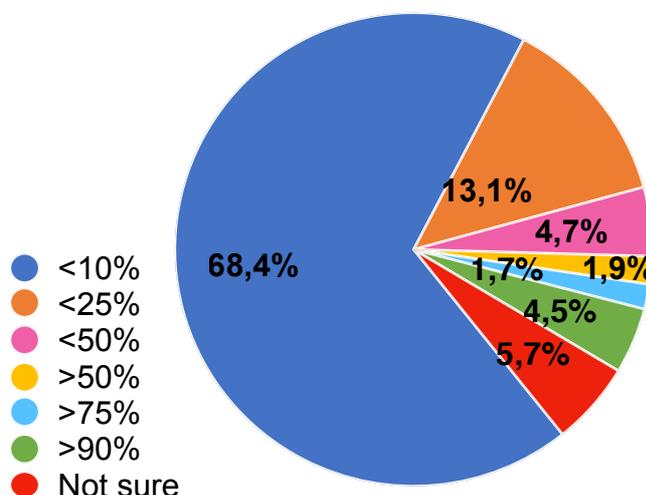


NB. this was a multiple answer question, percentages are higher than 100% and illustrate how many of the total number of respondents selected at least that answer

What percentage of the staff is still working on-site (including security and conservators)?

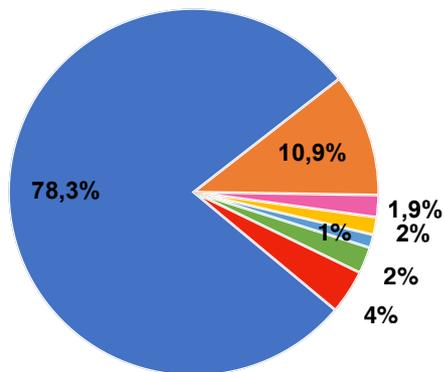
World

<10%	68,4%
<25%	13,1%
<50%	4,7%
>50%	1,9%
>75%	1,7%
>90%	4,5%
Not sure	5,7%

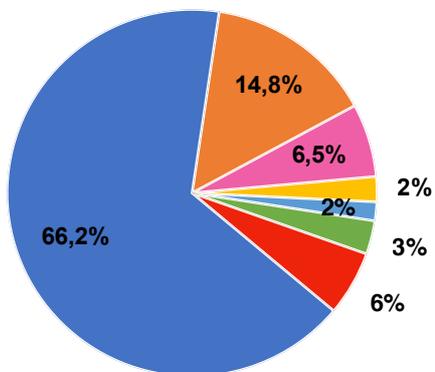


● <10%
 ● <25%
 ● <50%
 ● >50%
 ● >75%
 ● >90%
 ● Not sure

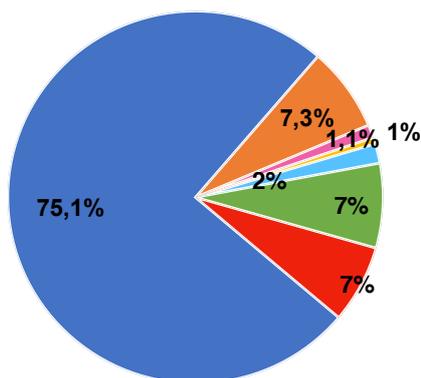
North America



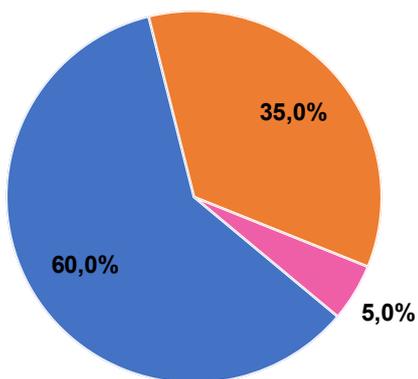
Europe



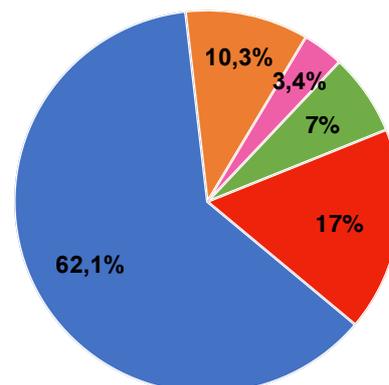
Latin America Caribbean



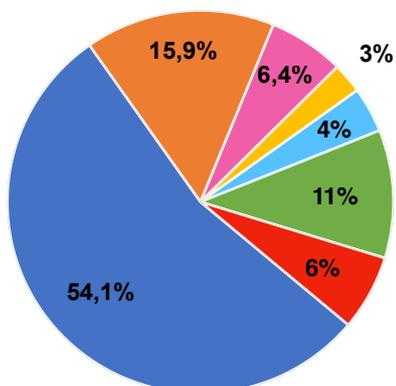
Arab Countries



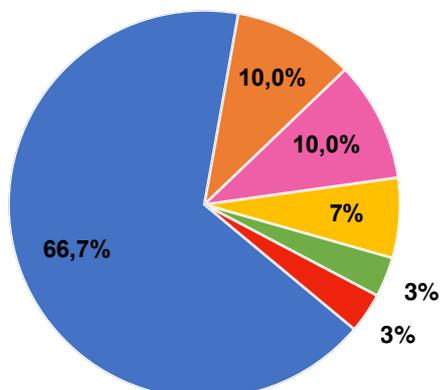
Africa



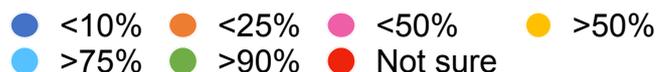
Asia



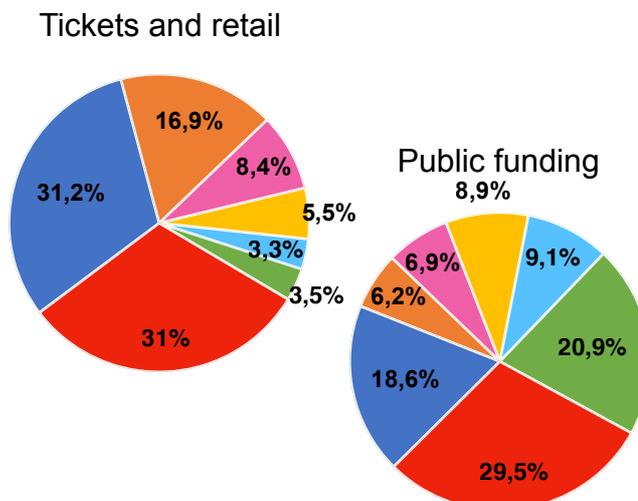
Pacific



2. Expected economic impact



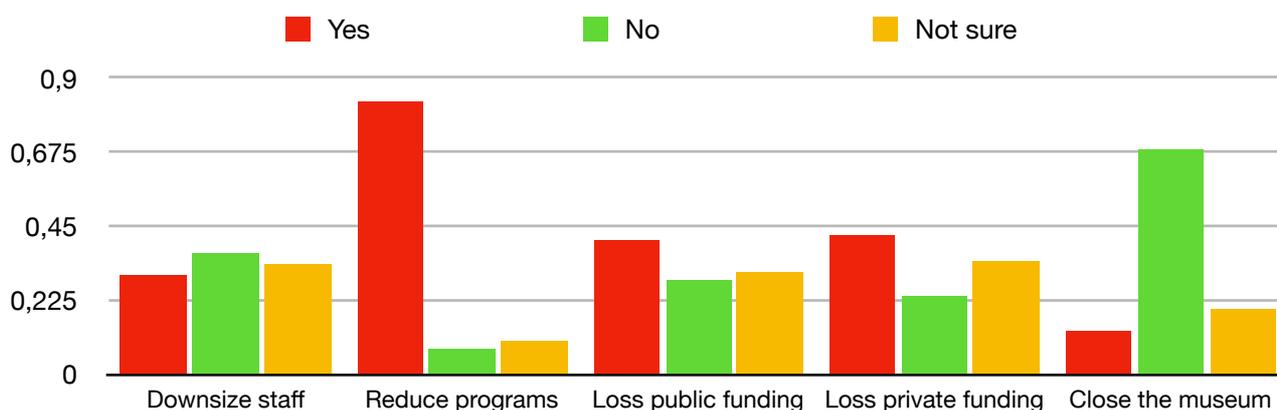
What percentage of your annual budget comes from:	tickets and retail	Public funding
<10%	31,2 %	18,6%
<25%	16,9 %	6,2 %
<50%	8,4 %	6,9 %
>50%	5,5 %	8,9 %
>75%	3,3 %	9,1 %
>90%	3,5 %	20,9 %
Not sure	31,2 %	29,5 %

