Photo by Mykolas Juodelė

# Between Rhetoric and Reality:
## Cultural Rights, Artistic Freedom, and Democratic Resilience

by Elena Polivtseva

january 2026

**PAC**

PERFORMING
ARTS
COALITION

# Table of Contents

*Cover page photo was taken during the Month of Cultural Protest and Assembly actions in Lithuania, 2025.*
*Requests for removal can be addressed to info[at]ednetwork.eu.*

# About the Performing Arts Coalition (PAC)

PAC, the Performing Arts Coalition is a platform for European and international performing arts networks to collaborate on advocacy for the performing arts, conducting joint actions and research, exchanging knowledge, and pooling resources. PAC was founded in 2025 by ASSITEJ - International Association of Theatre and Performing Arts for Children and Young Audiences; Circostrada - European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts; EDN - European Dance Development Network; EFA - European Festivals Association; and IETM - International network for contemporary performing arts. The joint membership of the networks is based in over 90 countries of the world counting over a thousand of organisations and professionals.

The PAC commissions relevant research, surveys their global membership on pressing issues faced by the performing arts sector, conducts sectoral dialogues and offers recommendations, ideas and knowledge to the European and international policy-makers.

PAC's mission is to strengthen the role of the performing arts in society by advocating for policies that recognise their unique value.

# About this paper

This document has been produced by the Performing Arts Coalition (PAC), established in 2025 by ASSITEJ - Association of Theatre and Performing Arts for Children and Young People, Circostrada - European network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts, EDN - European Dance Development Network, EFA - European Festivals Association, and IETM - International network for contemporary performing arts. In dialogue with their respective memberships, these networks carried out a survey entitled '*The Right to Engage with the Performing Arts in Today's Europe & Beyond*' and organised and documented individual network workshops and panels as part of their annual conferences[01]. These addressed key themes such as artistic freedom, access to cultural participation, and cultural rights. Additional desk research was undertaken to identify broader trends and to further contextualise the insights gathered through the survey and live discussions.

This policy consultation process, supported through the Creative Europe network grants of PAC members, was initiated primarily to inform EU-level policy-making. However, because several PAC members are global networks with members across the world, and given today's interconnected context where global challenges, such as climate change, wars, and democratic erosion, affect people across borders, we decided to highlight a global perspective and open the survey to members worldwide.

Of the 223 total respondents, 158 (71%) selected at least one EU country in the 'country' field, while 29% selected only non-EU countries (multiple selections were possible).

The top ten countries represented within the survey were EU member states, with the exception of the UK, which ranked third. Thus, as the responses are primarily Europe-focused, the global input is partial, yet it adds valuable geographic inclusivity. While much of the paper, including the introductory sections and recommendations, focuses on the EU level, the insights and proposed solutions are also meant to inspire action elsewhere, offering pathways for meaningful interventions on issues of global significance.

Finally, while additional desk research was carried out to substantiate and illustrate key insights and concerns, and respondents were invited to share links and attachments, we acknowledge that not every survey statement has been independently verified. Much of this document therefore reflects the lived experiences, perspectives, and sentiments of performing arts professionals on the ground, complemented where possible by examples of policies and practices. This report does not claim to offer a complete or exhaustive account of the topic, and given the rapidly evolving landscape, we acknowledge that some developments that occurred after the research was completed may not have been captured.

# Executive Summary

This report situates the performing arts within a context of democratic backsliding, social polarisation, loneliness, and distrust in institutions, arguing that theatre, dance, circus, and performance are essential democratic infrastructures rather than mere entertainment.

Performing arts should be framed as a public good and a vehicle for cultural rights: they enable assembly, dialogue, critical reflection, and participation that are indispensable for democracy to exist and renew itself.

## Democracy, culture and policy trends

→ Democracy is in long-term decline globally, with growing shares of people living under authoritarian rule and rising discontent even in high-scoring democracies; the EU has responded with instruments like the European Democracy Action Plan and the European Democracy Shield, which refer to culture's role in safeguarding democracy.

→ At EU level, culture's democratic function is now explicitly embedded in the Work Plans for Culture, the proposed AgoraEU programme (merging Creative Europe and CERV in the post-2027 MFF), and the Culture Compass, which treats artistic freedom and access to culture as indicators of democratic health.

## State of artistic freedom and cultural rights

→ Artistic freedom should be understood in a broad, rights-based sense (following UNESCO and UN cultural rights bodies): not just absence of censorship, but encompassing social and economic rights, mobility, association, fair remuneration, and the right of all to participate in cultural life.

→ In practice, political and legal frameworks seldom reflect this holistic understanding, leading to fragmented protection: symbolic commitments exist alongside direct and indirect pressures, economic precarity, self-censorship, and structural inequalities.

## Funding and governance

→ Funding is the central pressure point: respondents report widespread cuts, freezes, or erosion of cultural budgets in many countries, often combined with rising costs, administrative burdens, and a shift towards short-term, project-based, and numbers-driven schemes.

→ Even where budgets grow or remain stable, shifts in priorities (towards commercialisation, cultural tourism, or showcase events) and heavy instrumentalisation push organisations to chase policy buzzwords and audiences as 'consumers', undermining risk-taking, experimentation, and long-term community relationships.

→ There is a chronic mismatch between ambitious policy rhetoric (fair pay, inclusion, green transition, accessibility) and the absence of dedicated resources or realistic implementation tools, turning many agendas into box-ticking exercises that can erode trust between sector and policymakers.

→ Uncertainty (delayed calls, late payments, unstable rules) and lack of transparency or political interference in allocation decisions damage planning, foster self-censorship, and disproportionately harm the independent and community-based scene.

## Political climate and instrumentalisation

→ A broader shift to the right, including populist, nationalist and 'anti-woke' agendas, is reshaping cultural policy in many contexts: culture is recast as a tool of nation-building, ideological combat, or patriotic education, and diversity/inclusion agendas are attacked or quietly deprioritised.

→ Case material illustrates how governments use leadership changes, parallel institutions, funding criteria to constrain artistic expression without always resorting to overt bans, with long-term damage that is hard to reverse even after political change.

## Inclusion and diversity

→ Discourses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural rights have clearly advanced (new laws, charters, strategies, cultural rights plans, DEI reporting obligations), and some states have created dedicated structures or budgets for cultural rights and children's culture.

→ However, these gains are fragile: they are often underfunded, fragmented, or confined to short-term initiatives. In several countries there is active rollback, erasure of DEI language, and politicised resistance to inclusion-oriented work, including LGBTQIA+ and minority projects.

→ Funding criteria tied to 'diversity' can unintentionally attach artists from marginalised backgrounds into narrow identity narratives, reproducing stereotypes and homogenising the offer, especially when overall resources shrink and competition intensifies.

## Barriers to public engagement with the performing arts

→ The main barriers identified are:

- ticket prices and overall cost of living
- physical, sensory and communication inaccessibility
- lack of infrastructure (especially in rural areas and in contemporary circus and outdoor arts)
- social distance and a pervasive "this is not for me" feeling among many groups.

→ Austerity in adjacent sectors (education, youth work, social services, migration support) indirectly reduces cultural participation by weakening partnerships and intermediary structures that enable citizens to access the arts.

## Role of international and supranational actors

→ International bodies (EU, UNESCO, other multilateral organisations) are perceived as crucial guarantors of cultural rights and artistic freedom, able to provide normative frameworks, funding, monitoring, and cross-border solidarity when national politics become hostile or unstable.

→ Moves such as recognising culture as a global or essential public good and integrating cultural rights into wider agendas signal a growing, but still not fully realised, understanding of culture as core to democratic resilience and societal preparedness.

# Key recommendations

### 1. Funding and infrastructure

→ Guarantee stable, long-term, legally anchored public funding for culture that covers the whole value chain and ecosystem (including independent, socially engaged, and rural actors), with crisis-response tools built in.

→ Improve equity and transparency in access to funds, reduce administrative burdens, and design schemes that enable risk-taking, experimentation, and sustained community relationships rather than short-term, numbers-driven outputs.

### 2. Artistic freedom and status of the artist

→ Develop comprehensive legal frameworks on the status of the artist that cover all labour regimes and ensure access to social protection, fair remuneration, and cross-border mobility.

→ Enshrine artistic freedom in law and practice, and establish monitoring tools such as an Artistic Freedom Observatory and Index to track violations and hold states accountable.

### 3. Performing arts as a public good and democratic resource

→ Explicitly recognise performing arts as a public good and a pillar of democratic life, embedding arts education, participation and co-creation across the education system and community infrastructures.

→ Stabilise and expand participation tools (cultural passes, free admission schemes, mediators, community connectors) and invest in infrastructure, touring, and recognition systems that value socially engaged, minority, rural and experimental work, not only high-visibility urban projects.

### 4. From symbolism to implementation

→ Move from declarative commitments to actionable, funded, and monitored policies on cultural rights, inclusion, and diversity; ensure cross-government coordination so that culture is not undermined by hostile developments in other policy fields.

→ Use international and EU-level frameworks (e.g. AgoraEU, Culture Compass, UNESCO declarations) to embed culture structurally in democracy-protection agendas and to support long-term resilience of the performing arts worldwide.

# Introduction

The value of culture is particularly relevant today, as democratic engagement declines and trust in institutions wanes. The Bertelsmann Foundation's 2024 study *A Comparison of Youth Loneliness in Europe* shows that approximately 57% of Europeans aged 18 to 35 report being moderately or severely lonely[02]. Social polarisation, further intensified by the algorithms of digital platforms, drives people apart – including in their cultural consumption. Democratic systems are under pressure worldwide, as data consistently shows[03], and as political leaders themselves, at least in democracies, acknowledge[04].

The performing arts stand as one of society's most potent forces to inspire artistic imagination and foster democratic values, personal development, wellbeing, critical thinking, and inspiring visions of a better world. Far from mere entertainment, theatre, dance, circus, and performance serve as vital catalysts for social progress, individual growth - for people of all ages, and collective transformation that ripple through communities and generations. They foster the assembly of citizens and provide tools for communities to engage in dialogue, bringing forward concerns and feelings that might otherwise be excluded from social discourse and political debate. This civic engagement creates the essential conditions for democratic societies to not only prosper but to exist.

Yet, critical questions remain: who is included and who is excluded? What is the capacity of today's performing arts sector to engage all of society, to reach those most disengaged from civic processes, most marginalised politically and economically, and whose voices are ignored or actively suppressed? The performing arts, just like culture as such, are a public good, as repeatedly stated by UNESCO[05] and the EU[06], but are they truly treated, managed, and co-created as such? Do we have policies in place to fully unleash their value for democracy, critical debate, and the enrichment of every individual in these exceptional times?

It is likely that the answers to these questions are not universally positive. The performing arts - and the arts sector at large - face multiple threats, including those related to the freedom to create, express, and engage with society. At the same time, awareness of these issues has grown among policymakers, with cultural access and artistic freedom largely discussed and prioritised. The pressing question remains: why does a gap persist between words and actions, and how can it be bridged? How can we strengthen the performing arts to be the independent, vibrant, and resilient public good that empowers citizens to collectively imagine and shape the future?

# The State of Democracy

Democracy worldwide has been in steady decline for over a decade. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2024[07] points to a persistent democratic backsliding that began around 2007 and shows little sign of reversal, with the four years since the COVID-19 pandemic marking a particularly stark rollback of freedoms. According to the Index, more than one-third of the world's population now lives under authoritarian rule - a share that continues to rise. Sixty countries are classified as authoritarian regimes, up from 52 in 2014 and one more than in 2023[08].



Charting democracy's ups and downs, 2006 to 2024
Global average Democracy Index score out of 10 (10=best)
Source: EIU.
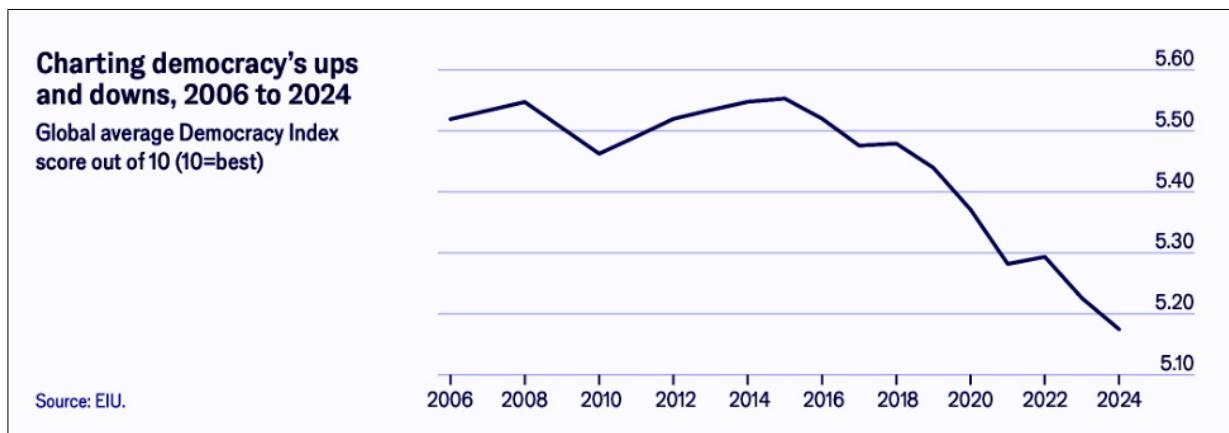
Although Western Europe remains the world's highest-ranking region within the Index, and the only one where average scores have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the landscape in this region is also marked by growing public discontent[09]. European citizens are not satisfied with the state of democracy: as the Eurobarometer 2023 *Democracy in action - One year before the European elections* revealed, less than half of EU citizens surveyed are 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the way democracy works in their country, against 31% 'not very satisfied' and 20% 'not at all satisfied'[10]. Across the 2024 elections, this frustration translated into widespread backlash against incumbents and surging support for anti-establishment and populist parties[11].

This crisis of democracy is not overlooked at the EU level. Protecting democracy is among the European Union's major strategic priorities for 2024–2029, alongside economic competitiveness and security[12]. A strong democracy is viewed as a foundation for a united Europe amid today's turbulent realities, marked by geopolitical tensions, conflicts, and the rise of authoritarianism. It is also seen as a driver of economic prosperity, competitiveness, and a well-functioning single market[13]. This focus on safeguarding democracy builds on the European Commission's strategic agenda 2019 - 2024[14], which included *A new push for European democracy* as a key priority, paving the way for the European Democracy Action Plan (2020), which outlined measures to promote free and fair elections, strengthen media freedom, and counter disinformation[15].

The growing EU's focus on protecting and safeguarding democracy reflects the overall recognition that democracy is under pressure in Europe, or, as the Commission President repeatedly put it, 'under attack'[16]. The EU's current ambition is to enhance respect for the rule of law, protect independent media, and strengthen citizens' engagement with democratic processes. A rather strong focus is placed on countering threats such as information manipulation, disinformation, and foreign interference[17].

An important milestone in the EU's efforts to safeguard its democracy has been the launch of the European Democracy Shield in November 2025[18]. This strategic initiative aims to counter foreign information manipulation and interference, safeguard election integrity, support independent media and journalists, and protect civil society. The Democracy Shield also aims to establish a European Centre for Democratic Resilience, which will facilitate information sharing, operational cooperation and capacity building to withstand common threats, especially foreign information manipulation, interference and disinformation.

# Culture and Democracy

According to the 2024 Democracy Index, surveys on attitudes towards democracy show that 'people not only expect more from their politicians but also wish for more to be expected of themselves': they want to be treated as citizens, not merely as stakeholders[19]. This is where the increasingly recognised mission of culture comes in: reactivating citizens and fostering democratic participation.

Indeed, the role of culture in strengthening democracy has long been discussed in academia, civil society, and policy-making. In recent years, particularly at the EU level, there has been a noticeable shift towards exploring how culture can support democracy and address social polarisation[20]. In the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, *Citizenship, Values and Democracy* was identified as a sub-topic under the broader priority theme *Cohesion and Wellbeing*. As part of this plan, the European Commission conducted a study to explore the relationship between culture and democracy.

