

EDN

European
Dance Development
Network

THE ARTFORM OF DANCE

**Europe's Progressive
Embodied Cultural
Practice**



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EDN Position Paper

Culture Compass Consultation 2025

Executive Summary

The European Dance Development Network (EDN) advocates for the recognition of contemporary choreographic arts as a vital part of Europe's social, democratic, and cultural life.

The contemporary dance sector has been systematically marginalised, underfunded, and institutionally neglected. This position paper highlights the urgent need for policy reform to release the transformative power of dance for contemporary societies and to establish dance development organisations as vital community hubs.

1. Dance as Democratic Infrastructure

Contemporary dance is more than a hobby or an aesthetic pursuit. It constitutes a dynamic artistic discipline, a critical site of cultural research, and a system of professional cultural labour. As a highly internationalised artistic environment, rooted in democratic values, dance fosters pluralism, embodiment, empathy, and relational understanding across diverse communities.

Dance development organisations serve as community nodes that offer social and cultural belonging, fostering reflection, expression, and collective action. They enhance democratic resilience through civic participation, intercultural encounters, and social inclusion.

The progressive, innovative, and transformative nature of dance uniquely positions it to address contemporary societal challenges and foster inclusive public spaces.

Through education, embodiment, and civic engagement, dance supports communities while responding to Europe's most urgent cultural and political issues. Its participatory, open, and interdisciplinary practices are especially relevant to young people navigating complex social and cultural transitions.

Power Imbalances

The current cultural policy landscape demonstrates significant imbalances between institutionalised and non-institutionalised performing arts.

While traditional forms such as opera, ballet, and national theatre benefit from established visibility, consistent funding streams, infrastructure, and policy support due to their historical institutional embedding, contemporary dance and other experimental fields remain systematically undervalued despite their innovation, international reach, and relevance to modern societies¹.

We urge EU development programmes to recognise the diverse contexts of artistic production within the performing arts.

- Foster balanced support for smaller, independent, and grassroots initiatives, alongside institutions as custodians of the public good.
- Complement heritage investment with equally balanced support for contemporary arts, experimental practices, and innovative work.
- Allocate long-term project funding to sustain professional artistic communities, where it is most needed and often neglected by national funding.

EDN advocates for acknowledging dance as a key partner through:

- Equal recognition of non-institutionalised performing arts in cultural, social, and democratic development².
- Adapting development programmes to the operational realities of the sectors, rather than the other way around.
- Inclusion of dance sector representatives in policy discussions and consultations.

Recognising dance as democratic infrastructure means addressing systemic imbalances in cultural policy and ensuring equitable support across all performing arts.

1 [EDN's report on Practices of Care and Wellbeing in Contemporary Dance](#) highlights multiple ways dance contributes to societal wellbeing and addresses tensions that respond to the strained working conditions in the dance sector.

2 [The Bratislava Declaration](#) is an example of how cultural participation can be established as a protected right, supporting the call for recognition of non-institutionalised performing arts.

2. Working Conditions and Digital Rights

Dance professionals, freelancers, performers, choreographers, and producers operate under conditions marked by systemic precarity, exploitation, and a lack of recognition within social and economic frameworks.

Fragmented project-based funding, excessive administrative barriers, and inadequate social protections cause sustained economic and psychological pressures. Burnout and inequity are widespread, particularly among emerging and independent artists³.

EDN calls for:

- Decent living standards and fair working conditions across the EU for all dance professionals, regardless of their employment status.
- EU-wide policy frameworks that recognise artists as workers entitled to social protections, pension schemes, healthcare, and mobility rights⁴.

Lack of Data

Unlike industries with stable infrastructures, independent dance remains fragmented, project-based, and often relies on external venues, festivals, and institutions. As a result, the sector is largely invisible in national statistics and often overlooked in public support schemes⁵.

This lack of ownership over data is more than an administrative gap. Without control over audience information and visibility metrics, independent dance risks being sidelined or even erased from policy conversations.

- EDN calls for improved data collection on freelance artistic work and dance as a distinct sector to inform evidence-based policymaking and employment legislation, enabling targeted support.

3 [On the Move examines](#) mental health and wellbeing of artists and cultural workers, offering analysis and policy proposals.

4 [Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts](#) is a concrete example of policy innovation that formally establishes artist status and provides economic security.

5 [EDN's webinar series](#) discusses strategies for navigating the political and professional landscape in dance.

Digital Transformation

Artists' vulnerabilities are intensified by rapid digital transformation. Generative artificial intelligence and corporate-controlled platforms pose new threats to artistic livelihoods by further devaluing artistic work.

Unlike textual or visual content, choreographic work represents embodied knowledge developed over years of physical practice, cultural transmission, and somatic research. When AI systems appropriate movement vocabularies without compensation or recognition, they exploit forms of knowledge that cannot be easily copyrighted or protected through traditional intellectual property mechanisms⁶.