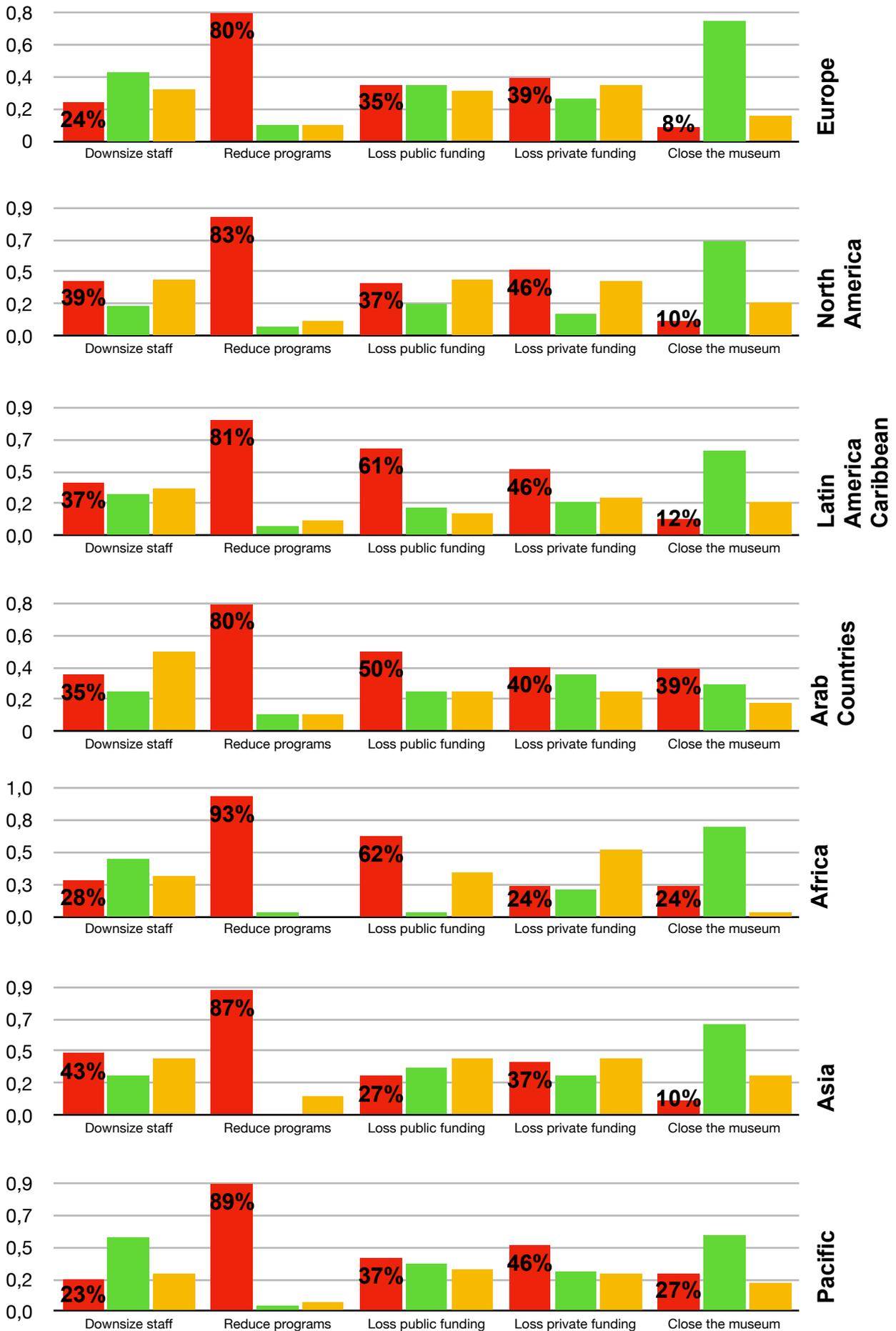


The economic impact of the crisis and closure of museums will be important in the short, medium and long term alike, regardless of their main sources of funding. Although we cannot ignore the differences in terms of funding structures of cultural institutions and world regions, participants' responses highlight a widespread climate of great concern and uncertainty, with **12.8% of participants saying that their institution may close permanently**, more than 80% of programmes reduced and almost a third of museums forced to reduce their staff.

Foreseen Economic impact

	Downsize staff	Reduce programs	Loss public funding	Loss private funding	Close the museum
Yes	29,8 %	82,6 %	40,4 %	42,5 %	12,8 %
No	36,8 %	7,6 %	28,8 %	23,6 %	67,8 %
Not sure	33,4 %	9,8 %	30,8 %	33,8 %	19,2 %





The situation is perceived differently by participants, depending on the region of the world they are in, but overall the results illustrate that the situation is critical, with severe economic impacts on all aspects of the activities of cultural institutions.

According to respondents, **there will be a reduction in projects and programmes in at least 80% of museums**, a number that rises to 93% and 87% in the regions of Africa and the Pacific respectively.

The percentage of museums that will have to downsize their staff is the highest in North America and the Pacific, but **still appears to be an expected impact for at least 23% of museums in all world regions**.

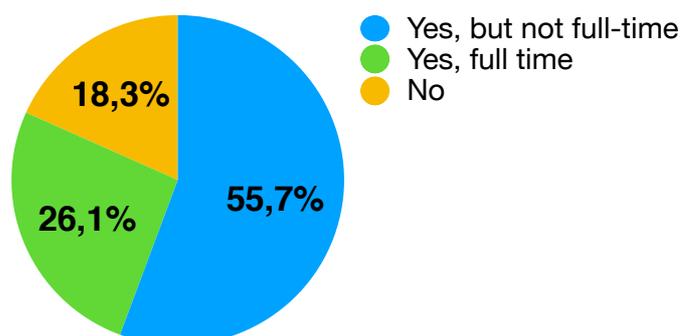
The anticipated reduction or loss of public and/or private funding, depending on museum funding structures, varies considerably but will potentially impact cultural institutions worldwide. Whether their revenues come from public funding, private donors or ticketing, the resources of all museums are likely to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Digital activities and Communication

The forced temporary closure of museums during lockdowns suddenly brought digital communication with the public to the fore. We witnessed a surge in virtual tours, social media posts, remote interactions with the public, and much more. While this demonstrates the reactivity and creativity that characterise the cultural sector, and its ability to adapt to the crisis, it also highlights some structural weaknesses that have for a long time affected cultural institutions, in terms of resources and staff dedicated to digital activities and communication, and the level of maturity of the content produced.