The resulting report, *Culture and Democracy: The Evidence*, published in 2023, showed that participating in cultural activities strengthens engagement in democratic and civic life, including voting, volunteering, and other 'civic-minded behaviours'. The study found that the social and civic benefits of arts participation are not limited to specific art forms or practices. Both active and passive participation are associated with positive civic outcomes, but the effects are strongest when people engage actively: individuals who actively create or participate in music, theatre, dance, visual arts, creative writing, or community arts initiatives tend to volunteer more and take part in community activities more frequently than those who attend cultural events passively[21].

This study has supported the further exploration of how culture can contribute to a strong democracy in Europe. In the current Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, the role of culture in supporting democracy is addressed under the topic *Culture for People: Enhancing Cultural Participation and the Role of Culture in Society,* which includes issues such as media literacy, dialogue and debate, social integration and community engagement, and combating disinformation, hate speech, and fake news. Some of these topics are relatively new for the EU's cultural policy landscape. In 2023, Horizon Europe launched a call for research projects exploring how culture and the arts can foster democratic participation and political expression.

After elections 2024, the inclusion of culture in efforts to safeguard democracy has not diminished; rather, it has been strengthened as part of the EU's current strategic focus. The Danish Presidency of the European Council (July - January 2025), despite giving limited attention to culture in its programme (as is typical for EU presidency programmes), highlighted culture's 'broader role in supporting democratic values and resilience'[22]. Under the Presidency, joint declaration was signed by all EU member states except Hungary, as well as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, the UK and Ukraine, entitled *Declaration on the necessity of culture and media as a safeguard for our European democracies*[23].

This trend of enhancing culture's role in protecting European democracy is further reflected in the newly proposed structure of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), presented by the Commission President in July 2025. Under this proposal, Creative Europe would cease to exist as a stand-alone programme and would merge with the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) under a new funding instrument, AgoraEU. The integration aims to simplify administration and improve applicants' access to funding, in line with the Political Guidelines of the European Commission. The proposal ensures that each component of the programme (Culture–Creative Europe, Media+, and CERV) will maintain its autonomy while promoting synergies across sectors[24].

Although the new programme largely inherits the objectives, priorities, and operational elements of the current Creative Europe and CERV programmes, a unifying principle runs through all potential beneficiaries of AgoraEU: the focus on protecting and safeguarding the EU's values, which face both internal and external pressures, as stated in the proposal for regulation. There is a clear emphasis on culture's contribution to the EU's identity, inclusive and participatory governance, active citizenship, equality, and non-discrimination. Terms such as '*democratic resilience*', '*societal preparedness*', and '*cultural and civic engagement*' recur as intended areas of impact, highlighting the key synergies to which all sectors - culture, audiovisual, news, and civil society - are expected to contribute. Ultimately, the programme's logic centers on strengthening civic engagement through meaningful participation in various spheres of public life, including political, social, economic, and cultural domains[25].

AgoraEU is also a space where artistic freedom, albeit not literally, is recognised among the key elements of Europe's democracy, and is embraced in a more tangible way as part of civic rights. Notably, *safeguarding artistic* freedom is now featured among specific objectives of the programme, which has not been the case for Creative Europe.

Attention to artistic freedom is by no means new. Artistic freedom has been one of the priorities of the EU's Work Plan for Culture since 2019, and freedom of artistic expression was for the first time featured as one of the guiding principles of the Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, which recognises it as 'fundamental to the human ability to address challenges, to think critically, to innovate and to invent'.

The urgency of safeguarding artistic freedom in Europe was emphasised during the debate '*European Cultural Compass as a Driving Force for Economic Competitiveness and Resilience*' that was held in March 2025. Nela Riehl, Chair of the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee, called for legislation similar to the European Media Freedom Act (entered into force in 2024), but specifically dedicated to protecting artistic freedom[26]. This is a crucial proposal, as it would not only enshrine artistic freedom among the EU's priorities and key pillars for safeguarding rights and democracy, but also, hopefully, provide a tangible framework for protecting artistic freedom in practice, rather than merely in discourse.

An important milestone in the EU's cultural policy has been the launch of the Culture Compass, the EU's new strategic framework for culture in November 2025. This new document, guided by the vision 'Europe for Culture, Culture for Europe', affirms artistic freedom as 'the cornerstone of any democratic and open society' and positions it as an 'indicator of a society's democratic health'. Access to culture is also recognised as a fundamental pillar of democratic and inclusive societies[27].

# Understanding artistic freedom

This focus on artistic freedom at the EU level has not emerged in a vacuum. Concerns about its state have been repeatedly raised by the cultural sector, which has reported a growing number of cases of political pressure, censorship, attacks, and intimidation directed at artists, companies, and cultural institutions across Europe[28]. Reports by organisations such as Freemuse[29] and the Council of Europe[30] highlight the diverse threats to artistic freedom worldwide, including in Europe - from political attacks and manipulation to undermining practices of digital platforms, as well as restrictions linked to public safety and security, and the spread of self-censorship.

Before examining these factors that undermine artistic freedom, it is important to stress a more fundamental issue: among the political and legal obstacles to safeguarding artistic freedom, the most profound - and too often overlooked - problem is the lack of a shared understanding of what artistic freedom actually is. Although comprehensive definitions exist in national and international law, artistic freedom is still frequently understood in a narrow sense, focusing primarily on the right to artistic expression and its suppression by power-holders through censorship, or by communities through attacks and intimidation.

While these threats are indeed becoming more acute worldwide, including in Europe, and require urgent vigilance and action, a flourishing artistic freedom rests on a much broader foundation. Artistic freedom is much more than just absence of censorship and repression.

UNESCO frames artistic freedom as a set of rights protected under international law: the right to create without censorship or intimidation; to have artistic work supported, distributed, and remunerated; to freedom of movement; to freedom of association; to the protection of social and economic rights; and the right to participate in cultural life[31]. These rights span the entire value chain - from the production to the presentation of art - encompassing the right to work and disseminate artistic creations in different places and to diverse audiences, while underscoring the fundamental necessity of fair remuneration for artists.

Importantly, this definition also extends to people's right to participate in cultural life, which forms the basis of cultural rights. As defined by the United Nations, cultural rights protect the development and expression of cultural identities and encompass the right to access and participate in culture, heritage, and other resources that enable individuals and communities to develop, consolidate, and express their identities[32]. In short, cultural rights, as defined by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, are the interrelated rights to access, participate in, and contribute to cultural life without discrimination - including the right not to participate[33].

Artistic freedom, when viewed through the lens of cultural rights, is a multilayered and complex notion. Safeguarding it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple rights, legal frameworks, and policy areas, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, the right to education, labour rights, social and economic rights, equality and non-discrimination, digital rights, as well as, of course, cultural policy and public funding.

In practice, however, a narrow understanding of artistic freedom, even when accompanied by genuine political ambition to protect it, often prevents declarative and symbolic commitments from translating into real change. A partial and selective approach to artistic freedom can also serve as a deliberate strategy to keep the concept confined to theoretical commitments and symbolic statements, while avoiding more far-reaching action. As Professor Alexandra Xanthaki, UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, observed at IFACCA's World Summit for Arts and Culture 2023 on artistic freedom, *'states might choose to see only the parts of artistic freedom in which they are interested, rather than having a wider and more inclusive understanding of what artistic freedom entails'*[34]. In other words, a government may deprioritise artistic freedom in the absence of direct censorship, claiming that no problem exists, while in reality artists may face precarious economic and social conditions and structural inequalities.

This fragmented recognition of artistic freedom is further complicated by competing interpretations of freedom as a political concept. Different political forces instrumentalise artistic freedom - or freedom more broadly - for specific ideological purposes: from left-wing appeals for progressive ideas to right-wing populist demands to amplify voices excluded from public debate due to the insulting or even illegal nature of their statements[35]. Such polarisation dilutes the very notion of freedom and obstructs the development of political measures that could enable artists to exercise the full range of rights that together constitute their artistic freedom, as defined by UNESCO.

At a time when democracy itself is under pressure, an issue underscored by data and formally recognised at the EU level,  it is essential that political commitments to artistic freedom do not remain confined to symbolic discourse or eloquent speeches. This is not only because artistic freedom is a fundamental driver of democracy, but also because rhetorical commitments unaccompanied by action - and even worse, set against a backdrop of worsening conditions for artists - can erode trust between people and decision-makers. Such erosion undermines efforts to foster citizen engagement in democratic processes, which is urgently needed in the second quarter of the 21st century, to rebuild and strengthen Europe's democratic systems.

However, recognising the all-encompassing and complex nature of artistic freedom should not itself become an obstacle to implementing effective solutions for its protection and promotion. What is needed is a structured and clear framework that focuses on the most essential and clearly defined components of artistic freedom: freedom to express, create, and participate.

In this document, we propose to understand artistic freedom through the lens of cultural rights. More specifically, we focus on the right of people to engage with the arts both as creators and as participants, while acknowledging the blurry line between these two roles. We asked our members about both their own artistic freedom and the public's freedom to engage with the arts within wider society. The responses provide insights into a range of trends and issues: from widely discussed concerns such as political pressures and attacks, to challenges less frequently connected to artistic freedom, including rigid funding structures, the gap between discourse and action, the marginalisation of culture in politics, growing social polarisation, and structural inequalities.

# What shapes people's engagement with the arts

# Policy and funding context

Survey respondents were invited to share any recent or upcoming changes in funding programmes, structures, or strategies supporting culture in their country that, in their view, have had or are likely to have an impact on citizens' engagement with the performing arts.

Before delving into the analysis of the survey responses, we acknowledge that in many parts of the world there is little tradition of public support for culture, and public funding is not widespread. However, because most survey respondents come from regions with state support for the arts, a significant part of this report focuses on the trends in this field.

Predominantly, respondents expressed a sense of discouragement regarding the policy and funding context in which they work. We subsequently mapped and assessed the measures they reported, classifying the overwhelming majority as negative and only a small fraction as positive. Overall, respondents expressed concern about the current state of people's right to freely engage with the performing arts. Nearly 56% of all respondents considered the statement *'people's right to freely engage with the performing arts is under threat'* to be extremely or very relevant, while only around 18% disagreed with it.

According to respondents, people's engagement with the arts depends on a variety of factors - ranging from education, free time, and economic means to digital access, the diversity of cultural offerings, the availability of suitable infrastructure, and the broader conditions that shape the creation and distribution of the arts. Through our survey, performing arts professionals shared their perspectives on these factors, predominantly through the lens of measures and events that affect the environment in which the arts are created and distributed.

Among the measures we classified as negative, the most frequently cited trends were related to public funding, primarily for culture, although a few respondents noted changes in education funding or general government spending on public services. Other reported changes included shifts in the overall political climate, particularly in countries or municipalities that had recently held elections, as well as the broader uncertainty such as collapses or crises of governments and other instabilities, linked to economic conditions and conflicts. Changes in cultural governance and legal initiatives were mentioned by only a small number of respondents.

Among the trends classified as positive, most relate to specific new policies or funding instruments aimed at increasing audience engagement, improving accessibility for people with disabilities, or reaching particular groups or regions.



**Policy & funding changes affecting citizens' engagement with the performing arts**

Negative — 84%

Positive — 16%



**People's right to freely engage with the performing arts is under threat**

Extremely relevant — 10.1%

Very relevant — 45.7%

Neither relevant or irrelevant — 26.1%

Not very relevant — 16.6%

Not very relevant — 1.5%
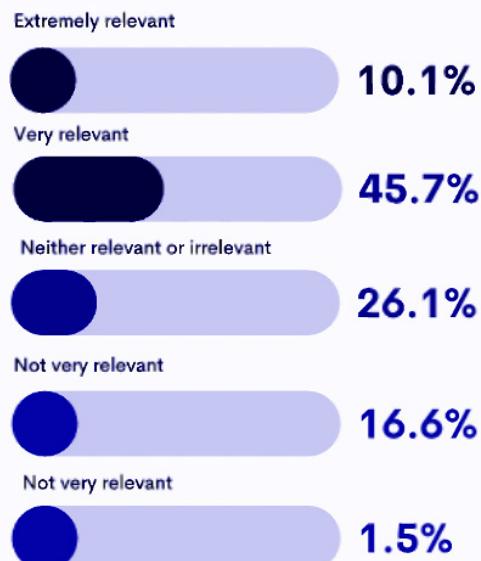


**Trends affecting people's engagement with the arts**

Funding

Political climate

Audience policies

Political (in)stability

Governance

Legal changes

0   20   40   60   80   100   120
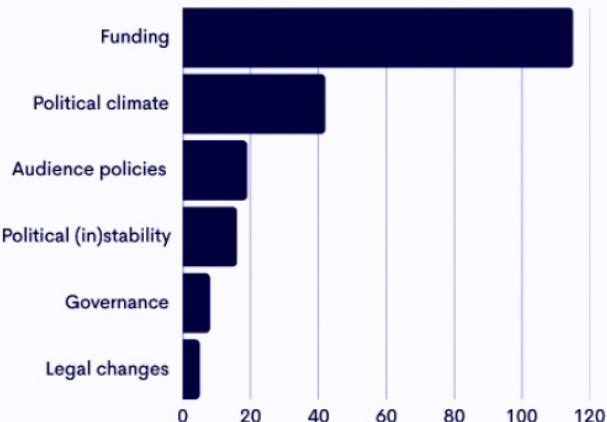
Some respondents also highlighted growing societal and policy-level awareness of inclusion and diversity, although only a small number referred to structured changes, such as adopting new laws. Below, we unpack these key trends identified by respondents.

# 1. Public funding

Multiple issues were reported in relation to public funding for culture. The overwhelming majority of respondents pointed to budget reductions or long-term freezes; the disproportionate defunding of the independent performing arts scene; and the lack of balance and transparency in how funding is allocated and managed. Other concerns included the growing administrative complexity, rigidity, and competitiveness of application processes, as well as shifting priorities and funding modalities that force applicants to divert their focus from their core strengths toward causes and missions that are often too ambitious and too wide-ranging given the available resources and organisational capacities.



**Funding**

- Overall decrease
- Precarity of independent scene
- Lack of balance and transparency
- Change of priorities
- Bureaucracy

## 1.1. Budget shifts

Several issues related to public funding were reported by survey respondents, the most pressing being its low and declining levels. Global levels of public funding for culture has been notoriously low in recent decades. According to UNESCO, global investment in culture has been falling over the past decade[36], while an OECD study shows that government expenditure on culture in OECD countries has still not recovered to pre-2008 levels after the financial crisis[37]. In the EU, the share of GDP allocated to culture remains remarkably low - just 0.5% on average - and has stayed at this level since 2014. Only six member states have seen a slight increase (on average 0.2%) between 2014 and 2022, while nine recorded a decrease and twelve remained unchanged[38].

Recent developments have further threatened the stability of public cultural investment. Many European countries are grappling with rising budget deficits, with eight EU member states currently subject to the EU's excessive deficit procedures[39]. This points to looming economic challenges, compounded by rather high inflation levels, and raises the likelihood of new austerity measures across the continent.