EDN calls for:

- Adequate remuneration frameworks to ensure fair compensation when choreographic work contributes to digital or AI-based developments.
- Support for ethical digital alternatives and European-based digital infrastructure that reduces dependence on monopolistic tech platforms.

Precarity can no longer remain the default working condition in the European dance sector.

3. Infrastructure and Access to Funding

The prevailing funding architecture, characterised by unaligned, short-term cycles, output-driven metrics, and institutional fragmentation, fails to support the long-term sustainability necessary for the dance sector.

Limited access to dedicated spaces for dance, research opportunities, and technical resources further compounds these structural challenges. To fulfil its democratic role, the sector needs planned, strategic support rather than survival-mode, production-based grant structures.

⁶ [Dance Magazine](#) reports on how AI is being trained with movement, how are dance artists using AI, and what could the technology mean for the sector.

EDN calls for:

- **Long-term, structural funding models** that support artistic processes, research, and capacity-building, including pilot schemes for small and mid-scale organisations, as well as adapting cooperation projects to enable process-based artistic research, organisational development, and outreach work⁷.
- **Investment in sustainable cultural infrastructure**, including rehearsal, education, residency, and production spaces, with European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) made more accessible to the cultural sector through earmarked funding for local and transnational cultural infrastructure, with specific provisions for non-profit and independent operators.
- **Public policy that embeds artist-led, community-rooted practices** within the broader European project, ensuring that decentralised, interdependent, and experimental forms are recognised as vital rather than peripheral to Europe's cultural, democratic, and social development⁸.

Culture must not be commodified or reduced to a tool for competitiveness and branding. Dance resists such instrumentalisation by engaging in alternative rhythms of presence, embodiment, and authentic co-existence.

4. Freedom, Mobility, and Equity

Mobility is the lifeblood of dance. As an embodied art form, the movement of the artwork is inseparable from the mobility of its creators.

With institutionalised support and work opportunities unevenly distributed across Europe, the dance field is resigned to a nomadic lifestyle, making internationalisation a key factor in its survival.

The fundamental right to mobility (physical, geographical, and artistic) remains central to the European project. Yet mounting barriers, including visa restrictions, environmental concerns, financial inequities, and geopolitical tensions, are increasingly fragmenting the European cultural space⁹.

⁷ [Extended subsidy cycles by the Dutch Council for Culture](#) is an example of a multi-year, accessible funding scheme.

⁸ [Zurich's Cultural Policy Reform](#) is an example of redistributing power to make cultural spaces more porous and community-rooted.

⁹ [Perform Europe](#) reports on geographic disparities in the European landscape of performing arts touring and presentation.

EDN calls for:

- Equitable and sustainable mobility schemes accessible to all artists, regardless of geography, ability, or care responsibilities.
- Schengen-wide visa facilitation for non-EU dance professionals participating in EU-based programmes.
- Climate-conscious collaboration models for touring and international partnerships, with additional funding to enable slow travel and to integrate climate justice into operational practices.

Artistic freedom is a fundamental democratic right, and mobility measures should be grounded in principles of social and environmental justice.

5. Societal Value and Cross-Sectoral Integration

Despite its transformative impact on our societies, dance is still undervalued both culturally and economically. This lack of recognition, be it symbolic, financial, or institutional, systematically undermines the sector's capacity to contribute to broader societal objectives.

EDN calls for:

- **Recognition of dance arts in public health, education, and wellbeing strategies** at both national and EU levels¹⁰.
- **Cross-sectoral funding models** where healthcare, youth development, and social cohesion initiatives co-invest with culture, ensuring balanced responsibility and shared outcomes.
- **Complementary support programmes**, designed to reduce administrative burden and enable artists to focus on community impact. These should include application assistance units, micro-grant schemes with simplified reporting, trusted intermediary organisations providing back-office support, and expanded administrative and legal guidance.

¹⁰ [Spain's dance-in-education programme](#) is an example of integrating inclusive movement practices in general education and cultural outreach.

Dance is a public good that deserves substantial investment, dedicated infrastructure, and comprehensive policy integration.

Conclusion: The Future is in Motion

Contemporary dance culture serves as a catalyst for transformation, creating connections across borders, bodies, and communities. It builds social cohesion, challenges existing systems, and generates alternative visions for collective futures.

For the EU's Culture Compass to achieve meaningful impact, it must prioritise lived, embodied experiences as much as heritage preservation. Europe's future depends not only on safeguarding cultural legacy but on enabling movement in all its forms: artistic, political, and collective.

The time has come to listen to bodies in motion, invest in transformative artistic practices, and create genuine space for dance in Europe's cultural landscape.

About this Document

This position paper was developed by the European Dance Development Network (EDN), informed by sector-wide consultations that explored the challenges of funding and policy support, the role of contemporary dance in community and democratic life, and the future of sustainable artistic production. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all participants whose expertise and dialogue have informed and shaped this document.

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