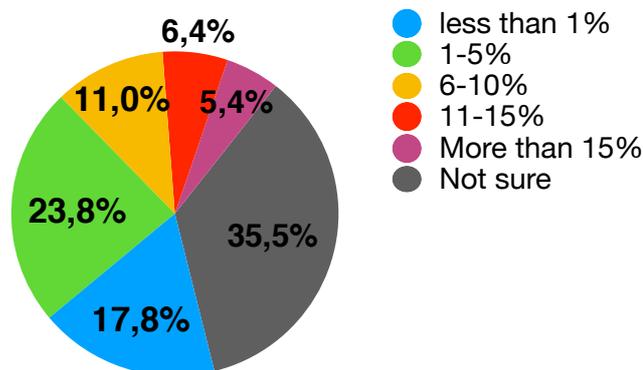
Do you have dedicated staff for digital activities?

Yes, but it's not their main domain of activite/they don't work on it full-time	55,7%
Yes, and they work on it full time	26,1%
No	18,3%



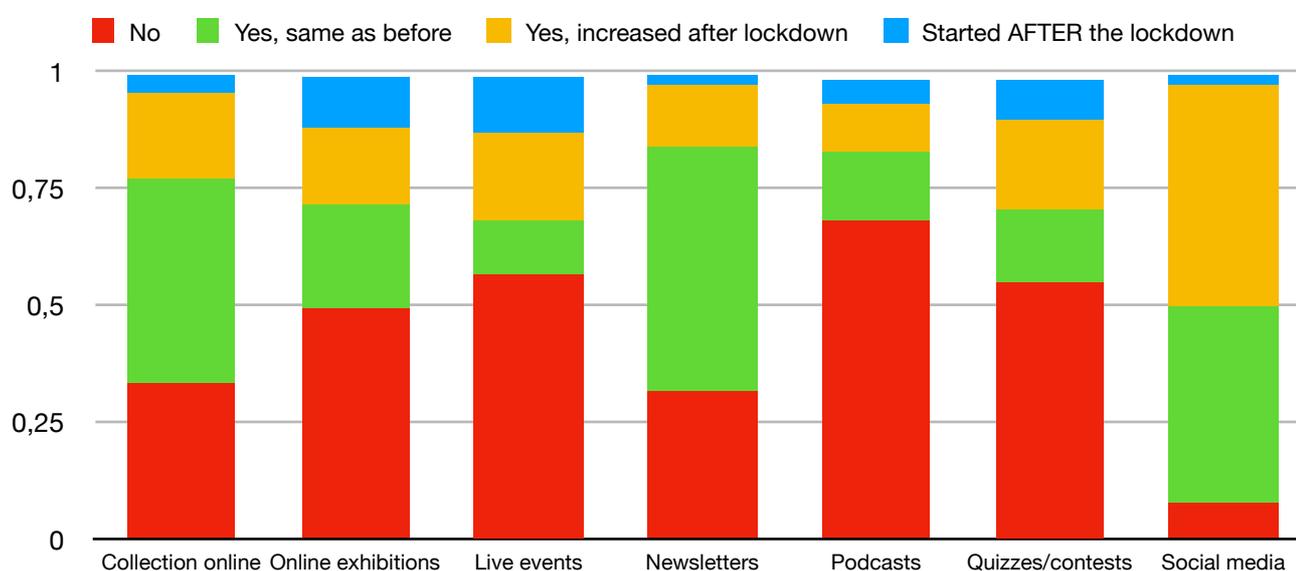
What percentage of your overall budget is dedicated to communication and digital activities?

less than 1%	17,8%
1-5%	23,8%
6-10%	11,0%
11-15%	6,4%
More than 15%	5,4%
Not sure	35,5%



Changes in digital services

	Collection online	Online ex- hibitions	Live events	Newsletters	Podcasts	Quizzes contests	Social media
No	33,31%	49,46%	56,47%	31,66%	68,26%	55,15%	7,67%
Yes, same as before	43,86%	22,18%	11,54%	52,18%	14,67%	15,33%	42,21%
Yes, increased after lockdown	17,97%	16,16%	18,80%	13,36%	10,39%	19,21%	47,49%
Started AFTER the lockdown	4,04%	10,88%	12,28%	1,90%	5,11%	8,57%	1,98%



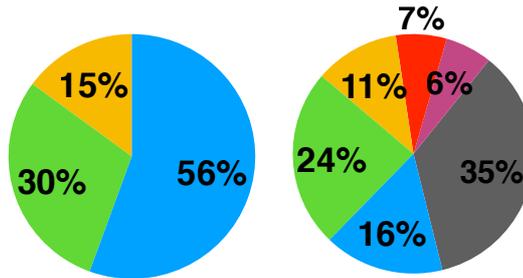
The restrictive measures led museums to develop their digital activities **All digital activities mentioned increased or began after the lockdowns, for at least 15% of participants.** In particular, activity on social networks increased or started for almost 50% of the total number of respondents.

Although certain activities are still difficult to implement for some museums, especially in terms of resources, it is certain that this crisis will have a lasting impact on the way cultural institutions communicate with their audiences.

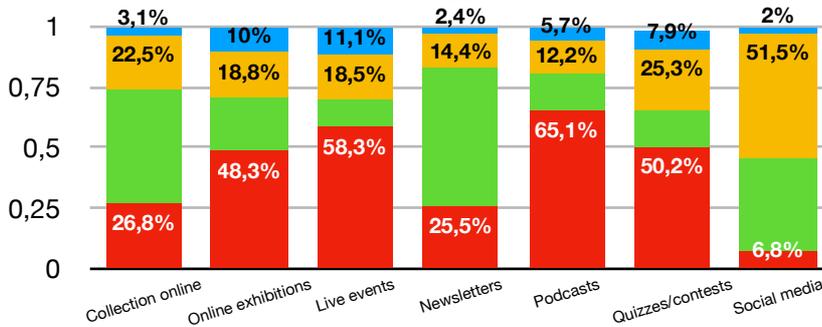
The following pages present the previous three graphs by region, attempting to compare the availability of economic or human resources with the institutions' ability to react to the current crisis.

Europe

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No



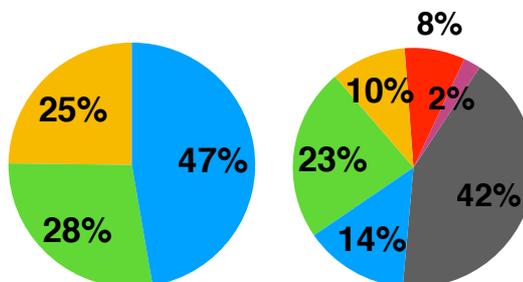
- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



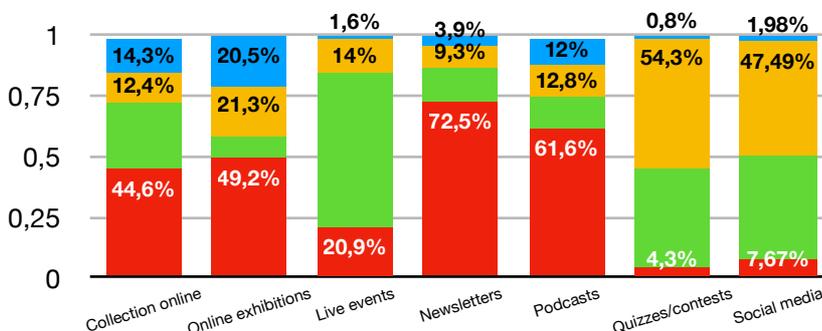
- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