However, the cultural funding situation across Europe - and even within individual national contexts - is complex and uneven. Countries where funding cuts were reported by multiple respondents include Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the UK. As the survey makes clear, in most countries represented, low levels of public funding for culture remain a significant obstacle to the sector's ability to create freely and engage meaningfully with the public.
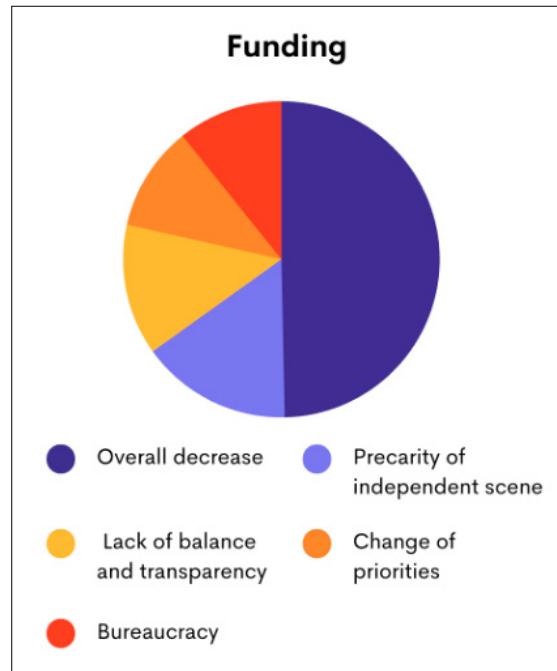
However, as respondents highlighted, the size of the budget is far from the only factor that matters when it comes to funding. Budget increases or reductions can occur for a range of reasons, often with very different impacts on the performing arts. Examples include the cancellation of temporary support measures (such as those linked to the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility), the completion or launch of specific projects like new cultural infrastructure or European Capital of Culture initiatives, or the reallocation of certain activities to other budget lines, such as education or social affairs. What ultimately matters is how funds are allocated and which priorities are pursued. Respondents from several countries expressed particular concern that recent cuts have disproportionately affected vulnerable but essential parts of the sector - namely the independent scene, internationalisation of the arts, and community-based projects.

EXAMPLE

# Cultural budget shifts

Many countries in Europe and beyond have faced budget reductions in recent years, and these are projected into the future. These cuts have been driven by various factors including economic pressures, deficit reduction efforts, and shifting political priorities. Other countries have not officially reduced cultural budgets or even increased them, but resources were reallocated to specific priorities hitting other areas that are essential for citizens' engagement with arts.

## Finland

The Finance Minister has proposed €900 million in total spending cuts for 2025[40], with culture among the sectors targeted. The allocation for arts and culture is approximately €535 million, around €20 million less than in 2024[41]. Most of the reduction (€17.4 million) stems from savings in line with the Government Programme on discretionary grants awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Of this, €10.9 million comes from central government funding for performing arts (€7.9 million) and museums (€3 million), while €6.5 million comes from discretionary government grant appropriations. A further €5.1 million cut will affect grants for national communities in the arts and culture, investments in cultural facilities, promotion of film, audiovisual culture and creative content, international cooperation, and intercultural dialogue. The Arts Promotion Centre Finland will implement approximately €1.3 million in cuts from its own budget, while the Finnish Heritage Agency's funding for civil society organisations in museums and cultural heritage will be reduced by €90,000. Subsidies to foundations and associations are slated for a €100 million cut[42].

## France

In February 2024, €10 billion in overall budget cuts were announced, in addition to the €16 billion reduction in spending already built into the 2024 budget. While much of the reduction has focused on cuts to environmental initiatives and medical transport, the cultural sector is also among the areas affected[43]. The culture budget was reduced by €150 million, though it still amounts to just over €4 billion. Within this, cultural creation was the only line to receive an increase, rising to €45 million. By contrast, funding for national heritage projects fell by €200 million, while the budget for the 'transmission of knowledge and democratisation of culture' was reduced by €20 million. The Culture Pass programme, designed to help young people access cultural events and products, saw its allocation cut from €97 million to €72 million[44]. At the local level, the 2025 budget reduced state subsidies to councils by €2.2 billion[45].

## Germany

The federal cultural budget for 2025 has shown mixed developments. Overall, the budget rose to €2.25 billion, which is an increase of more than €50 million[46]. In 2025, film funding grew by €11.3 million, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation received an additional €25 million, and Deutsche Welle also saw its funding increase. At the same time, however, the Federal Cultural Funds were cut by approximately 50%, hitting the six federal funds (Literature, Translation, Performing Arts, Sociocultural, Music, and Art) particularly hard[47]. Germany's *Kulturpass* programme, which had provided €200 vouchers to 18-year-olds for cultural activities, will reportedly be discontinued after 2025 due to funding cuts[48]. In 2026, the federal cultural budget is expected to amount to €2.5 billion, which is an increase from 2025, with more funds earmarked, for example, for the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the construction of the New National Gallery - Museum of the 20th Century, the investment grants, and the category 'Incentive to Strengthen Film and Series Production in Germany'[49]. The Berlin government introduced a cut of €130 million in 2025, affecting many performing arts organisations, some of which have to close their doors in 2026[50]. According to bbk berlin (September 2025), Berlin's funding for public art has shrunk by over 85% compared to 2024[51]. Significant cuts for culture were introduced in draft budgets of other cities, such as Cologne, slashing 20% of culture budget 2025/2026[52].

EXAMPLE
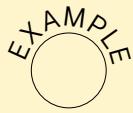
## Italy

The 2025 Budget Law introduced significant cuts to the Ministry of Culture. Reductions of €147.6 million were introduced in 2025, followed by €178.1 million in 2026 and €204.08 million in 2027. The ministry's 2024 budget already stood at €3.5 billion - around 0.4% of the national budget - representing a drop of €124 million compared to 2023[53]. The majority of the 2025 cuts (€144.05m, €176.54m, and €202.56m respectively) will fall under the mission Protection and Enhancement of Cultural and Landscape Heritage and Activities, particularly the line for Planning and Allocation of Resources for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (€100.9m in 2025, €139.77m in 2026, and €167.02m in 2027). At the same time, the National Fund for Live Performing Arts is increased by €500,000 for the year 2025 and 1 million euros for each of the years 2026 and 2027[54].

## Sweden

The total cultural budget stands at SEK 9.6 billion, up from SEK 9.3 billion in 2025 - a nominal increase of SEK 315 million (+3.4%). However, to maintain the same budget share as last year (0.65%), culture would have required an additional SEK 341 million. This year, the culture budget corresponds to a share of 0.62 percent of the country's total budget, which has not been this low in 26 years[55]. The 2025 budget aimed to increase students' access to art and culture: creative schools, operating for fifteen years, will receive an additional SEK 50 million over three years, raising support for schools from SEK 176 million to SEK 226 million to enhance student access to culture and provide more opportunities for cultural creators. The budget also includes measures to enhance co-financing within Creative Europe, and emphasises preparations ahead of Sweden hosting the European Capital of Culture in 2029. The largest cuts target regional cultural activities funded through the cultural collaboration model, with SEK 20 million withdrawn from the regions[56]. This has affected the study associations that own around 265 culture houses, more than 4 000 rehearsal spaces, and over 90 000 people have the possibility to play music, access to coaching, instruments, and courses every year. Over three years starting in 2024, the government cut SEK 500 million (approximately €43.5 million) from study associations, for which these reductions risk closing rehearsal spaces, music houses, and concert venues that nurture the next generation of artists[57].

## United Kingdom

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will have a budget 2025–26 representing around 0.35% of total government spending. Over the Spending Review period (2025/26–2028/29), the department faces a 1.4% reduction in real terms - comprising a 1.2% cut to resource budgets and a 2.8% cut to capital budgets. With inflation factored in, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates the cuts will cost an additional £11 million in real terms by 2029. This marks the second consecutive Spending Review in which the Chancellor has cut the DCMS budget in real terms while overall government spending has risen. At the previous review, overall spending grew by 5.4% while the DCMS budget shrank by 6.2%. By 2029, government spending per citizen on culture, media, and sport is projected to be more than a third lower in real terms compared with 2010, deepening the current 32% decline. Local authorities remain the largest public funders of culture, heritage, and libraries in England, but their investment has almost halved since 2010. Meanwhile, some targeted support continues: through the Dormant Assets Scheme Strategy, £440 million will be allocated to social causes, including £132.5 million dedicated to improving young people's access to culture, arts, sport, and safe spaces[58].

It is important to note that cuts to culture in many countries are unfolding against a broader backdrop of austerity. Several respondents highlighted that budget reductions are affecting the entire public sector, which creates additional strain on the arts - even in places where they have not (yet) been directly defunded. For example, when education receives less funding or is pressured to address an increasing number of priorities within unchanged budgets, teachers are forced to make difficult choices, and creative or artistic activities often suffer. One respondent reflected on the shrinking space for collaboration with schools: '*It is becoming more and more complicated to organise small events, and direct relationships with schools also face greater obstacles. Teachers are increasingly overburdened and fearful of being held responsible in case of failure*'.

The same applies to youth NGOs and other civil society organisations that usually work with the cultural sector or indirectly strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities - including those at risk of exclusion - to engage in cultural life. According to respondents, in some countries, such as Finland, the Netherlands, and Germany, governments are planning to reduce or have reduced funding for work with migrants and asylum seekers. In the long run, this will affect newcomers' ability to access local public goods, including culture.

At the same time, a few respondents, though a minority, noted positive dynamics in cultural budgets - typically increases for specific projects or initiatives that enhance public access to the arts, or establishment of new programmes and systems, such as Basic Income For the Arts in Ireland. Positive changes were also reported in Iceland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, and the Czech Republic, although in the latter the respondents spoke primarily about the EU Recovery and Resilience support, which is set to end in autumn 2025. Some respondents point to subsidy increases implemented under specific conditions. For instance, a respondent from Cyprus, shared that an additional amount of money is given to any theatre company which involves an inclusive practice in their (already) funded project. According to the respondent, most companies use this programme mostly adding sign language translation or subtitles to their productions.

## Denmark - Culture Pass scheme

In 2025, the Danish government has launched a "Kulturpas" (Culture Pass) scheme aimed at helping young people who are disengaged from education or employment by integrating them into cultural, sports, and community life. Under the scheme, eligible youth receive a digital card worth DKK 1,000 per year which they can use to access culture, association, and sports activities. The Culture Ministry has established a national partnership with cultural, sports, and community organisations to identify target youth, distribute the passes, and help support usage of the card. A total of DKK 60 million is allocated for the digital card programme in 2025–2026. In addition, there is a "kulturpas-forløb" (culture pass programme) component, where DKK 40 million has been earmarked over 2025–2026 to support initiatives, lasting several months or short group courses, designed to promote well-being and employment among youth. These programmes will be awarded through calls for proposals to help organisations develop or host these interventions59.

## Ireland - Basic Income for the Arts

Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot scheme is an initiative launched by the Irish government in April 2022 to address the financial instability faced by artists and arts workers. Spearheaded by then-Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Catherine Martin, the three-year pilot provides €325 per week (approximately €16,900 annually) to 2,000 randomly selected artists and creative workers60. Unlike traditional grant programmes, the BIA operates as a non-competitive, lottery-based selection system from over 8,200 eligible applicants, with recipients required to register as self-employed and pay income tax on the payments61. Originally scheduled to conclude in August 2025, the government extended the pilot by six months until February 2026, with Minister Patrick O'Donovan intending to present proposals for a successor scheme as part of Budget 202662. The programme has been pivotal in fostering recipients' engagement with their communities. Participants reported involving local stakeholders by hiring local crew, hosting reading groups, organising fundraising events, and connecting directly with community groups through facilitation or state-funded initiatives such as Heritage Week and Culture Night. Recipients also emphasised the importance of supporting minority communities, forming collectives for artists with minority identities, and accessing training or mentorship to facilitate these interactions ethically and effectively63. Importantly, according to the evaluation of the programme, the BIA scheme has significantly reduced the proportion of artists who feel that "low pay" is a barrier to working in the arts64.

## Luxembourg - increase for contracted cultural institutions

Luxembourg's 2025 draft national budget allocates €287.7 million to the Ministry of Culture, marking a 12.8% increase from 2024. Of this, €256 million is earmarked for current expenditures and €31 million for capital investments, representing 0.98% of the total state budget. The budget prioritises support for the contracted cultural sector, allocating approximately €131 million to 11 public institutions and other organisations, with plans to index agreements with certain cultural structures to enhance financial stability. Heritage preservation and archaeology are also emphasised, with the National Institute for Architectural Heritage (INPA) receiving €7.5 million for five new built heritage inventories and the National Institute for Archaeological Research (INRA) allocated €18 million for preventive and emergency archaeological excavations, with the state covering all associated costs starting in 2025. Audiovisual production support is strengthened with €41 million, including €5.57 million for the operational costs of Film Fund Luxembourg (FONSPA), and €5.5 million for the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA), a 32% increase, to modernise technical facilities and expand activities65. While not specified officially, the support for the Kulturpass programme, an initiative offering individuals and families facing economic hardship affordable access to cultural events, has been reportedly also increased66.

## Switzerland - Concept Funding in Zurich

Zürich has undergone significant cultural policy reforms centered around the *Kulturleitbild* 2024-2027 (Cultural Strategy 2024-2027)67. The reforms emerged from extensive consultation with cultural stakeholders and were informed by the three-year *Kultur Labor Zürich* project (2021-2023), which tested innovative funding approaches. The most groundbreaking element of the reform is the new *Konzeptförderung* (concept funding) system for dance and theatre, launched on January 1, 2024. Instead of annual applications, successful institutions receive funding for six years, while independent groups and artists can secure funding for two to four years. This provides continuity and security for cultural practitioners. Moreover, funding decisions are based on artistic concepts proposed by applicants themselves, rather than rigid criteria alone. The goal is  to diversify the offerings within the city's performing arts sector by providing sustained funding over an extended period. This approach aims to attract independent artists and create more opportunities for emerging performers and individuals from a broader range of backgrounds to establish themselves in the field68. The city also oversees and invests in ArtFAQ, a platform formed through the merger of several production and touring specialists, providing advice, networking, training and further education, particularly for young artists69.

## UK - Arts Everywhere programme

At the start of 2025, the UK government announced Arts Everywhere, a £270 million flagship cultural investment programme. *Arts Everywhere* provides a comprehensive funding package to support arts venues, museums, libraries, and heritage organisations across England. A key component is the Creative Foundations Fund, which allocates £85 million to help arts and cultural organisations undertake vital repairs and upgrades. The fund targets issues such as ageing infrastructure, inefficient energy systems, and inaccessible spaces, aiming to ensure that local theatres, performing arts venues, galleries, grassroots music venues, and contemporary arts centres can continue offering opportunities, developing skills, and attracting visitors from across the country. Organisations are also encouraged to apply for up to £10 million each, to enhance access for young people through creative skills development70. Despite the programme's scale, some sectors have highlighted limitations. Outdoor Arts UK noted that the fund primarily benefits indoor venues and capital projects, leaving outdoor and community-based arts activities with limited support71. Cultural education advocates, including organisations like Curious Minds, have expressed concern that only 1.2% of the total fund (£3.2 million) is dedicated to cultural education, representing a missed opportunity to expand access for children and young people72.

## 1.2. Mismatch between discourse and practice

In a few countries, respondents noted that policy priorities which have gained importance in recent years - such as fair pay, improved working conditions in the arts, and greater inclusivity - are positive in principle but difficult to implement without additional funding, especially against the backdrop of shrinking budgets. A respondent from Switzerland explained: '*At the moment there is a political process focusing on working conditions and fairly paid salaries. On the one hand, this is a positive sign. However, it is also clear that more money is needed, but financial resources are only being increased hesitantly*'.

A professional from Portugal pointed to a similar situation: the budget for supporting private cultural organisations has not increased in 2025 to keep up with inflation, leaving organisations with effectively less support at a time when legislation is pushing for improved working conditions[73].

In many places, despite growing attention to broader societal priorities, cultural organisations struggle to engage with them while maintaining their core activities. For example, Tornedalsteatern in Sweden, facing funding cuts, has been forced to postpone its reconciliation work between the state and minorities and instead focus on its basic local operations[74]. A professional from Mexico also raised the concern of mismatch between the government's intention to advance the rights of minority communities and the allocation of resources: '*Changes in cultural policies in Mexico include the new General Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities*[75]. *This law aims to safeguard the cultural heritage of these groups by recognising their collective intellectual property rights. However, the proposed 2025 federal budget includes a significant cut in funding for the Culture Ministry, which is expected to negatively impact the sector*'.