North America

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No



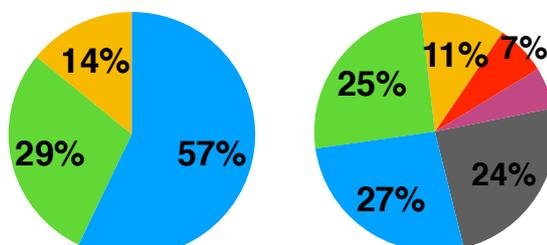
- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



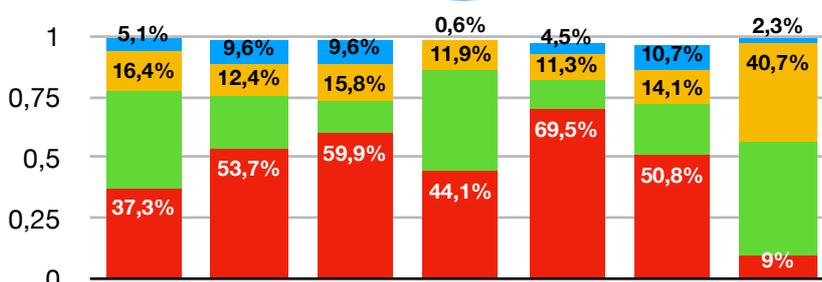
- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

Latin America Caribbean

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No



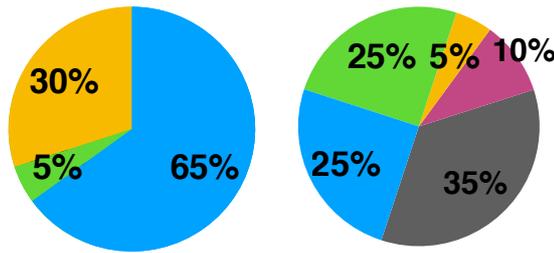
- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



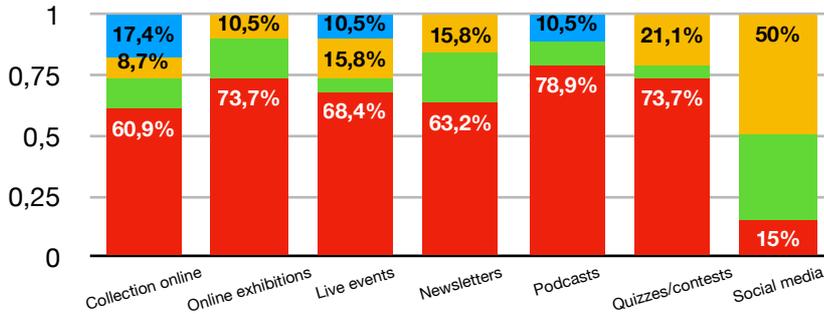
- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

Arab Countries

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No



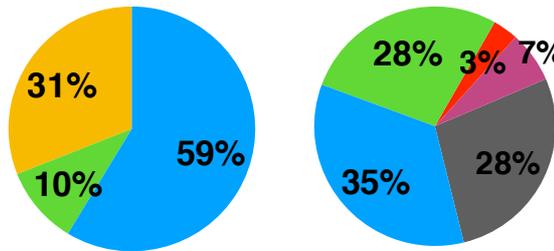
- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



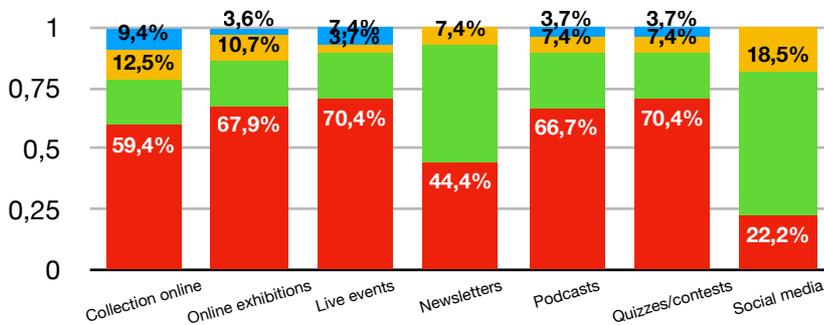
- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

Africa

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No



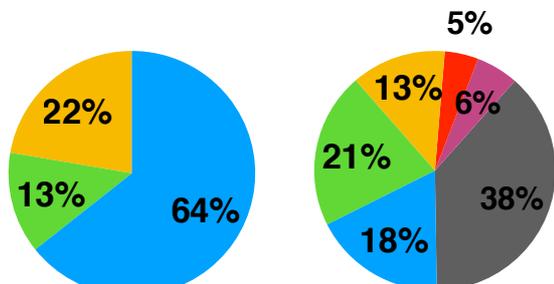
- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



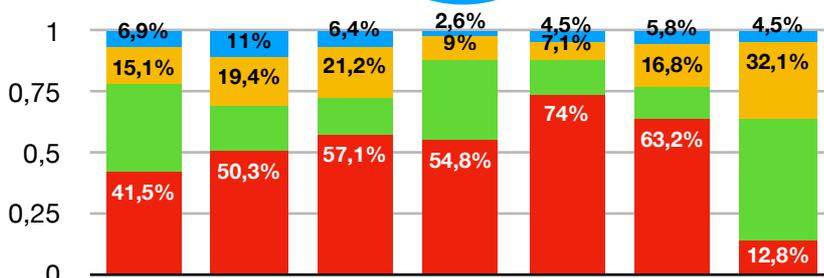
- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

Asia

- Yes, but not full-time
- Yes, full time
- No

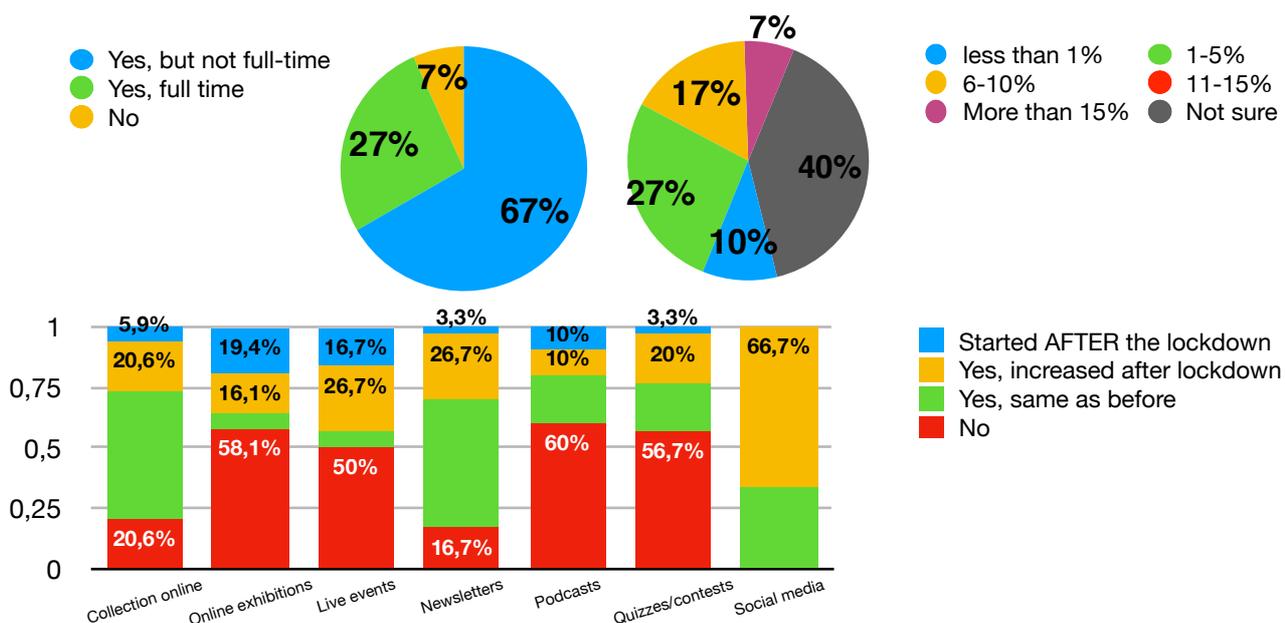


- less than 1%
- 1-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-15%
- More than 15%
- Not sure



- Started AFTER the lockdown
- Yes, increased after lockdown
- Yes, same as before
- No

Pacific

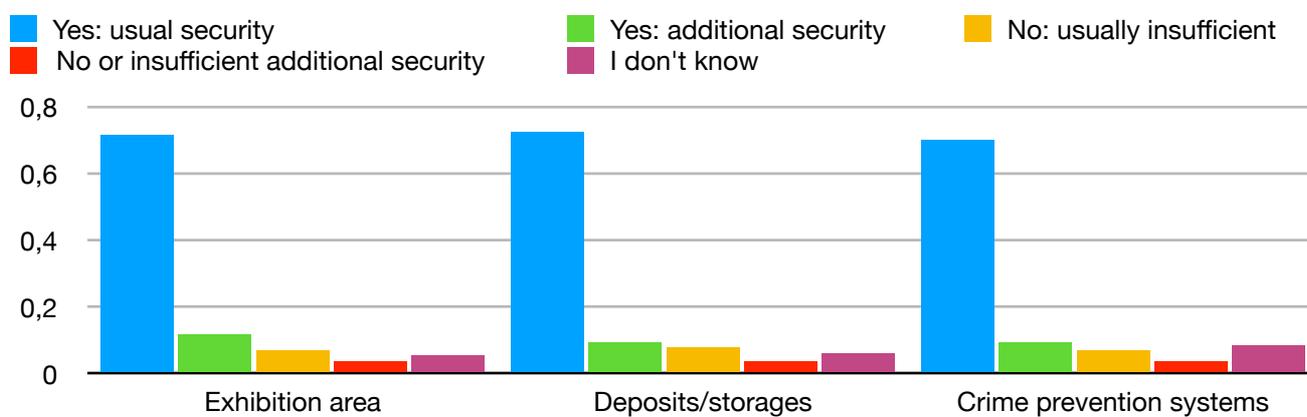


When comparing data from world regions, we notice important differences in the resources that museums can make available for digital communication activities, and consequently their ability to reach audiences remotely. While for social media the difference is less pronounced, for other online content the divide becomes substantial, especially when analysing data from regions such as Africa and the Arab countries.

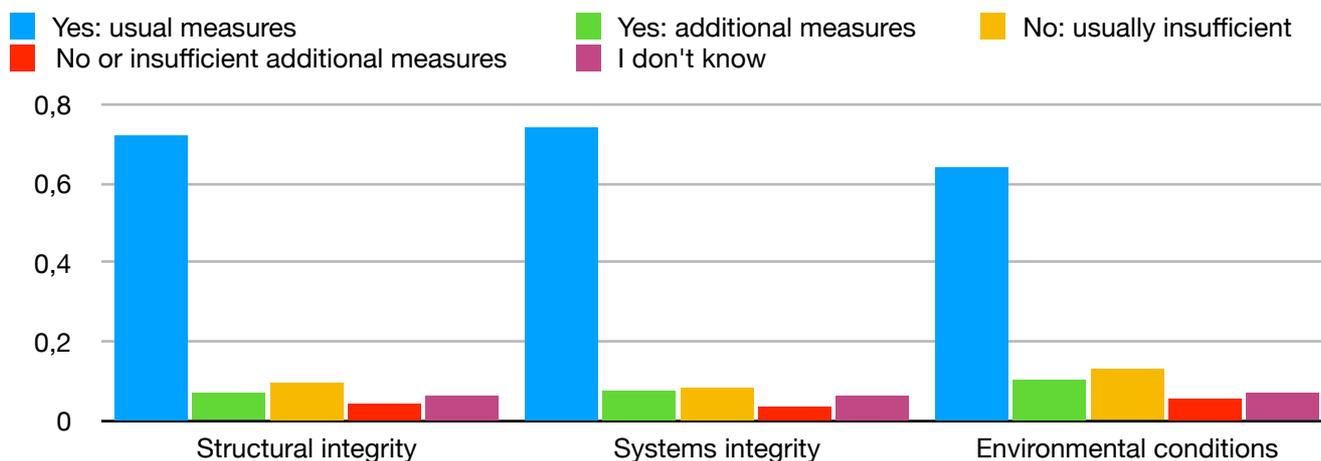
Once again, we must keep in mind that the data collected from these regions is limited, and the percentages could vary significantly.

4. Museum security and Conservation

Is security fully maintained with regards to:	Exhibition area	Deposits/ storages	Crime preven- tion systems
Yes: all usual security measures were taken	71,64 %	72,22 %	69,91 %
Yes: additional security measures were taken	11,79 %	9,32 %	9,89 %
No: the usual security are already insufficient	7,25 %	7,67 %	7,42 %
No: no or insufficient additional security measures taken	4,12 %	4,29 %	4,12 %
I don't know	5,19 %	6,51 %	8,66 %



Is the conservation of artifacts fully maintained with regards to:	Structural integrity	Systems integrity	Environmental conditions
Yes: all usual conservation measures were taken	72,55 %	74,20 %	64,22 %
Yes: additional conservation measures were taken	6,84 %	7,67 %	10,22 %
No: the usual conservation are already insufficient	9,89 %	8,49 %	12,70 %
No: no or insufficient additional conservation measures taken	4,29 %	3,22 %	5,77 %
I don't know	6,43 %	6,43 %	7,09 %



It is not just activities with/for the public that have been deeply impacted by lockdowns. In fact, museums have found that it is necessary to review essential functions, such as security management and collection conservation.

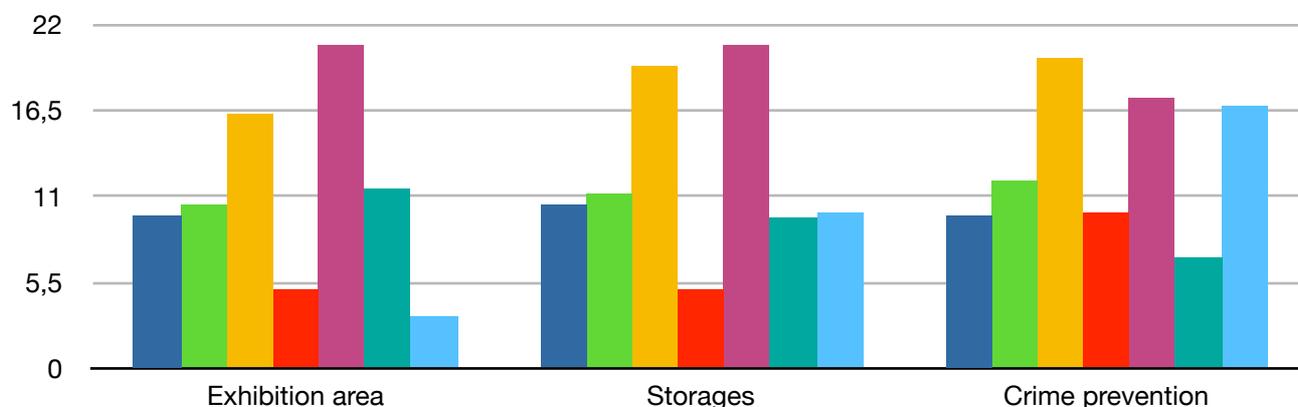
At least 80% of respondents think that their collections are safe in terms of all the different aspects of security. They report that their museums have taken additional measures to ensure security or that all usual protocols have been maintained. On the other hand, **about 11% think that the measures in place were already insufficient or that insufficient additional measures were taken to deal with the current situation.**

In relation to the conservation of museum collections, responses are slightly more varied. The maintenance of stable environmental conditions is a greater source of concern than other factors, with **more than 18% of respondents reporting that their systems are not adequate to guarantee object conservation.** The structural integrity of buildings and other systems (electrical, fire-fighting, etc.) are perceived as a smaller risk, with 14% and 12% of participants respectively worrying that the systems may not be adequate.