The result is that discursive celebrations and formal - even legal - commitments take place against the backdrop of a broader decline in the sector's overall conditions. The risk is not only that the arts sector is burdened with more responsibilities and expectations without corresponding support, but also that symbolic commitments turn into box-ticking exercises, preventing meaningful, long-term progress.

## 1.3. Shift in funding priorities and forms

It is not only the decrease in funding but also shifts in how funding is structured, guided, and allocated that are identified as negative trends. During periods of overall austerity, changes in funding priorities often promote the financial autonomy of the cultural sector by focusing on audience numbers and revenue, while prioritising large-scale events, cultural tourism, and content with mass appeal. In other contexts, funding may not be directly reduced, but the redirection away from core artistic activities forces organisations to engage in commercial activities to survive. Consequently, citizens are increasingly seen as cultural consumers, while meaningful engagement with the arts is not a priority.

A respondent from Romania noted that recent policy changes remove clear financial guarantees for cultural programming, shifting priorities toward administrative costs rather than artistic creation. As a result, funding for performances, exhibitions and educational activities may shrink, pushing institutions to depend more heavily on commercial revenue and external sponsorship. They further reflect: '*Without guaranteed state funding for core artistic activities, institutions may turn into rental spaces for commercial events rather than serving their primary cultural and educational mission. This jeopardises citizen engagement with high-quality, non-commercial artistic content*'.

Similarly, a professional from Italy commented on the dominance of numbers-driven logic in funding: '*The Italian Ministry of Culture has just published a new law76 concerning the financing of cultural entities for the next three years. This law includes audience numbers as a criterion for receiving public funds. As a result, public cultural organisations are being forced to programme more commercial performances to secure funding*'.

Respondents note that overall, with rising demands on the arts sector and decreasing funding, application and reporting procedures have become increasingly laborious. The growing administrative burden, compounded by defunding, undermines the accessibility of funding, particularly for smaller and independent players.

Furthermore, the increasing instrumentalisation of the arts, which is also a trend closely related to the overall precarity of funding that increases the need to justify its allocation in a more rigorous way, compels organisations and artists to meet multiple objectives simultaneously - such as sustainability, inclusion, urban development, and education - forcing them to divert attention from their core artistic missions. For instance, respondents from conflict-affected areas, such as Israel and Ukraine, highlighted growing expectations for the arts to serve therapeutic, educational, and social inclusion purposes, which are as such important, but can constrain artistic freedom and diminish the intrinsic value of art itself. In some contexts, heightened instrumentalisation is also reinforced by reliance on private foundations as public funds shrink. These foundations often have distinct priorities, such as social inclusion, health, or the green transition. Several respondents also noted that competition for private funds has intensified, adding further pressure on cultural organisations to align their work with broader societal agendas.

## 1.4. Funding uncertainty

Another negative trend reported by some respondents is the unpredictability of funding, often linked to shifts in government strategies, changing priorities, and political turnover. Delays in funding calls, evaluations, and subsidy disbursements disrupt activities, reduce programming, disengage audiences, and sometimes even force temporary closures of organisations.

In Spain, one respondent noted: '*Calls are published with significant delays, sometimes when the project should already be underway. In most cases, the financial aid is received only after the activity has been carried out, creating substantial financial pressure*'. In Germany, a respondent reported the general unclarity about future cultural funding and a call for the new funding period being postponed: '*Several companies have had to put their work on hold and consider letting go of long-term employees*'. Finally, a respondent from Bulgaria shared: '*The political crisis that has struck Bulgaria in the past few years, brings chaos in the main funding programmes that should support art and bring it to the audience*.'

Respondents note that instability undermines long-term relationships with communities. Interruptions in programming, diversion of internal resources from artistic creation to crisis management, halted planning, reduced collaboration with local civil society organisations, and the cessation of experimental initiatives all contribute to these ruptures.

## 1.5. Lack of balance and transparency in the allocation of funding

A recurring issue is the selective allocation of funding and lack of transparency in decision-making. Bureaucratic hurdles, favoritism, and politicisation have been cited by several respondents as major barriers. On that note, a respondent commented: '*The requirements of grant calls change constantly and are not always clearly defined. Furthermore, there is no consultative body to ensure consistency, so we often depend on the subjective interpretation of an individual official'. Another respondent observed: 'The overall budget is slightly decreasing, while the number of applicants keeps increasing, leading to a very selective allocation of funding*'.

Many respondents discussed the lack of balance in project-based and structured support. Project-based funding, if not complemented by operational support, particularly for independent performing arts, further limits stability, planning, and experimentation. In Serbia, for instance, respondents highlighted the scarcity of long-term support for independent artists and companies beyond annual open calls.

While short-term projects can support a balanced ecosystem alongside multi-annual activities, a shift toward fewer, larger initiatives reduces opportunities for emerging and smaller organisations. A respondent noted: '*The Danish Arts Foundation has cut down the number of application rounds from three to one*[77]. *This demands a long planning horizon, puts short-term projects on hold, and makes it nearly impossible for younger artists to enter*'. In general, shifts in support from emerging to established organisations - or vice versa - can destabilise the ecosystem, which needs both strong long-term players and new voices.

Respondents from Greece highlighted insufficient support for research, experimentation, and independent theatre. One commented: '*No funding for research, less and less space for experimentation. Big institutions shape the field with their choices'. Another respondent from Greece noted: 'The survival of independent theatre companies and small theatres is at risk, highlighting the need for stable, transparent, and accessible funding*'.

Turning to private foundations is sometimes a solution, but, as a few voices flagged, reliance on private donors alone in their countries can also create an opaque and imbalanced landscape, lacking transparency and insight into the overall landscape of how and who is supported in the arts and why.

These trends affect citizens' engagement with the arts in multiple ways. Cuts increase competition for limited resources, pushing artists and organisations toward self-censorship and 'safe' choices. Risk-taking and experimentation decline, narrowing the diversity of artistic voices. For audiences, this translates into a less varied, less innovative, and less representative cultural offer. Precarity in the sector limits long-term projects that build audience relationships. Centralisation of funding and infrastructure concentrates cultural opportunities in large urban centres, making access harder for smaller towns, rural areas, and marginalised communities. Finally, commercialisation raises the cost of participation, turning cultural experiences into consumer goods rather than shared public goods.

# 2. Political climate

In 2024, more than half of the world's population went to the polls. With over 70 countries holding elections – including eight of the ten most populous – it was the largest election year since the invention of universal suffrage. The defining trend of this 'mega election year' was a widespread voter backlash against leading parties and individuals. Many sitting leaders were voted out of office or saw their support shrink. Numerous elections strengthened populist and radical anti-establishment parties[78].

Conservative and far-right parties have achieved unprecedented success across democracies, with right-wing populist movements now in government or supporting ruling coalitions in many countries. In Europe, both the EU elections and several recent national elections have shifted the political landscape to the right, leaving the European Parliament more right-leaning than ever before.

The shift to the right often translates into stricter border controls, tougher migration policies, and a stronger emphasis on national identity, frequently at the expense of global openness and cooperation. Right-wing populist parties also bring a distinct approach to supporting, promoting, and governing culture and the arts. Rather than embracing values of diversity and inclusivity, they often tend to instrumentalise the arts for political ends or dismiss them as elitist and undeserving of taxpayer support[79].

## 2.1. 'Anti-woke' and nationalistic discourse

Not all right-wing populist parties approach culture in the same way. Those aligned with illiberal, nationalist, or religious agendas, such as Fidesz, the leading party in Hungary, and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, which backed Karol Nawrocki in his June 2025 presidential win, tend to reframe culture as a tool for consolidating national identity, which often entails significant state control. In Hungary, Orbán's government placed cultural funding under direct political oversight, replaced independent arts administrators with loyalists, and promoted historical revisionism through museums and theatres. In Poland, PiS used culture as an instrument of ideological warfare, silencing dissenting voices in national institutions and enforcing a homogenised, state-approved narrative[80].

Shifts towards right-wing ideologies have also been seen in some countries with cultural policies traditionally leaning towards democratic values. In Flanders, the Vlaams Belang, far-right and nationalist party that has achieved a breakthrough in elections in 2024, states in its manifesto: 'Culture is more than art. In addition to artistic activities such as painting, drawing, sculpting, acting, dancing, singing, making music, writing, or filming, culture also includes a shared language, religion, heritage, traditions, customs, norms, and values'[81]. This integration of culture with broader notions, such as traditions and language, is also seen in the cultural policies of the Finns Party in Finland and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden (both second-largest parties in their Parliaments) - both interested in using culture to develop socially and culturally homogenous nations[82].

The Party for Freedom (PVV), the right-wing party in the Netherlands that participated in the governing coalition between July 2024 and June 2025, links culture to protecting traditions such as Christmas and Easter, and to defending the rights of 'native Dutch people' who, according to the party, have become victims of 'positive discrimination' and 'affirmative action' promoted by the arts, broadcasting, politics, academia, and many municipalities[83].

For other right-wing parties, the emphasis on freedom, including artistic freedom, is framed as liberation from a 'one-sided' view of history. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), for instance, asserts: 'The current narrowing of German culture of remembrance to the period of National Socialism must be broken in favour of a broader view of history that also includes the positive, identity-forming aspects of German history'[84].

Cultural policy focused on national pride and identity, alongside discourses demonising the arts as sources of 'woke' ideas, is not conducive to fostering a diverse and accessible art field or meaningfully engaging marginalised or minority groups. Cultural practices that do not promise tangible benefits - whether in terms of economic gain, image-building for those in power, or advancing a political ideology - struggle to survive in such contexts. In countries where efforts to engage diverse populations with the arts remain limited to initiatives and programmes rather than overarching strategies and visions, these efforts are easily discontinued as political priorities shift. As one respondent from Italy observed: '*Major cultural programmes do not consider engagement a priority, and there have not been specific strategies to promote it. Instead, investment is increasingly directed toward initiatives that serve the government's efforts to shape a populist cultural identity.*'

## 2.2. Political and legal pressures

In some countries, however, the challenges go beyond the mere deprioritisation of audience engagement and cultural participation. Many respondents highlight shifts in government priorities that have resulted in censorship or ideological restrictions within the cultural sector. In places where right-wing politicians have increased their influence in recent years, there is growing concern that cultural policy could become a tool for political agendas, with boards and institutions pressured to align with government views or risk losing support. Political dismissals and appointments are cited not only as direct infringements on artistic freedom but also as a broader societal concern. As one respondent noted: '*Less artistically driven leadership in cultural institutions leads to potential declines in innovative and high-quality productions*'.

EXAMPLE
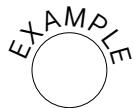
### Politisation of Arts and Culture in Slovakia

The report by the Artistic Freedom Initiative and Open Culture!, The Politicisation of Arts and Culture in Slovakia, highlights the impact of recent political shifts to the right on Slovakia's cultural sector. The newly elected coalition government, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico and composed of SMER-SSD, HLAS, and the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS), has moved to politicise the country's cultural institutions. Fico's fourth mandate has intensified democratic backsliding, characterized by anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-immigrant rhetoric, hostility toward independent media, and Euroscepticism.

Control of the Ministry of Culture was handed to SNS and its minister, Martina Šimkovičová, a far-right media figure with no cultural management experience. Under her leadership, the Ministry has shifted from supporting cultural diversity to enforcing nationalist ideology, centralizing funding decisions, dismissing experienced professionals, and prioritising 'traditional' Slovak values while sidelining progressive and minority voices.

Recent legislative amendments have further weakened transparency in the appointment and dismissal of cultural institution directors, abolished public hearings, and expanded ministerial control over the Audiovisual Fund and the Slovak Arts Council. Expert-led evaluations have been replaced by politically aligned appointees, giving the government veto power over funding for projects that conflict with its ideology.

The Ministry has also targeted LGBTQ+ initiatives, cutting funding, overruling expert committee decisions, and canceling projects. Specific cases include defunding LGBTQ+ festivals, banning a children's book on gender identity, removing LGBTQ+ artworks from exhibitions, and canceling performances with LGBTQ+ themes[85].

As professionals in the field note, the damage caused by such tactics is not easily reversed, even after a regime change. For example, Poland has experienced shifts between populist and pro-democratic governments, yet, according to some representatives from the art field, progress in cultural policy has proven to be more challenging than anticipated.

EXAMPLE
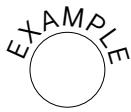
## Poland: challenges to reverse the damage

At the IETM Plenary Meeting in Berlin, during the session on artistic freedom, Jakub Depczyński, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, offered a trenchant diagnosis of how far-right regimes strategically dismantle cultural ecosystems. Speaking explicitly in a personal capacity, Depczyński highlighted the five systematic tactics used by Poland's previous ultra-conservative government to capture the cultural field:

1. Replacing leadership in the cultural institutions that are hierarchical by design can effectively change the position and discourse of the entire system.

2. Creating parallel structures: instead of firing staff, the regime created duplicative, loyalist bodies alongside existing institutions that were defunded. This can lead to marginalising dissenting voices while maintaining an appearance of continuity.

3. Introducing small improvements: initial policies included raising salaries and improving contracts for the most precariously employed workers, creating a veneer of progress and making the environment less conducive to dissent and resistance.

4. Redefining the essence of culture: the regime avoided overt censorship. Instead, it manipulated funding mechanisms, reshaped criteria for grants, and weaponised terms like 'woke', 'liberal propaganda', and 'cultural Marxism' to delegitimise progressive art.

5. Undermining collective resilience: the government targeted solidarity itself - driving wedges between climate, feminist, migrant, and artistic movements, rendering resistance fragmented and easier to suppress.

The damage inflicted on culture by such regimes is not easily reversed, even when political tides shift. Depczyński offered a sobering reflection on the aftermath of Poland's far-right government. While its removal from power brought hope, the coalition of centrist, Christian democratic, and left parties has proven deeply disappointing to many artists and cultural workers. Not only has the successor government failed to undo the structural damage, but they have often adopted similar mechanisms of control - prioritising mainstream narratives, sidelining progressive or critical practices, and applying subtle forms of censorship masked as depoliticisation. Depczyński warned of how the shift from overt censorship to instrumentalisation of culture is often equally dangerous: 'You're not directly censored, but you are asked not to be divisive. You're told to make work that "unifies". And suddenly your only option is to paint landscapes, horses, still lifes'. This kind of censorship - through funding criteria, discourse management, and aesthetic pressure - produces a chilling effect that undermines critical art just as effectively as direct bans[86].

International conflicts, in particular, the Israeli-Gaza war, have also affected the state of the freedom of expression in some countries, with Germany being one example.

EXAMPLE

## Resolution 'Never Again is Now: Protecting, Preserving, and Strengthening Jewish Life in Germany'

On November 7, 2024, the German Bundestag passed a cross-party resolution titled '*Never Again is Now: Protecting, Preserving, and Strengthening Jewish Life in Germany*'. Although the resolution is non-binding, it carries significant consequences for anyone seeking public funding in Germany's state-subsidised arts and culture sector.

The resolution states that no organisation or project should receive public funding if it 'spreads antisemitism, questions Israel's right to exist, calls for a boycott of Israel, or actively supports the BDS movement'[87].

Human Rights Watch noted that Germany's approach equates defending Israel with protecting Jews from hate in Germany, creating a framework so broad that it could encompass individuals whose criticism of Israel has 'no antisemitic intent'[88]. Legal scholars and civil society organisations have described the resolution as creating a 'chilling effect' on academic and artistic freedom[89]. Amnesty International's Germany chapter criticised the resolution for potentially resulting in 'serious violations of basic human rights and legal uncertainty'[90].

Concerns about international cultural isolation are also emerging, particularly in the context of stricter immigration policies and declining global cooperation. Visa issues have historically posed serious barriers to global equity in the performing arts, and with the political shift to the right and tightening migration policies in Europe and the US, the situation is unlikely to improve. Moreover, respondents from the Global South reported that international political tensions have created uncertainty around foreign donors, making applications for certain international funds potentially risky due to domestic repercussions. One respondent observed that cultural relations with the global South are coming under increasing pressure from anti-migration policies of European countries.