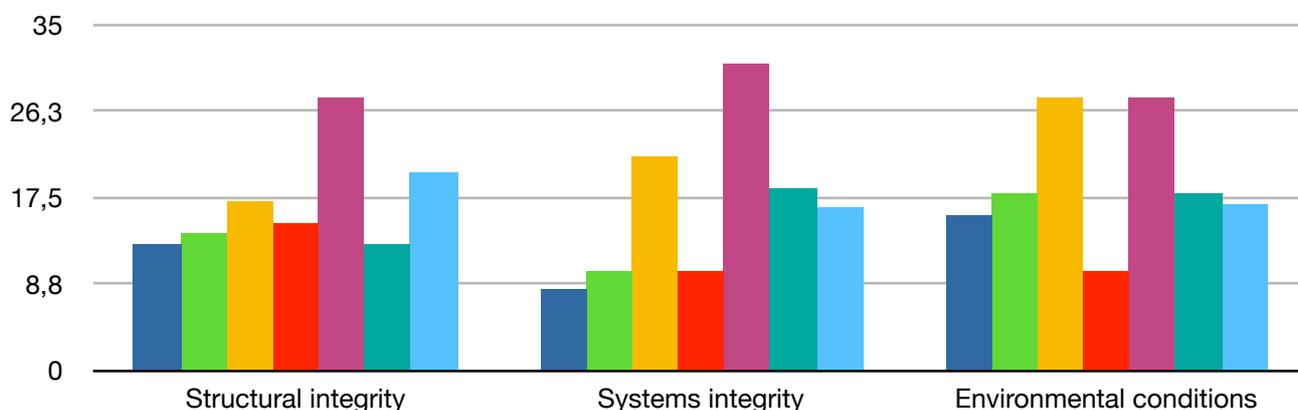
Here too, the separate analysis of regional data reveals deep inequalities, with **major concerns coming mainly from the Latin American and Caribbean, African and the Pacific regions.** Below are two graphs which illustrate the aggregate figure of "insufficient standard and/or additional measures" for each question, by region.



Museum security

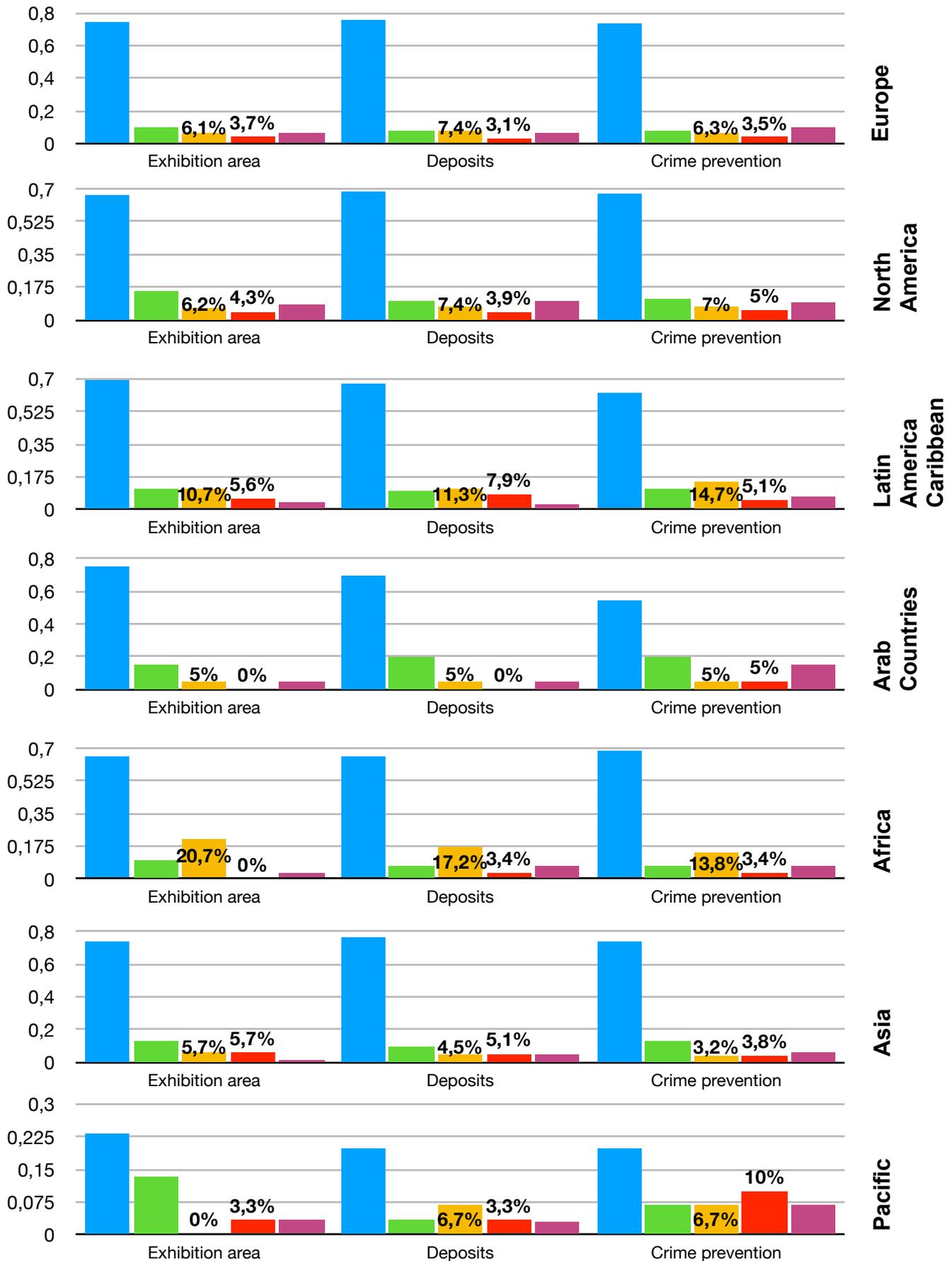


Conservation of collections



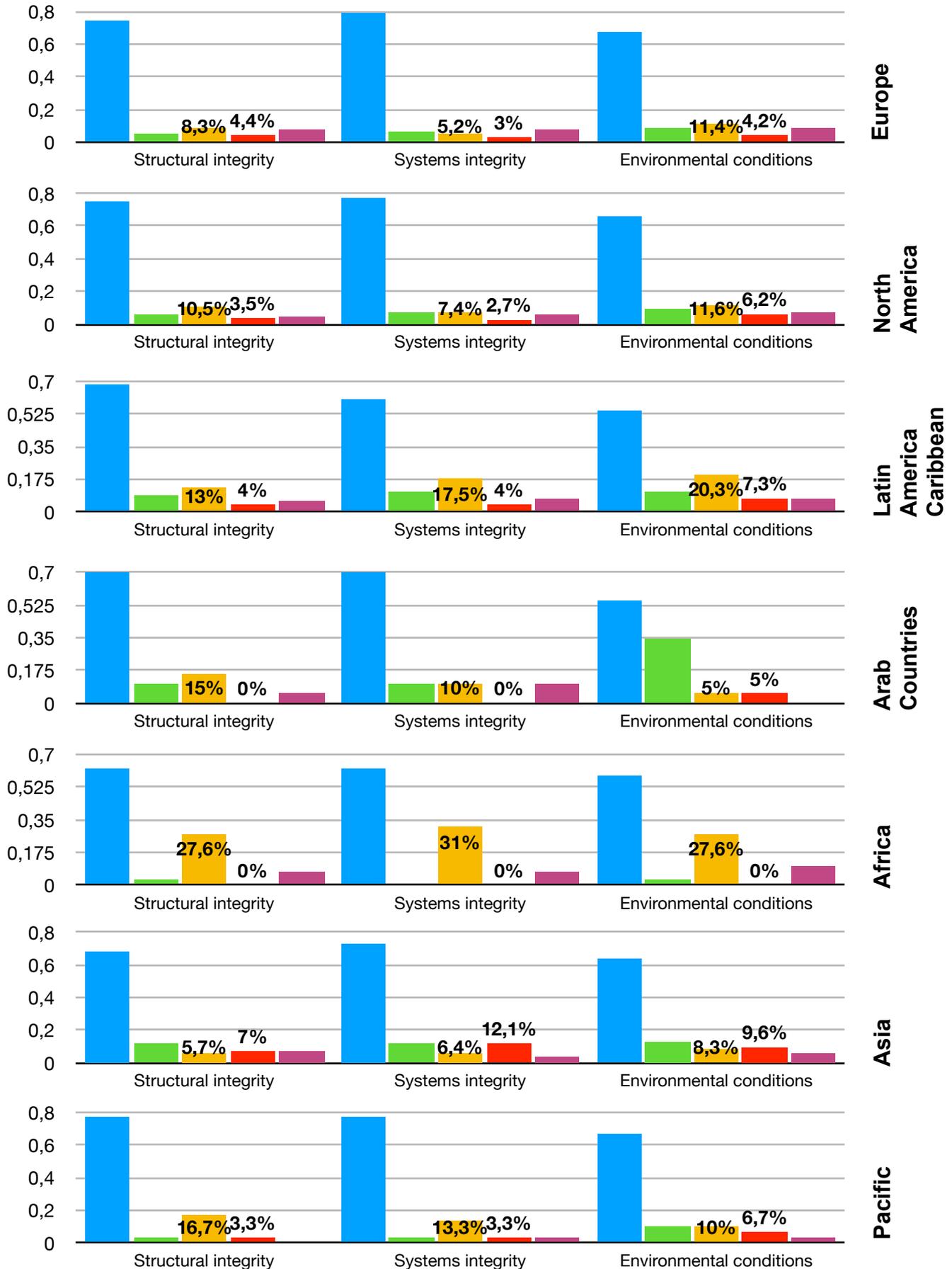
SECURITY

■ Yes: usual measures
 ■ Yes: additional measures
 ■ No: usually insufficient
■ No or insufficient additional measures
 ■ I don't know



CONSERVATION

■ Yes: usual measures
 ■ Yes: additional measures
 ■ No: usually insufficient
■ No or insufficient additional measures
 ■ I don't know

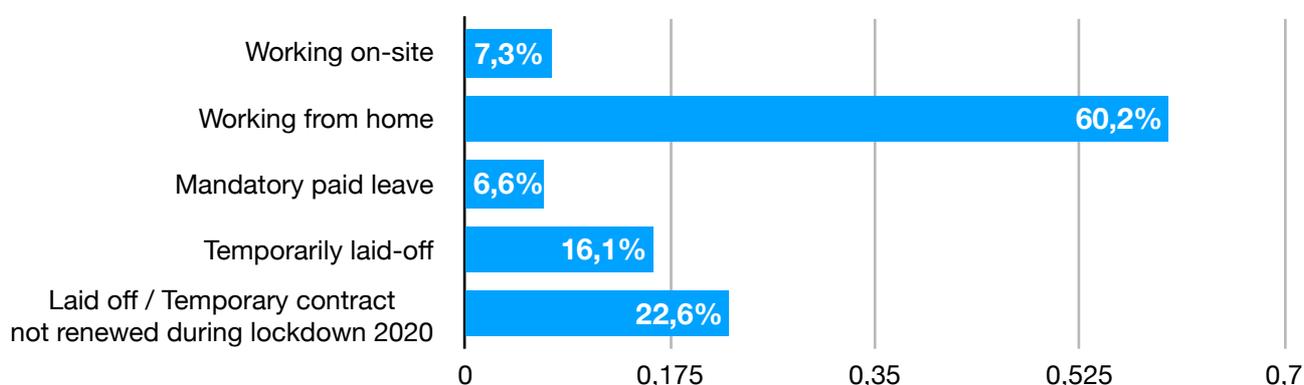


5. Freelance professionals or consultants

Given the smaller number of responses, for this section we will only present aggregated world data. Respondents have highlighted a critical situation, which will have serious repercussions for the self-employed or freelancers in the cultural sector (which in many countries make up a large portion of the total museum workers and are key for the vitality of the sector) in both the medium and long term.

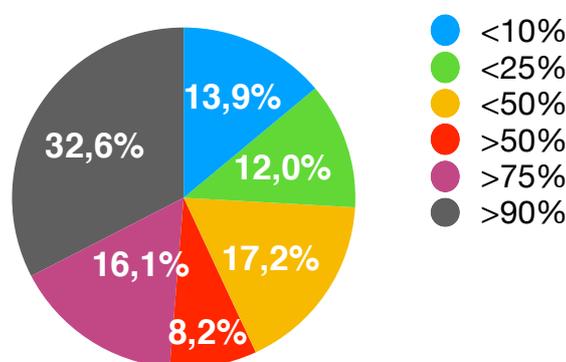
In many cases, these professionals are not only currently unemployed, but they are also the most exposed to systemic economic recessions in the cultural sector. In most cases, consultancy work for museums is their main source of income.

What is the current situation of the staff of your firm?



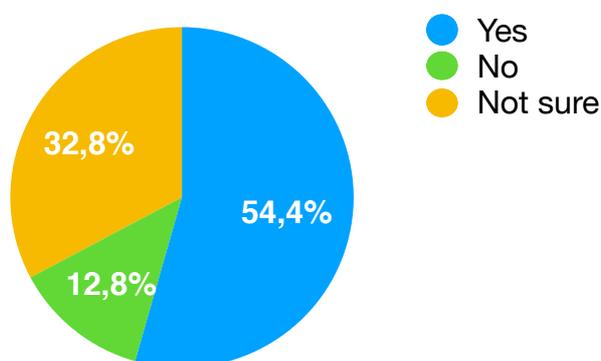
What percentage of your income is based on consultancy for museums?

<10%	13,9%
<25%	12,0%
<50%	17,2%
>50%	8,2%
>75%	16,1%
>90%	32,6%



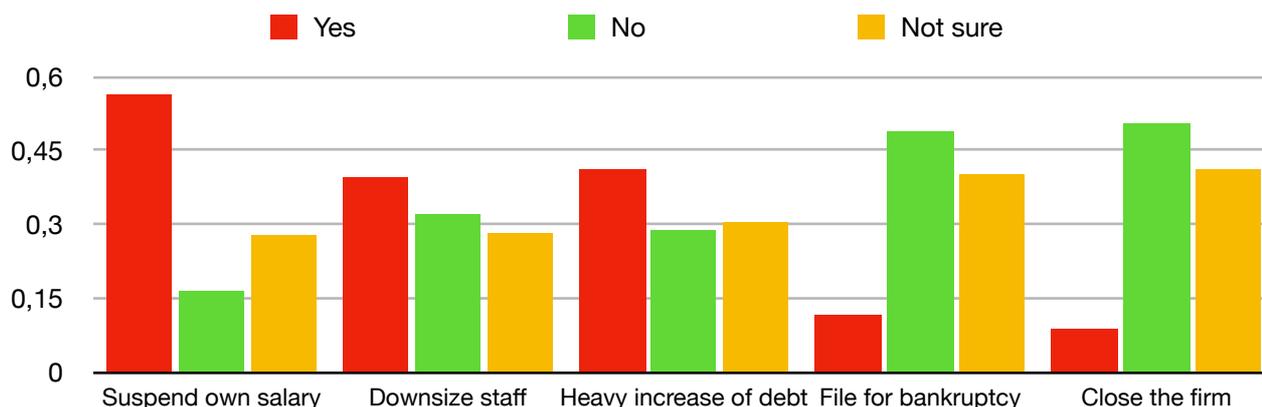
Is the Covid-19 crisis threatening the future of your firm?