## 2.3. Weak foundations of the culture portfolio

Furthermore, many respondents highlighted the broader deprioritisation of culture and cultural policy amid shifting political realities, often reflecting weaknesses such as a limited cultural policy portfolio and the absence of a coherent and approved cultural strategy, as is the case in Bulgaria, where *A Draft Strategy for the Development of Bulgarian Culture 2019-2029* was developed in 2019 through consultations with cultural professionals, but remains unapproved as of 2025. A lack of a long-term governmental vision and strategy signals an insufficient recognition of culture's role in society, as well as the ad hoc or nonexistent efforts to ensure that citizens have access to a vibrant and diverse cultural life.

In some instances, the weak and incoherent position of culture within the government has resulted in appointments of officials overseeing the sector who lack expertise or genuine interest in culture and the arts. In Lithuania, the sector was concerned about the appointment of a Ministry of Culture without relevant vision and expertise. As stated in the petition by the Lithuanian cultural community, the party of the Nemunas aušra party where the candidate belongs '*has paid absolutely insignificant attention to culture in its programme, has never shown the necessary competencies to manage this extremely important area of the state, nor any commitment to protect culture and its autonomy*'. The petition called the appointment 'political', done in exchange as part of political negotiations, treating culture as 'a tool for political deals'[91]. As a result, the appointment of the Nemunas aušra party did not take place.

In a few countries, including Belgium[92] and the UK[93], discussions about a possibility of abolishing, restructuring, or merging dedicated cultural ministries or departments have signaled the vulnerable political position of culture. In some cases, such as Ireland, media coverage has cast the arts sector in a negative light due to internal issues at the Arts Council, potentially affecting the sector's public image more broadly: '*The Arts Council of Ireland are currently under scrutiny because they failed to manage a large IT project worth over €6 million to reform their application processes[94]. This has painted a negative light on arts organisations in general in the media portraying them as wasteful, which is absolutely not the case. That sort of publicity is damaging*'.

# 3. Inclusivity and diversity in cultural policy

This sub-chapter describes how the performing arts sector perceives the state of inclusivity and diversity within cultural policies - both in terms of how cultural policies promote these principles in society more broadly and how they support or hinder inclusivity and diversity within the cultural and creative sectors themselves.

Compared to questions more directly related to public engagement with the arts (see previous sections), responses on this theme suggest a somewhat more balanced ratio of positive (indicated by 41% of respondents) and negative (51%) developments, though negative changes still outweigh the positive.

Overall, respondents reported that the situation regarding public engagement with the arts has clearly deteriorated (see previous sections). At the same time, there have been some positive steps in embedding the priorities of inclusivity and diversity in cultural policy itself.

This might suggest that the promotion of these values through cultural policy does not effectively translate into a visible impact on the arts field and on people's engagement with the arts. Instead, these priorities are often perceived as symbolic - limited to changes in discourse - or implemented through specific, targeted, or temporary initiatives, which often result in shifting existing budgets between priorities, rather than through comprehensive strategies or structural reforms. Yet, the situation is complex and varies across the surveyed countries.

## 3.1. Social moods

Awareness about diversity and inclusion has been rising worldwide in the past decades. Global movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have also shown and strengthened the role of diversity and inclusion in public discourse. According to the World Economic Forum, 83% of employers now report having DEI initiatives (diversity, equity, and inclusion), a sharp increase from 67% in 2023[95]. In EU member states, since 2024, the new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) requires organisations to disclose detailed information on diversity-related policies, risks, and outcomes[96].

Yet, heightened awareness does not necessarily translate into wider acceptance, and in some contexts, it has even provoked backlash. The 2025 Global DEI Census, surveying the global marketing industry, found that while 72% of respondents acknowledged industry efforts in terms of diversity and inclusion, overall inclusion scores showed no improvement between 2021 and 2023[97]. Furthermore, in the United States, Pew Research Center data reveals declining support to the values of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): in February 2023, 56% of workers favoured an emphasis on DEI in the workplace, dropping to 52% by 2024, while opposition grew from 16% to 21%[98]. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reported that 34% of respondents of African descent experienced racial discrimination in 2022, compared with 24% in 2016. Similarly, reported discrimination among LGBTI individuals has also increased[99].

This trend - growing awareness about DEI coupled with resistance and backlash, and the deterioration of the situation of minorities - manifests differently across regions and contexts. As our respondents share, paradoxically, even in the context of rising right-wing and populist sentiments, which often target people from diverse and minority backgrounds, respondents observed that society as a whole is becoming more aware of the issues of diversity and inclusion.

Despite this growing awareness, most respondents felt that the overall social climate is not conducive to significant progress in these areas, and in some cases remains openly hostile. A respondent from Malta noted: *'General policy is still progressive and liberal, in spite of a general climate that is becoming less tolerant of diversity and inclusivity'*. Others highlighted the stagnation of progress, such as a respondent from Latvia who reflected that their country is *'still a very conservative nation and everything changes very little or nothing at all'*.

## 3.2. New legal and strategic frameworks

Access to culture is enshrined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that *'everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits'*[100]. Culture was also recognised as a 'global public good' in UNESCO's Mondiacult 2022 and 2025 Declarations[101], reaffirmed as 'an essential public good' in the Cáceres Declaration, adopted by 27 EU member states in 2023[102], and called 'a fundamental public good' in the Culture Compass. But how do these political commitments translate into practice?

Even a superficial review of official cultural strategies of current governments - at least within the EU - shows that ensuring *'culture for all'* and safeguarding every citizen's right to participate in cultural life are among the most explicit official missions of cultural ministries and core priorities in their strategies. This aligns with the very purpose of having a government department dedicated to culture: to guarantee society's access to cultural life. Yet, an analysis of the programmes of political parties currently represented on the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament reveals that *'access to culture'* is a most cited priority, but rarely approached as a comprehensive framework encompassing all cultural expressions, disciplines, and experiences. Instead, many programmes frame access narrowly, often focusing on specific domains such as museums, libraries, or archaeological sites, and prioritising access for particular groups - most young people, older adults, or persons with disabilities[103].

Notable progress in recent months, as highlighted by several respondents, includes the adoption of new charters and strategies centred on inclusion, equality, or cultural rights. In some cases, these discursive shifts have already been reflected in changes to funding criteria and priorities, or in the establishment of new instruments to engage underrepresented audiences, improve accessibility in cultural venues, or strengthen cultural provision in rural areas.

The strongest examples are those where legal and policy initiatives are backed by dedicated budgets and accompanied by new governance structures responsible for their implementation. One such example is Spain's new Cultural Rights Plan (see below), which explicitly recognises that cultural rights depend on a broad system of factors and capacities within the cultural and creative sectors - from unionisation to available infrastructure, and from digital governance to gender equality - rather than being addressed solely through targeted, short-term initiatives for specific audience groups.

# Cultural participation
# Policy initiatives

### Iceland: Creating dedicated agency to implement a new plan

In 2023, Iceland's parliament (Althingi) adopted a Parliamentary Resolution on an Action Plan for Enhancing Children's Culture for the years 2024–2028. The resolution outlines three main objectives: to improve coordination and strengthen policy development in the field of children's culture, to expand access to arts, culture, and arts education for children and young people, and to consolidate the activities of the *Art for All (List fyrir alla)* project together with Iceland's Children's Cultural Fund. As part of this effort, a new Children's Culture Center is meant to be established, to operate both the *Art for All* project and the Children's Cultural Fund[104].

### Lithuania: In shrining cultural right in the culture law

Lithuania passed its first comprehensive Fundamentals of Cultural Policy Law (Kultūros politikos pagrindų įstatymas) in June 2024, which came into effect on January 1, 2025. The law establishes that the primary objective of cultural policy is to 'ensure the preservation, continuity and international competitiveness of Lithuanian culture, promote balanced and sustainable cultural development, and increase cultural inclusion'[105].

The law defines four core cultural policy tasks:

1. Create conditions to realise human cultural rights and freedoms and to acquire or improve cultural and creative competencies
2. Promote cultural diversity and foster the cultural distinctiveness of Lithuania's ethnographic regions
3. Ensure equal access to quality cultural services throughout Lithuania and promote Lithuanian culture abroad
4. Strengthen cooperation between state institutions, municipal institutions, and cultural participants[106]

However, the Fundamentals of Cultural Policy Law does not yet appear to be backed by specific additional budget allocations for its implementation. Instead, the cultural budget has seen more general - yet important - increases, including €15.5 million for salary rises among cultural workers, and €3.5 million in extra funding for competitive projects[107].

### Spain: A comprehensive approach to advancing cultural rights

Spain has launched its first Cultural Rights Plan (Plan de Derechos Culturales) for the period 2025-2030. The plan was officially presented on July 8, 2025, by Culture Minister Ernest Urtasun and features 146 concrete measures backed by €79.3 million in funding through 2027 (€46 million for new lines of public investment). It includes an investment of more than €66 million in various aid programs, including new calls for cultural projects with a special social impact, support to professional associations and unions, and cooperation programmes in rural areas.

The Cultural Rights Plan establishes four strategic priorities:

1. Guarantee cultural participation on an equal footing, ensuring that all people can access, participate in, and actively contribute to cultural life, eliminating barriers, correcting structural inequalities, and recognising the diversity of cultural practices.
2. Addressing contemporary challenges through a cultural lens, in areas such as equality, diversity, sustainable development, territoriality, and physical and mental health.
3. Promote a sustainable professional network, with decent working conditions for professionals and creators, and strengthen the sustainability and independence of the cultural network.
4. Consolidate cultural rights as a framework for public action, promoting their centrality in public policies.

Over €7 million has been allocated to specific projects, including a cultural intervention program in prisons targeting women and a municipal film platform designed to increase access to film screenings in rural and less-populated areas. Within the framework of equality, the Gender Equality Plan in Culture, presented in December of last year, forms a central pillar of the broader Cultural Rights Plan. It builds on previously implemented initiatives, such as the Unit for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in the Cultural Sector, and incorporates gender criteria into public subsidy allocations. The Plan also seeks to strengthen cooperation between culture and other strategic areas. This includes projects in educational centers and artistic training for teachers in partnership with the autonomous communities, initiatives with the Mental Health Commissioner to reinforce the connection between culture and health, and collaboration with the Ministry for Ecological Transition to promote cultural equity and combat depopulation. Moreover, the Plan encompasses initiatives in democratic memory and measures aimed at advancing digital governance within the cultural sector.

Spain has established a Directorate-General for Cultural Rights within the Ministry of Culture to operationalise cultural rights across all public policies[108].

EXAMPLE

## 3.3. Lack of meaningful and strategic support

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents noted that the growing attention to inclusion and diversity within the discourse of cultural policy, even if symbolically vital, is not always backed by increased budgets, new governance structures, legal frameworks, or feasible implementation plans. Several respondents spoke about the lack of resources to provide disability support, while this has become a requirement. A respondent from Ireland shared: '*Disability access costs for audiences now need to be included as part of your production budget when applying for Arts Council funding - there is no additional funding available for audience access costs. Therefore, if you wish to make your production more accessible, other production costs are negatively impacted*'.

Moreover, others reflected about the negative effect of 'inclusion and diversity' criteria in realities when funding is shrinking. Artists from marginalised backgrounds tailor their practices to fit funding criteria, often reinforcing fixed ideas of ethnic, cultural, or racial identity, as they feel pressured to present their identities in ways that fit existing stereotypes. The funding system often frames these choices as manifestation of personal agency or empowerment, while masking the deeper structural inequalities and systemic barriers at play. This can also lead to a 'homogeneous offer' for audiences, referred to by a respondent based between Portugal and UK: '*Diversity is paradoxically decreasing because of diversity initiatives. Those from minority groups who get the opportunities are restricted in what they can produce - it's expected to reflect their marginalised status*'.

It is striking that social engagement is promoted in the arts without widespread recognition at the governmental level that true inclusivity and accessibility require sustainable conditions for both artists and the sector as a whole. Instead, diversity- and community-related priorities are often forced into already limited support frameworks.

Yet, this is still a relatively positive scenario compared to a few countries where efforts toward inclusivity in the arts are now being purposefully brushed away or even actively suppressed.

## 3.4. Purposeful erasure of inclusivity and diversity priorities

Survey respondents report that with the rise of so-called 'anti-woke' ideologies in several countries, terms such as diversity and inclusion have increasingly become taboo. This shift is not confined to the cultural field but extends into broader areas of public life, as new regulatory measures begin to influence how institutions operate. In the United States, for example, some grantmaking processes have been affected by the introduction of restrictions on language use. As one US-based respondent observed: '*There is a growing list of words which can flag a grant and either hold up the process or deny the request*'.

**EXAMPLE**
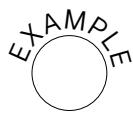
## United States

In the United States, shortly after the start of his second presidential term, Donald Trump issued several orders that both reflect and shape the changing political climate in the country:

→ The executive order *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling* (29 January 2025) directs federal agencies to cut off funding or support for what it labels "illegal and discriminatory treatment and indoctrination" in K–12 schools - particularly relating to gender and equity ideologies. It mandates that the Secretaries of Education, Defense, and Health & Human Services (in consultation with the Attorney General) develop, within 90 days, an 'Ending Indoctrination Strategy' aimed at 'eliminating Federal funding or support for illegal and discriminatory treatment and indoctrination in K-12 schools, including based on gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology'. The order also restores the President's Advisory 1776 Commission to promote "patriotic education"[110].

→ The executive order '*Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*' (20 January 2025) declares that sex is an immutable biological reality and rejects the use of "gender identity" in federal policy. It directs all federal agencies to define terms such as "sex," "women," and "men" strictly in biological terms, removing references to gender identity from policy documents, programmes, and forms. Agencies are required to rescind or block any regulations, funding streams, or guidance that promote what the order calls "gender ideology."[111].

The Trump Administration has also cancelled several National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants. Hundreds of arts groups of various sizes across the U.S. received emails notifying them of the withdrawal and termination of their grants, just hours after President Trump proposed eliminating the agency entirely from the federal budget. 'The NEA is updating its grantmaking policy priorities to focus funding on projects that reflect the nation's rich artistic heritage and creativity as prioritised by the President', the email stated in part[112].

Across Europe, negative dynamics are unfolding, though not immediately and massively reflected in new laws, but rather in deprioritising certain issues.

In Sweden, concerns are growing about the erosion of the arms-length principle - the mechanism of keeping politics at a distance from cultural content. Several respondents note that they feel political influence has become more visible in funding decisions, particularly in municipalities where projects on themes such as LGBTQIA+ rights, antiracism, and migration have been deprioritised or rejected. Such developments risk undermining artistic freedom and narrowing the cultural space for critical voices.

In Norway, as one respondent reflected, the Truth and Reconciliation Report, produced by the Commission to Investigate the Norwegianisation Policy and Injustice against the Sámi and Kvens/Norwegian Finns[109], remains a key document, underscoring the limited opportunities for minority groups to engage in cultural life, to see their languages represented on stage, or to experience cultural content that reflects their realities. Yet, according to the respondent, there is little political will to implement the report's recommendations, leaving inequalities largely unaddressed.

A respondent from Italy shared: '*Recent policy shifts have significantly reduced inclusivity and diversity in cultural policy. The government has discontinued the funding programme for artists with disabilities, which was established just two years ago, without providing further information or alternatives. Additionally, there is a clear decline in interest towards the Green Deal, as well as a reduction in support for community-driven projects. The current approach prioritizes aesthetics over ethics, focusing solely on market-driven success and numerical impact rather than fostering cultural value, social engagement, and long-term sustainability*'.

## 3.5. Persisting gaps in recognition and action

Concluding this section - the situation with inclusion and diversity progress in cultural policy is complex and differs from country to country. Overall, there appears to be a noticeable increase in discourse around diversity and inclusivity in some contexts. However, these rhetorical shifts often take place against a backdrop of funding cuts for culture, or stagnant funding structures that have not evolved in line with these new ambitions.

It is essential to recognise that symbolic victories remain just that - symbolic - unless they are translated into concrete legal and policy changes, and their implementation is monitored by effective mechanisms. Symbolic developments often take the form of non-binding statements, vague commitments in strategic documents, or awareness-raising activities not backed by actionable plans. While such efforts are important, it is crucial to closely monitor whether they lead to real-world change. However, in many countries, it is clear that even the progress that goes beyond symbolic statements can be quickly undermined by the rise of hostile ideologies, which often lead to the dismantling of support tools and initiatives.

Some respondents also stated that there also is a limited coordination between ministries and government departments when it comes to promoting inclusivity and equality. In some countries, the cultural sector's ambition to contribute to this field is acknowledged by ministries of culture, resulting in the integration of inclusivity and diversity as priorities in funding calls. However, this recognition can be no more than tokenism if the broader policy context has become increasingly more hostile and averse to these values, both in discourse and practice, resulting for instance in defunding civil society organisations supporting minority groups and defending their rights, cancelling government programmes aimed at the structural promotion of equal and inclusive societies, or restraining migration policies.

# 4. Key barriers to access performing arts

How do these trends translate into people's engagement with the performing arts? What kinds of barriers do citizens face when participating in the arts - as audiences and as practitioners?

According to our respondents, the primary barriers that prevent people from engaging with performing arts include ticket prices, physical, hearing and sensory accessibility, and a lack of belonging or awareness of the artistic offerings available. Other, less frequently cited barriers include geographic distance, social inequalities, political pressures, and gaps in arts education.

## 4.1. Ticket price

The cost of attendance was identified by an overwhelming majority of respondents across all regions represented in the survey. This issue arises from at least two interrelated factors: the overall rise in the cost of living and the increasing financial precarity of arts organisations, which are often forced to rely on ticket sales for survival. Change of policy priorities, such as those resulting in the cancellation of free-admission programmes or culture pass initiatives, further exacerbate the situation.

Performing arts professionals are particularly concerned that this problem disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups - people from minority backgrounds, economically marginalised communities, and migrants - who are already often excluded from local cultural life. Some respondents noted that, in an effort to maintain their relationship with audiences, they experiment with alternative models, such as 'pay what you can' admission. While this approach attracts new audiences and yet again proves the importance of ticket prices as a barrier, it is financially unsustainable for many companies and institutions. Therefore, in the current context of austerity, balancing long-term and meaningful engagement with diverse communities against the need to ensure the sustainability of the arts sector itself has become an increasingly difficult challenge.

The situation is particularly fragile for the outdoor arts sector, where performances are most often ticket-free and rely even more on the strength of organisers and public support to avoid the precariousness of busking. Outdoor arts, as well as contemporary circus, play a vital role in promoting cultural rights and democratic engagement by bringing culture directly to people in public and unconventional spaces, fostering inclusion and participation across generations and communities. Their economic fragility continues to threaten the stability and long-term development of these essential practices.

## 4.2. Physical, sensory and visual access

Gaps in inclusive access - including physical, sensory, and hearing barriers - emerge as the second most frequently cited group of issues. Many respondents highlighted the lack of physical adaptability in their venues for people with various disabilities, as well as limited resources to provide sign language interpretation or audio description for visually impaired audiences. Some also noted the stigma that certain groups, including neurodiverse children and their families, may face when attending performing arts activities not specifically designed for them.

In countries of the Global South and in parts of Eastern Europe, respondents flagged the persistent lack of infrastructure all together - venues, rehearsal spaces, and production facilities. This shortage is particularly acute in the field of contemporary circus, where the absence of dedicated creative and training venues poses a major barrier to artistic development and sustainability. In many countries, this problem is particularly severe in rural areas, often compounded by poor transport connections, which leads to the concentration of cultural offerings in capital cities. Yet, circus often plays an essential role in reaching rural and remote areas, providing access to culture where institutional structures are scarce.

**Access barriers**

| Barrier | Value |
|---|---|
| Attendance costs | ~72 |
| Physical / sensory / hearing barriers | ~57 |
| Lack of awareness / belonging / interest | ~35 |
| Centralisation / distance | ~26 |
| Structured inequalities | ~20 |
| Political pressure | ~17 |
| Education gap | ~16 |
| Lack of inclusive offer | ~16 |
| Artists' precarity | ~16 |
| Language barriers | ~7 |
| Lack of political recognition | ~5 |
| Lack of time | ~4 |
| Insecurity | ~4 |
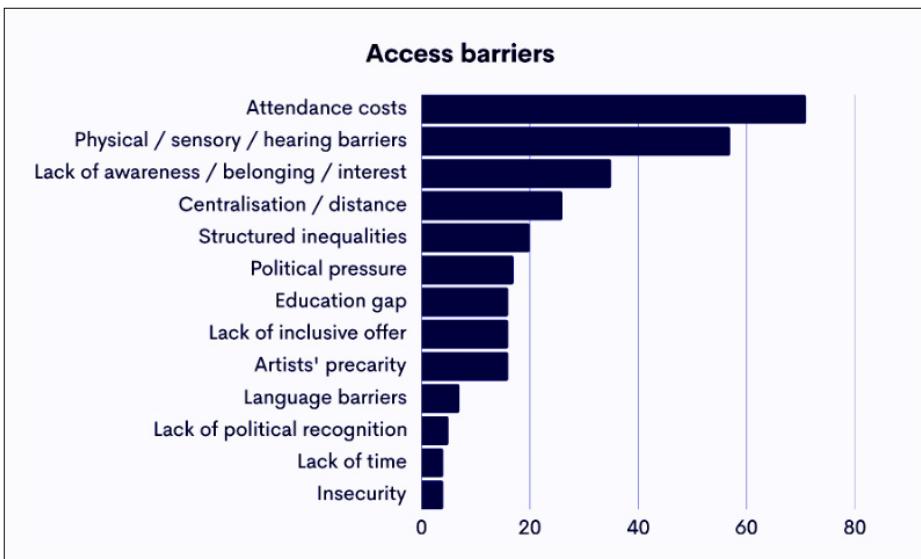
These challenges are further intensified by the increasing pressure for the arts sector to commercialise its activities, resulting in greater competition for public space and attention in urban centres, which are already highly saturated with events and information.

## 4.3. 'This is not for me' effect

Furthermore, many respondents consider that its offerings often fail to resonate with a broad segment of society and do not foster a widespread sense of belonging. Some respondents simply acknowledge that their programming is too 'experimental' for general audiences. Others recognise that their spaces can feel intimidating to those who do not regularly attend performances. Some professionals also express concern about their limited capacity to break through top-down, formal institutional structures - such as buildings and venues - that have historically been elitist and unwelcoming, making the arts itself appear inaccessible.

Moreover, many respondents stress that performing arts work that is currently on offer in their countries is not diverse enough, as non-Western, community-based, or diasporic forms are often not recognised as legitimate cultural and artistic practices by decision makers. In her keynote at the Circostrada FRESH STREET #5 in Great Yarmouth, Vicki Dela Amedume described founding her circus company as a response to the absence of artistic spaces where '*lived experiences, initially mine, could be authentically represented and explored. I didn't see anyone who looked like me in the placesI was working, so I needed to create a place where I could belong and invite others to do the same*'. This speaks to the need for cultural rights frameworks that enable underrepresented voices to not only access art, but also to shape it.

However, the majority identify the core issue as the lack of mediation and accessible information about arts events, which is often concentrated in more affluent neighbourhoods, as well as the absence of educational initiatives that could cultivate enthusiasm and a sense of belonging to the arts space among citizens. Returning to the issue of budget austerity, many respondents emphasise the resulting reduction in funding for high-quality mediation activities, visibility initiatives, and programmes aimed at reaching audiences in remote areas. Many respondents from different countries also highlight the persistent media and political perception of the performing arts as 'bourgeois', 'elite', or 'exclusive'. Some highlight that today's many challenges actually widen the gap between the arts and societies. A respondent from Croatia remarked: '*I am afraid that the "average citizen" tends to hate things they don't understand and then project their own frustration with the economic system and living standards onto artists who rely on public sector funding for their projects and work. This can probably be explained by years of downgrading the educational system since Croatia's independence and a climate of the aforementioned mass media hysteria*'.

## 4.4. Barriers according to audiences themselves

It is important to compare how the performing arts sector perceives participation barriers with the reasons for non-attendance reported by audiences themselves, as this can indicate whether the sector adequately understands trends within wider society - especially the parts of it the sector struggles to reach. According to the recent *Eurobarometer Survey on Citizens' Attitudes Toward Culture (2025)*[113] , the main barriers citizens face when participating in cultural events are: lack of time (45%), cost of admission or tickets (38%), distance to venues (34%), lack of interest in available activities (28%), lack of information about events (22%), insufficient artistic, cultural, or creative offerings in their area (20%), inadequate education (8%), and personal accessibility issues such as mobility (7%). Notably, only 4% of respondents reported feeling unwelcome or excluded.

Here are a few further insights:

→ Lack of time emerges as the primary reason for non-attendance, surpassing factors such as cost, distance to venues, and lack of interest. This barrier is particularly pronounced among highly educated, financially secure individuals living in large towns who are satisfied with their professional lives. Cultural workers themselves also cite it more frequently than any other obstacle.

→ Ticket costs rank second overall, disproportionately affecting women, students, older adults, and, unsurprisingly, those who struggle to cover basic expenses.

→ A lack of interest in available activities is more common among men, individuals with lower educational attainment, and urban residents. Paradoxically, only a small proportion of urban dwellers report a shortage of cultural or creative offerings in their area, suggesting that the challenge may be more about the relevance or appeal of existing programs than their quantity.

→ Feeling unwelcome or excluded ranks twelfth among all barriers but is more prevalent among unemployed and financially insecure individuals, as well as those dissatisfied with their personal or professional lives.

Comparing these findings with the *2013 Eurobarometer on Cultural Access and Participation*[114] shows both continuity and change. Lack of time was already the leading barrier in 2013, and its significance has grown slightly (from 42% to 45% in 2025). However, financial barriers have risen more sharply, increasing from 29% to 38%, making it the only barrier with a remarkable increase over the past 12 years. While it is not the top barrier, this sharp rise aligns with widespread concerns about escalating ticket costs highlighted in our survey.

Although the datasets produced by the Eurobarometer and our survey are not directly comparable, it is clear that the arts sector may be underestimating the significance of people's time constraints as a barrier. Indeed, the growing phenomenon of 'time poverty' is acknowledged and frequently discussed in academia and policy and is associated with factors such as evolving family dynamics, access to a growing variety of experiences offered by digital technologies, and the dynamism of modern career paths[115]. This complex issue is closely tied to how individuals prioritise their free time and may also be compounded by other barriers, including high costs and lack of interest or awareness of available artistic offerings.

This suggests that, even if ticket costs are a serious and increasing concern, a more fundamental issue exists: before people can assess whether they have the financial means to engage with the arts, they must first place these activities high on their list of priorities amidst the many demands of daily life. This is not only a question of fostering belonging or inclusion but also a deeper issue concerning the role of the arts within social life and individual worldviews.

What is particularly striking is the stability of disinterest: despite numerous policy and strategy shifts in the cultural sector over the past decade, aimed at diversifying offerings, rethinking participation, and reaching underrepresented communities, 28% of people still cite lack of interest, a figure almost unchanged since 2013. Meanwhile, actual feelings of exclusion or a lack of belonging, frequently discussed within the arts sector, may not be perceived by audiences themselves as top concerns. This could be explained by the fact that, when thinking of 'cultural activities', people tend to imagine those that resonate with them rather than those from which they feel excluded. It may be the case that many Eurobarometer respondents are simply unaware of the artistic offerings that our survey respondents are engaged with.

It is important to note that barriers according to audiences themselves have to be analysed differently when talking about children's access to culture. One reason is that children have not been surveyed as part of the Eurobarometer that only includes respondents older than 15 years. Another is that children's cultural participation – either attending professional performing arts as audiences or as active participants in arts education or performing arts workshops – depends on their surrounding adults. In schools, nurseries and kindergartens, the interest or disinterest of their teacher/caretaker, allocated budget, national or local arts infrastructure and touring support schemes and requirements to their curricula fully define their level of access. This is why arts education in its broadest definition must take its rightful place as a part of the intrinsic structure of both curricular and extra-curricular activities[116], and the public responsibility to provide structures for access must be given special attention when working with this age segment of citizens.

When it comes to children's access to the arts outside institutional settings, their ability to influence decisions about attending performances or engaging in artistic activities may be greater. However, this access still depends on the cultural habits, economic means, and other barriers identified by the Eurobarometer that their parents or legal guardians face.

## 4.5. Precarity in the arts as a barrier to the exercise of cultural rights

What is remarkable is that, while the precarious nature of artistic professions is acknowledged by some respondents, it is not widely perceived by the majority of them as a crucial barrier to public access to the performing arts. At the same time, ensuring that artists from all backgrounds can contribute to cultural rights is fundamental to securing equal and just access to culture for all members of society - to make cultural life belong to everyone. The UNESCO global report on cultural policies '*Culture: the missing SDG*' (2025) acknowledges:

'*The right for culture and creative professionals to contribute to cultural life depends heavily on their working conditions. These artists' rights have many components that reflect the complexity and diversity of their work. These include the right to create, produce, shape, influence, transform, distribute art and discourse on art making, the right to innovate in cultural practices and modes of expression, the right to advocate for cultural policies and opportunities to occupy leadership positions in cultural organisations. Artists also play a fundamental role in cultural life by capturing, interpreting and expressing the values, traditions and social narratives of their societies*'[117].

In reality, for people from marginalised backgrounds, pursuing a career in the arts is often unaffordable: it offers no guarantee of stable income, demands unpaid labour, and provides little or no social protection - factors repeatedly highlighted in recent studies on working conditions in the cultural and creative sectors. When the performing arts become less financially viable, they also become less desirable to certain socio-economic groups. As a result, working-class and ethnic minority people are less likely to access the field, since it is not considered a sustainable career path. A professional sector that excludes diverse communities is, in turn, will struggle to create spaces where those same communities can participate as audiences, engage, and feel their agency respected and represented. It is therefore essential that the connection between sustainable working conditions in the arts and the public's right to engage with cultural activities is recognised at both the policy and sector levels.

## 4.6. Invisibility of displaced artists

Survey responses and discussions at the IETM Plenary in Berlin highlighted the particularly dire situation of displaced artists, who face severe barriers to financial support, freedom to create, engagement with audiences, and freedom of self-representation. At a time when global displacement is at record levels[118], driven by wars, conflicts, and environmental disasters, it is essential that the needs of displaced artists are fully integrated into political frameworks on cultural rights and artistic freedom.

As recent research by On the Move shows, despite the urgency, many national cultural ministries, including those in countries hosting large numbers of refugees, provide little or no targeted support. The majority of support tools for artists at risk and displaced artists are short-term  or small-scale emergency responses, many of which have already been discontinued. Structural barriers persist: some visa schemes and work permits are accessible only to well-established and financially secure artists, while many grants and scholarships demand proof of partnerships or guaranteed showcases in the host country, requirements that newcomers, often unfamiliar with local networks, cannot meet. Moreover, even when support is provided, it frequently positions displaced artists as mediators, ambassadors, or storytellers, with funding tied to documenting their displacement, contributing to community integration, or promoting national culture. This risks reducing artists to instruments of policy rather than recognising them as independent creators. Large-scale initiatives that research and respond to the evolving needs of displaced artists themselves also remain rare[119].

# Freedom of expression in the performing arts

The state of freedom of expression is deteriorating worldwide. The Global Expression Score has fallen by 5 points over the past decade, with far more people now living under deepening repression than experiencing gains in their freedoms. Those facing declines significantly outnumber those seeing advances, whether measured over the past year, the past five years, or the past decade[120].