Yes	54,4%
No	12,8%
Not sure	32,8%



Foreseen economic impact

	Suspend own salary	Downsize staff	Heavy increase of debt	File for bankruptcy	Close the firm
Yes	56,4 %	39,4 %	41,0 %	11,3 %	8,6 %
No	16,1 %	32,2 %	28,6 %	48,5 %	50,4 %
Not sure	27,5 %	28,4 %	30,5 %	40,2 %	41,0 %



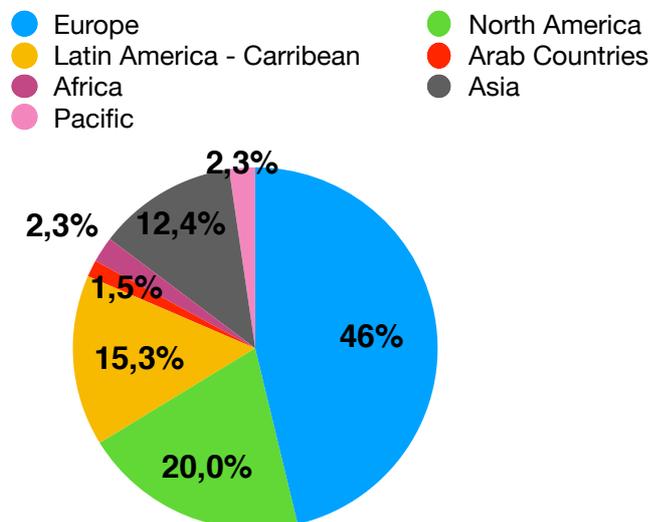
The situation for freelance museum professionals is alarming: 16,1% of the respondents said they were temporarily laid-off, and 22,6% did not have their contract renewed during lockdowns. **The survey highlights the fragility of the freelance sector:** 56,4% of the respondents stated that they will have to suspend their own salary as a result of the crisis, 39,4% will downsize their firms, and for 54,4% the future of their firm itself is at risk.

6. Participants profile

46% of respondents come from Europe, 20% from North America, 15,3% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 12,4% from Asia, 2,3% from Africa and the Pacific and 1,5% from the Arab Countries region.

Geographic distribution

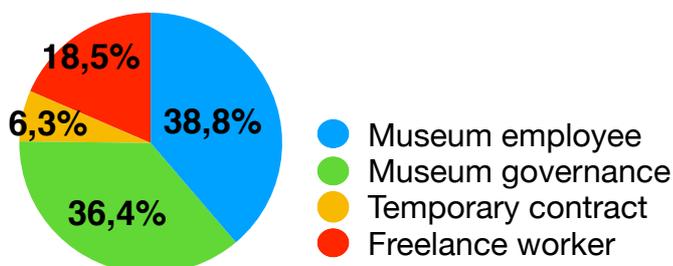
	Responses	Countries
Europe	46,3%	36
North America	20,0%	2
Latin America - Caribbean	15,3%	22
Arab Countries	1,5%	11
Africa	2,3%	16
Asia	12,4%	18
Pacific	2,3%	2



Among the respondents, the number of employees and governance is quite balanced. Among the employees, 6,3% of them have a temporary contract, while the remaining 18,5% work as freelancers or consultants.

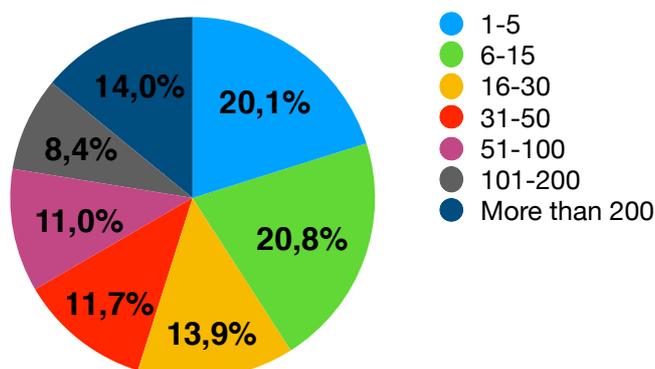
Working position

Museum employee	38,8%
Museum governance	36,4%
Temporary contract	6,3%
Freelance worker	18,5%



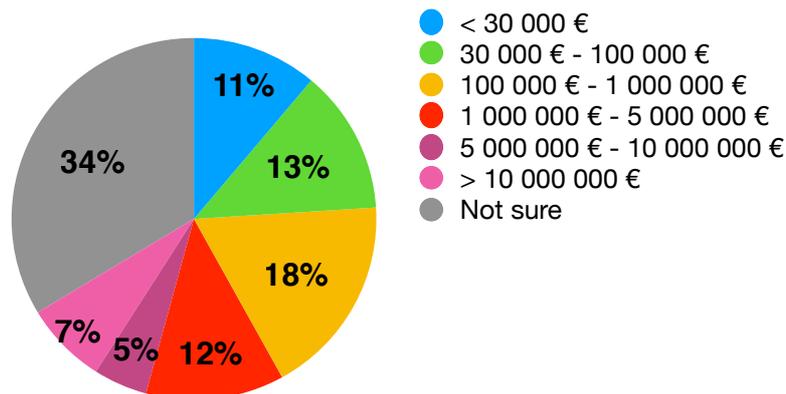
Number of staff

1-5	20,1%
6-15	20,8%
16-30	13,9%
31-50	11,7%
51-100	11,0%
101-200	8,4%
More than 200	14,0%



Annual budget for 2019

< 30 000 €	11,13%
30 000 € - 100 000 €	12,86%
100 000 € - 1 000 000 €	17,97%
1 000 000 € - 5 000 000 €	12,28%
5 000 000 € - 10 000 000 €	4,78%
> 10 000 000 €	7,34%
Not sure	33,64%



Museums of all sizes took part in the survey. Museums with less than 15 employees represent 41% of the sample, while large museums with more than 100 employees represent around 22%.

Disclaimer

This report and the underlying data from the survey was gathered, analysed and interpreted by ICOM - International Council of Museums. Data was collected through an anonymous, voluntary survey, without traceability or accountability for the accuracy of statements from participating individuals, nor verification of their profession. All collected data shall remain private under the management of ICOM.

The raw results of the online survey “Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19” were later harmonised as follows:

- Country names were harmonised; (i.e. “ITALIE”, “Italia”, “ITALY” became “Italy” and “USA” became “United States”);
- in the case of several answers coming from the same museum, only one answer has been kept, favouring the most complete one;
- Incomprehensible responses were deleted.

While the sample does not guarantee representativity of the current circumstances in their respective localities, this report nonetheless offers a snapshot of the perceived consequences and challenges faced by museums and museum professionals, as well as their efforts to overcome them and serve their communities during the pandemic.

Photo Credits

Cover page: © Ioana Cristiana