The deteriorating state of the freedom of artistic expression has been monitored and captured in several reports by expert organisations, such as Freemuse and the Council of Europe (see above). Negative trends triggering both obvious and more obscure threats for artistic freedom are unfolding all across the globe, including in places where freedoms and rights traditionally excelled, such as in Europe. In this report, we are not aiming to investigate and describe these various threats and their playing out in practice in different regions and contexts; instead we invite you to delve into the reports cited above.

In this paper, instead, we present a snapshot of how the performing arts sector perceives the state of its artistic freedom. One of the goals is also to understand how the freedom of artistic expression connects to the sector's

relationships with audiences. Finally, we also look into the trends of self-censorship in the sector, as an area typically most challenging to assess and measure.

Across the survey, respondents identified two main sets of challenges: economic and political. They tended to link people's right to engage with the arts to economic issues such as rising ticket prices and lack of funding, while connecting their own freedom of expression to political pressures and hostile ideologies. At the same time, many recognised the strong overlaps between the two.

Overall, respondents expressed greater concern about the economic situation than about purely political developments (though many noted that worsening economic conditions often stem directly from shifting political priorities). This explains a difference in perception: 55.7% of respondents believe that people's right to freely engage with the performing arts is under threat, while 47% see freedom of artistic expression itself as endangered. Both figures are significant, but the economic barriers to access appear as the more immediate concern.



**'People's right to freely engage with the performing arts is under threat'**

| 10% | 45.7% | 26% | 16.6% | 1.5% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely relevant | Very relevant | Neither relevant or irrelevant | Not very relevant | Not relevant at all |
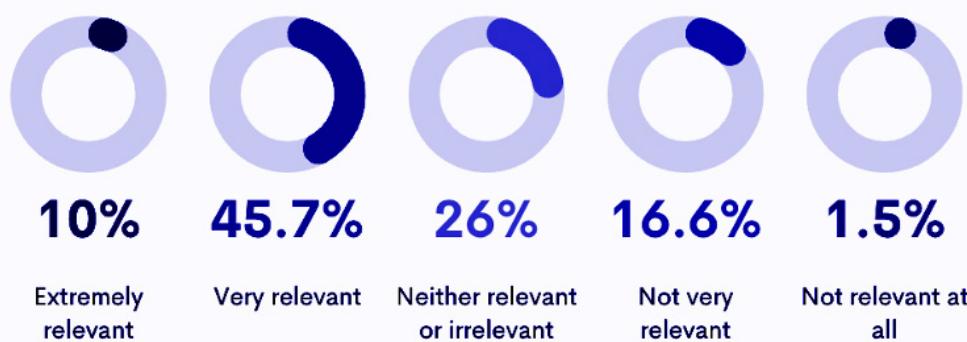
**'Freedom of artistic expression is under threat'**

| 14% | 33% | 15.3% | 23.7% | 14% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely relevant | Very relevant | Neither relevant or irrelevant | Not very relevant | Not relevant at all |
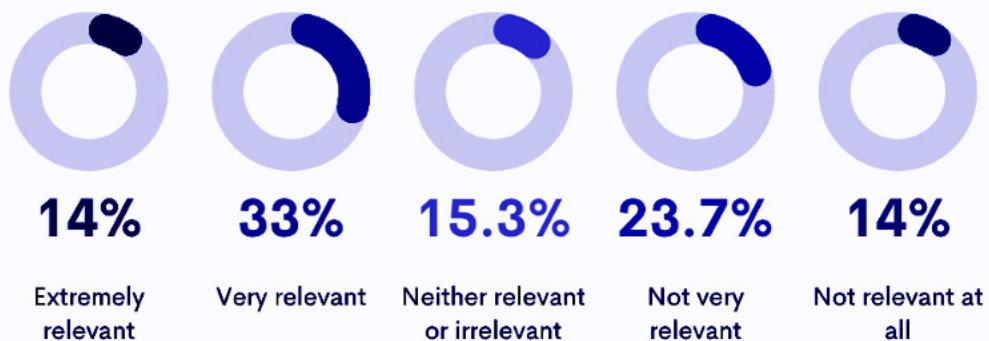
There is a notable difference in how representatives of organisations/institutions and freelance/independent professionals perceive the current situation. Freelance and independent workers are generally more concerned with the freedom of artistic expression. 59% of freelance/independent respondents believe it is under threat, compared to 48% of organisation representatives. This can be related to the fact that freelance professionals are typically less protected from insecurities in general and their freedom is more vulnerable in the face of political and legal pressures, economic manipulations, intimidation by policy-makers and activists, media attacks, and other threats. Independent artists are also more likely to be interested in critical and provocative narratives than larger institutions, although this is not a confirmed trend.

Country-specific dynamics are not very distinct. Representatives from the same country may report both experiencing censorship or self-censorship and not being affected by it. This discrepancy may stem from differing understandings of these terms, as well as from variations in the nature of their work and the topics they address. This shows that there are only a very few countries among those represented within the survey, where the situation of artistic freedom is perceived largely as problematic by a wide part of the sector. In many countries, a significant portion of artistic work today can be produced and presented without issue; yet certain subjects remain off-limits for governments or are considered taboo by society. It likely depends on what kind of work you are doing and how you navigate the political and economic shifts.

When it comes to censorship and self-censorship, the general sense emerging from the survey is that two key trends are currently at play. The first is the widely discussed **polarisation of politics and societies**, which is not as much about differences of opinion, which as such is not a new trend, but more about the rise of dogmatism, antagonism, and the unwillingness to accept others' beliefs - a trend further fuelled by media, both consolidating information 'bubbles' and inundating the space with simplified messages. The other trend concerns the **declining tolerance for 'controversy'** within the bubbles themselves - whether in social discourse, political debate, or the arts. Fear of backlash and of being misunderstood in the fast-paced, simplified flow of information are key factors driving controversy out of public debate within 'like-minded' communities, while paradoxically, the communication between fighting camps gets ever more aggressive and intolerant. This 'decay of controversy' not only undermines the essence of art but also poses a serious threat to democracy.

**As Simon Mundy wrote in his article summarising EFA's session on artistic freedom in Edinburgh:**

*'The arts can expose the slenderness of the assumptions behind headline views. They can encourage empathy to counter the aggressiveness of political victimhood and they can use their programmes, like festivals, to offer audiences the subtlety and breadth of vision that the 'keyboard warriors' reject. This takes courage on the part of artists themselves and on programmers, like festival directors. To do this, though, the artists have to be free of constraints forced on them by populist sentiment in the media - from either end of the political spectrum - and from the interference of politicians and autocrats'[121].*

## 1. Censorship

To the question '*Have you or your peers experienced censorship by public authorities and/or sponsors in the recent past?*', just over one third (33%) responded positively, half (50%) said 'no', and the remaining 17% (the 'no, but' category in the graph on the left) stated that they had not experienced censorship themselves but expressed concerns about its potential emergence or noted signs of increasing censorship within the sector. Taken together, this means that around half of the respondents have either experienced censorship or do not rule out the possibility of it happening to themselves or others in the future.

The most frequently reported form of censorship was direct government intervention, such as forbidding or banning projects. Examples included theatre performances about Palestine or the Israeli–Gaza conflict in Sweden and Germany, a project addressing social issues with young audiences in Romania, and performances cancelled under vague justifications like 'inappropriate content' or 'public morality' in Turkey, often targeting works on gender, feminism, or political history. A respondent shared that in Serbia, a documentary about the climate crisis was censored by sponsors themselves. Another respondent noted that in Cyprus, the National Theatre's work for children was vetted before it could be shown in schools, with at least two requests made to erase phrases addressing LGBTIQ+ topics, and one performance dealing with historical events outside the official curriculum for the first two years of high school was also banned. A respondent from Italy described more subtle forms of control: '*Now it is becoming more sophisticated. For instance, in some contexts, certain expressions are subtly discouraged, such as "extreme right", "neo-nationalisms", and "fascism". It is not explicitly stated that you cannot use these terms, but there are silent corrections in articles, requiring you to find alternative ways to refer to far-right and right-wing approaches. And, of course, another strategy is to gradually sideline you*'.

Censorship was also reported through the withdrawal or reduction of funding, or through changes in funding priorities and procedures that prevent certain organisations from applying or receiving grants. A respondent from Slovakia shared: '*Drama Queer Festival asked for the support at the Arts Council. They received the most points and the highest evaluation from the experts, but the Board decided not to support it at all. The Minister of Culture explicitly said that she will not give "a penny" to any LGBTQ+ culture activities.*' Many respondents highlighted that, even in the absence of official bans, funding systems are evolving in such a way that the most critical and provocative organisations - typically within contemporary art and independent institutions - are left unsupported. A growing sense emerged that progressive narratives are being suppressed more actively, either through shifting funding priorities or by making procedures excessively complex and non-transparent.

Legal measures also play a role, with the adoption of laws implying censorship or discrimination against specific groups, often LGBTIQ+, as well as regulations linked to migration law or criminal proceedings against art organisations or cultural workers. In some cases, right-wing politicians initiated legal action against artists because of their public statements. Even when these did not lead to convictions, the mere existence of proceedings placed a heavy burden on cultural professionals, forcing them to think twice before speaking out.



Have you or your peers experienced censorship by public authorities and/or sponsors in the recent past?

- 50% NO
- 33% YES
- 17% NO, BUT
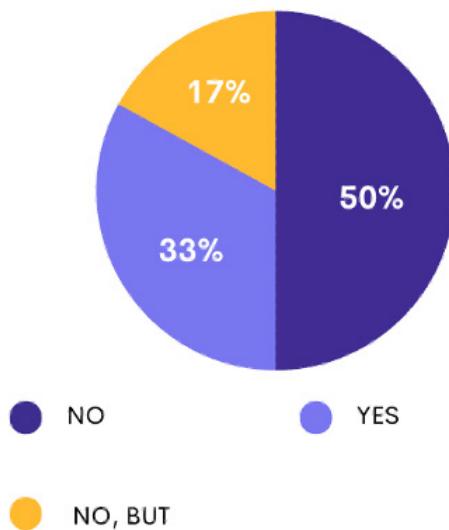
Respondents also described being censored or attacked by the media. In these cases, the outlets were identified as increasingly 'right-wing' or 'racist', either organising campaigns against projects tackling social issues or ignoring them entirely, despite having previously offered broad coverage. Others mentioned censorship by colleagues or peers, often driven by fear of becoming targets themselves. In Germany, one respondent said they were asked to submit their script to the venue before performing. In the Netherlands, a cabaret dance involving two men was cancelled for 'not aligning with the venue's values', while similar performances with women were permitted. In Serbia, a project addressing homophobia was nearly cancelled at the last moment when a technical manager decided to withdraw.

Finally, several respondents reported instances where religion was used as grounds for censorship. In Greece, 'works perceived as blasphemous, critical of the Church, or challenging traditional religious values' provoked strong reactions. In Poland, a respondent recalled that a director of the Dramatic Theater in Warsaw was suspended by the marshal of the province for "offending religious feelings" because she brought a feminist sculpture by a famous Polish artist to the theater'.

## 2. Self-censorship

Self-censorship was an important topic discussed at Circostrada's FRESH STREET #5 in Great Yarmouth, where speakers from Hong Kong and Slovakia raised concerns, such as: '*You no longer need to ban work. You just need to make people fear the consequences of speaking*', '*In fragile democracies, satire becomes dangerous. And silence becomes policy*', and '*We learned to silence parts of ourselves to survive funding cycles. But over time, that becomes internalised — you forget you're allowed to speak freely*'.

### How wide-spread this trend in reality?

Around 37% of respondents to our survey stated they self-censored in recent past[122]. A significant number of them referred to doing so when interacting with funders – particularly in the context of funding applications. This often involves adjusting language and emphasising certain aspects of a project to avoid rejection or to align more closely with the funder's priorities. One respondent shared that they had not mentioned a few names of contemporary artists intended to be involved in the project, instead only referring to a 'celebrity'. Others spoke about reframing the project in a different vocabulary on paper when writing the application – avoiding undesirable angles  -  while in practice still pursuing the original idea. One respondent from Hungary shared: '*While I have not had to directly censor artistic content or collaborators, I have occasionally adapted the framing of project proposals and public communications to align with the expectations of centralized funding bodies. This often means placing emphasis on technical or apolitical aspects (e.g. innovation, sustainability) rather than thematically sensitive elements, in order to maintain eligibility and institutional continuity*'.

A smaller group reported not pursuing their project ideas at all or altering them significantly to secure funding or avoid potential backlash. '*In applying for national funds, all independent organisations know they need to avoid topics that might be perceived as anti-government*', a respondent from Serbia shared. Respondents from Sweden and Denmark noted the growing need to uphold a 'good profile' and maintain good relationships with funders, which means refraining from direct criticism or raising controversial issues. While this does not always mean suppressing one's own voice or altering artistic work, some admitted that imagining how their work would be received by conservative segments of society had become an integral part of conceiving and creating work. A respondent from Croatia wrote: '*When programming the thought often occurs inadvertently – will there be a backlash, will we (organisation) be able to deal with the situation. These thoughts being based on prior contexts often involving ghosting by media outlets, lack of editorial coverage for events that the mainstream media considers "outlandish", marginal, of lesser value*'.

Another sizable group noted that they are generally very cautious when expressing their views or addressing certain topics, in order to avoid criticism – not only from conservative parts of society, but also from peers, progressive activists, or the media. For some, growing awareness of progressive issues results in stifling free debate and creation. A respondent shared: '*In the performing arts sector in Norway it can be hard to state an opinion that is against the majority in the field. If one does not agree on issues, one is being pointed out as right wing by some people. So there is sometimes a strong inner censorship*'. Another respondent shared that there is a trend in their country to eradicate 'cultural appropriation' in the arts, which for some means limitations in terms of what genres they can explore artistically and what identities they are free to address in their work ('you are only allowed to talk about who you are'). However, other respondents considered this a positive trend if 'privileged' people in the sector reflect more deeply on what they say and do, how and when, to make way for justice and not undermine the self-narratives of people who have been suppressed for too long.

Many respondents clarified that while they do not self-censor in their artistic work, they avoid sharing personal or political views publicly, particularly if these might be seen as controversial or displeasing to the government, media, or colleagues. For some, this is not directly about upsetting someone or sparking a personal clash, but rather about the fear of being misinterpreted, taken out of context, or instrumentalised – with media, including social media, playing a significant role. This is not only a matter of personal image and security, but also of the organisation they represent: '*I do not post my personal opinions on social media to a wide range of topics because the risk that my personal opinion will be taken as the opinion of the organisation I lead is too high*', a respondent from Hungary shared. Meanwhile, many organisations feel compelled to have an official stance on critical issues, yet they lack the resources or courage to do so in the current climate: '*Self-censorship is truly bad for art and arts institutions. I find it in the issue of Gaza and Israel, mostly. We would like to take a clearer stand on the issue, but because of the hassle, and the possible media attention and the other possible misunderstandings and debates around it, we tend to stay quiet*'.

Organisations working with young audiences face specific challenges related to growing doubts about addressing sensitive issues, such as gender, religion, conflict, and history. As one respondent from Italy noted, '*not all teachers have the same tools, the same knowledge, the same background. So we have to strike a balance between what we would like to propose and the degree of understanding and acceptance of those who have responsibility for children and those who take them to the theatre*'. While this is not perceived as explicit self-censorship, the varying capacities of schools to provide mediation and knowledge result in artists altering their work depending on the specific audience. Some schools are simply not interested in certain topics that art companies would like to address (such as addiction, death, sex, or illness, as respondents cited), making collaboration impossible and creating financial challenges for organisations. According to some, it is mostly teachers and parents who avoid sensitive topics, not the students themselves. As a person from Italy reflected: '*It is adults who avoid these themes. In general there is more ignorance and cultural poverty than in the past*'.

When it comes to general political views, some respondents working with children shared that they see their primary mission as engaging artistically with young audiences – no matter what political stance their parents take or what side of polarised societies they occupy. This creates challenges in balancing between expressing political views and adopting activist positions – with the risk of losing subsidies or undermining their public image – and remaining true to their mission of bringing art to all children. '*We advocate but we do not advocate loudly, for we make art for all kids and not only for kids whose parents' political stance(s) coincide with our own*', a respondent from the UK reflected.

Some respondents also mentioned withholding aspects of their identity out of fear of discrimination and lost opportunities. A couple of respondents said they prefer not to mention their country of origin, others conceal their age, or even the fact of having a family: '*Never saying I'm mother of a small child and hiding it all the time because I'm scared it can limit the options of working in new projects*'.

# Moving forward

According to UNESCO's *Global Report on Cultural Policies Culture: the Missing SDG* (2025), 'the strategic role of culture is increasingly acknowledged in national sustainable development plans, with 93% of reporting Member States recognising culture as a key element in their development strategies'[123] . Yet, tellingly, the very title of the report is *The Missing SDG*, recognising that culture is structurally missing from the global sustainability agenda.

Within the EU, all 27 Member States guarantee freedom of expression in their constitutions, and the overwhelming majority also guarantee artistic freedom either constitutionally or through dedicated laws[124]. The UNESCO's report cited above also notes that among the Member States that submitted reports on the 1980 Recommendation, 85% in the Global South and 84% in the Global North reported having policies and laws to promote artistic freedom[125]. However, the extent to which these legal provisions are effectively enforced is unclear: only 61% of States Parties to the 2005 UNESCO Convention report having independent bodies receiving complaints about violations and restrictions on artistic freedom, revealing a gap between legal frameworks and practice (2005 Convention Periodic Reports)[126].

Furthermore, according to UNESCO, about 60% of Member States have adopted laws defining a minimum wage for workers that apply to artists. Reality on the ground is far less encouraging: among the NGOs that participated in the consultation, only 22% confirmed the existence of a minimum wage for artists in their countries. Even where such legislation exists, it rarely extends to self-employed or freelance artists[127].

Finally, while approximately 89% of high- and upper-middle-income countries provide comprehensive social protection, only 62% of lower- and lower-middle-income countries do so. Despite these provisions, just 9% of respondents feel that their economic and social rights are adequately protected, whereas 62% report receiving little or no protection at all[128].

## What does this data tell us?

It shows that even with laws, constitutional guarantees and political commitments in place, the reality for the sector remains challenging. Bridging the gap between words/intentions and action is far from straightforward, and doing so in an effective way is an even bigger challenge. In today's context - where incomes are falling, subsidies are shrinking, polarisation is rising and the very notion of freedom is contested - symbolic statements and rhetorical commitments are no longer sufficient. It is essential to look deeper for solutions, moving beyond tokenistic measures, abstract declarations and political gestures that struggle to deliver real change.

At a time when democracy itself is under threat, culture is increasingly seen as a means to bring people together, re-engage them in social and political life, and empower them to imagine and shape better futures - through dialogue, even in polarised contexts. This is not a moment for half-measures and hollow approaches. It is a time to act strategically, ensuring that changes are structural, long-term, and supported by monitoring and implementation frameworks. Only then can the cultural sector remain engaged and vigilant about both its professional future and the right of every individual to truly be part of cultural life.

One part of the survey focused on policy solutions, asking respondents to suggest measures at different policy levels to protect artistic freedom and enhance people's right to freely engage with the performing arts. Below we present the key pathways for action put forward by the sector. All recommendations are meant for all policy levels, with some only for particular decision-making areas, such as the EU, as specified accordingly.

# Key principles

## 1.

### Performing arts are a vital public good, requiring equitable access and active support for engagement across all forms.

Performing arts must be valued for their indispensable and unique artistic contribution and treated as a public good, meaning that the state must ensure everyone's access through fair, equitable, and diverse platforms. Engagement with and co-creation of performing arts, in all their diversity - from outdoor arts, circus and dance to theatre, performance, and other genres, including both contemporary and traditional forms - should be actively supported. Performing arts are an indispensable element of democratic societies. At the same time, it is crucial that real problems of democratic backsliding - such as dysfunctional governments, insufficient transparency, lack of accountability, corruption, discontent with traditional party systems, misinformation, and other structural issues - are recognised and addressed at their respective levels.

## 2.

### Cultural rights and artistic freedom depend on a complex ecosystem of rights and freedoms and must be embedded in policies and monitoring.

Both cultural rights and artistic freedom are complex, multifaceted concepts that encompass a variety of human rights and freedoms, and depend on an ecosystem of factors, including financing, social protection, education, labour conditions, political and social climate, legal structures, and broader frameworks safeguarding human rights, equality, and diversity. Artistic freedom to create is not only about the absence of repression: freedom isn't simply about speaking freely, but about being resourced, visible, and trusted. This is not merely rhetorical: we insist that both 'culture for all' and artistic freedom laws and strategies recognise the multidimensional nature of these crucial goods and integrate them into implementation plans and monitoring frameworks.

## 3.

### Today, we need action and real commitment - rhetorical wins alone will not help.

Symbolic statements and non-binding acts are important for the political recognition of culture, particularly in contexts where it is largely absent from social and political agendas, and can pave the way for structured and practical changes in the future. However, at a time when the gap between discourse and action is widening, when well-intentioned or tokenistic rules remain poorly implemented, and when societies are increasingly divided by symbolic battles and mistrust between citizens and institutions grows, it is imperative to move to action. Anything that cannot be implemented and translated into concrete, feasible commitments will fail to address the real challenges facing democracy.

## 4.

### In times of polycrisis, the role of international and supranational bodies is crucial

In the current moment, marked by political, social, and economic pressures, international institutions, such as EU and UNESCO, are increasingly viewed as key guarantors of independence, protection, and long-term structural support for the performing arts worldwide. The sector sees international bodies as crucial for embedding cultural rights and artistic freedom into global policies, supporting cross-border collaboration, and strengthening cultural diplomacy. They are expected to provide funding mechanisms, facilitate partnerships between governments, civil society, and artists, and promote resilience, freedom of expression, and solidarity across borders.

# Recommendations

## Funding

While the lack of funding is widely regarded by the sector as the most urgent problem facing the performing arts sector, increasing financial support is not seen as the only fundamental or transformative solution. Instead, there is a strong emphasis on who has access to money, on which conditions, and what activities are supported. There is also a focus on how public investment helps to strengthen the resilience of the performing arts sector - understood broadly to include advocacy, capacity-building, collective bargaining, networking, collaboration, and resource-sharing - as the sustainable path forward in today's challenging times.

## 1.

### Guarantee sustainable funding for culture

People's cultural rights, including artistic freedom, are inherently dependent on the level and stability of resources available to the performing arts sector to create work and engage with diverse audiences. It is essential to recognise that cultural participation for all can only be guaranteed through a strong and independent creative ecosystem. Public funding for the arts must be stable, long-term, and adequate. Short-term initiatives aimed at specific target groups or particular themes should serve as valuable complements to a sustainable system, not as the primary means of addressing gaps in participation, freedom, or wider social issues. Therefore, we recommend:

→ Increase international, national and local public budgets for the cultural and creative sectors, ensuring resources match the real cost of cultural participation and artistic production and dissemination. Ensure that the performing arts sector is not pushed into market-driven models, as this will directly compromise meaningful engagements with diverse communities.

→ Anchor cultural funding in legislation, so that cultural budgets are safeguarded across political cycles and not left to the discretion of changing governments; ensure continuity and balance in supporting the entire performing arts ecosystem across the value chain.

→ Ensure that emergency or crisis-response funds are systematically included in cultural policies, protecting the sector from economic shocks and helping it withstand emerging crises, whether related to digital transformations, conflicts, climate disasters, health emergencies, or other disruptions.

→ Financially support the implementation of all new priorities within whole-of-government and cultural policy agendas, such as disability access, diversity and inclusion within teams, outreach to underrepresented groups, wellbeing, and environmental transition. While there is genuine motivation and commitment within the sector to engage with these and other crucial issues, it must be recognised that delivering on such priorities requires not only adequate financial resources and skills, but also strong political backing and promotion - especially in light of the backlash against progressive narratives in many parts of society.

→ **EU:** Ensure that the proposed budget for the future *AgoraEU* programme (€8.6 billion) is increased - or at minimum maintained - during the MFF negotiations, and that new budget flexibility mechanisms do not lead to cuts in cultural funding. We call for either earmarking specific percentages for each programme strand, establishing a ring-fenced budget for Creative Europe - Culture, or reversing the merger of the Creative Europe and CERV programmes. It is essential that culture is shielded from competition with other AgoraEU priorities, such as democracy protection, combating disinformation, and media freedom, and that the merged programme genuinely promotes collaboration rather than undermining support for culture.

# 2.

## Improve equity in access to funding

→ It is indispensable that the entire performing arts ecosystem - covering the full value chain from creation and production to presentation and mediation, across all disciplines and types of institutions - has access to sustainable funding support. Crucially, in times of crisis and hardship, no part of the ecosystem, including the independent field, should be undermined by defunding, as harm to any single component ultimately weakens the whole sector and reduces audience engagement.

→ To safeguard artistic freedom, a dual approach is needed to support underrepresented artists - combining targeted support with systemic equity:

- First, **targeted and sustainable instruments** should be introduced, informed by systematic mapping of who is currently represented and who is not. These targeted funds should be designed, for instance, for displaced artists and those working in remote or rural areas, with support that does not require artists to address themes tied to their identities or act as representatives of specific communities. Multi-year, accessible funding schemes that support community-led, participatory, and cross-cultural practices should be developed.

- Second, **existing funding structures should be made more equitable and accessible for everyone**, including ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrants, women, and diverse genres, ensuring that all artists can develop their work freely and explore topics of their own choosing, that appeal to diverse audiences.

→ **EU, UNESCO, regional and national institutes:** Establish international and regional solidarity funds dedicated to defending artistic freedom and supporting censored or persecuted artists. Such funds could provide emergency financial support, legal aid, and advocacy, as well as fund residencies or safe mobility opportunities. They could also offer capacity-building, mentorship, and platforms for safely showcasing censored work, ensuring that artists can continue their practice and reach audiences despite threats or restrictions. Such funds should be open to artists from all over the world.

# 3.

## Reform funding structures

→ Replace over-reliance on short-term, project-based funding with long-term, structural support that enables institutions and independent artists to plan sustainably. A balance between structured and long-term support, aimed at meaningful and future-oriented community relationships, on the one hand and funding specific initiatives aimed at exploring new places or topics, and reaching out to underrepresented areas and groups is essential.

→ Reduce bureaucratic barriers by simplifying application and reporting requirements, introducing lighter processes for small-scale grants, and developing trust-based models of support. A more effective application mechanism would allow applicants to define their project as much as possible, starting with values, priorities, and purpose. This approach would enable artists and organisations to be proactive, bringing their ideas and needs to the table, rather than forcing them to fit into a rigid framework dictated by the funding stream.

→ Encourage funding schemes that explicitly reward innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking in artistic practice. It is essential to have funding instruments that enable the performing arts sector to fulfil one of its core missions: pushing boundaries and imagining what does not yet exist. Such an approach is equally crucial for fostering community co-creation and the active engagement of citizens in artistic conception and processes. The lack of support for experimentation and risk-taking leads to 'monoculture of programming' driven by market-friendly aesthetics or thematic priorities enforced by funders.

# 4.

## Protect funding from political interference

→ Guarantee transparency by publishing clear criteria, decisions, and evaluation results for all funding calls. While application processes should not be overly burdensome or exclusive, funding tools must be clearly defined from the outset, specifying who they are designed for and where they may be less relevant. Clear reporting and appeal procedures must also be established to prevent funding decisions based on ideological, political, or personal considerations.

→ Reinforce the arm's-length principle or reform the governance structures of funding bodies to ensure independence from direct political control. The cultural sector should be actively involved in designing governance procedures and structures, with particular attention to ensuring that diverse voices are represented.

→ Remove ideological constraints from funding guidelines - for example, restrictions on certain themes or communities - in order to safeguard artistic freedom and pluralism. Core funding instruments should avoid rigid thematic priorities, as these can either exclude large numbers of applicants or pressure organisations to abandon their own values and priorities. Conditioning funding on narrow themes ultimately homogenises the cultural offer, undermines the diversity of cultural expressions, and deprives audiences of a rich and multifaceted cultural life.

# 5.

## Improve working conditions through funding

Working conditions in the cultural and creative sectors is a multifaceted and complex issue, typically shaped by social security systems, taxation, labour relations, and other structural frameworks. Yet, public funding place an enormous role in this, thus we recommend to enact this role by:

→ enforcing minimum wage standards for artists and cultural workers, including freelancers and self-employed professionals. Charters, codes, and other commitments to fair working conditions - whether established within the sector or adopted at the governmental level, including provisions on fair pay - must be integrated into funding criteria and cultural policies. Crucially, these commitments should be backed by clear and stable budget allocations, rather than treated as ad hoc or experimental budget lines. Real change in practices and mindsets requires sustained, long-term processes, and any setbacks triggered by budget cuts risk undermining the progress already achieved;

→ setting up robust monitoring processes to follow-up on the implementation of fair pay commitments within the sector and between the sector and government agencies, involving regular consultation with the sector, mechanisms to report infringements, and tools to measure progress.

→ promoting interministerial collaboration in reforms on status of the artist and working conditions, involving budgets from other government departments essentially responsible for social security, taxation systems, and labour relations;

→ supporting capacity-building programmes that strengthen professional sustainability, such as training in digital skills, career transition support, green transition, financial literacy, ;

→ **EU:** introducing social conditionality in funding programmes supporting the cultural and creative sectors, in line with the European Parliament resolution '*EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors*'[129], adopted in 2023, and the Culture Compass aimed at developing an Artists' Charter. This should require all beneficiaries of EU funds, including the future AgoraEU programme, to commit to fair pay and transparent budgeting, while upholding fair standards in contracting, safety, and equality.

# Collective resilience

While adequate funding remains essential, policies should also strengthen internal connections, networks, and consolidate the sectoral collective resilience and cohesion both nationally and internationally. Long-term resilience strategies - including unions, associations, collaborative charters, international collaborations, and other modes of professional organisation and exchange - are vital for helping the performing arts sector withstand current and future threats, and maintain a robust, inclusive, and sustainable cultural ecosystem. This resilience is not only necessary for the survival and flourishing of artists and the arts, but also for shaping a continuous, meaningful and inclusive cultural life for diverse communities.

A resilient sector will also enable artists to remain true to their creative and professional values, without compromising their work due to economic pressures, social expectations, or political constraints, while allowing them to play an even more significant role in today's societies.

## 1.

### Support unions, associations, and sectoral organisations

→ Invest in and protect the capacity of unions, professional associations, and other sectoral organisations, both nationally and internationally, to enhance the representation of workers, negotiation of fair conditions, providing legal and professional support, and facilitating collective action.

→ Promote the creation of collective and inclusive charters on working conditions at national and international levels, ensuring sector-wide standards for fair pay, safety, equality, and professional sustainability. Provide both financial and political support for the dialogues, consultations, and collaborative processes necessary to develop and implement these charters, involving artists, institutions, and policymakers.

→ Support the involvement of local and national associations in international policy dialogues, collaborative initiatives, and funding decisions, ensuring continuous learning about good practices and collective contribution to the global and European advocacy for the arts.

→ **EU, UNESCO:** Provide capacity building in the fields of advocacy and leadership for the performing arts, supporting and encouraging the sector to unite at local, national, and cross-border levels to advocate effectively for culture and the arts.

## 2.

### Invest in resource- and information-sharing

→ Fund and strengthen networks that enable collaboration, knowledge exchange, mutual support, sharing expertise, and resilience-building at local, regional, and international levels. Networks should also facilitate sharing best practices across countries, raising awareness of global cultural rights, policy developments, and funding opportunities, and maintaining a sense of community during crises. Importantly, various existing and emerging models for sharing physical resources, such as production sets, decorations, costumes, and more, should be encouraged, scaled-up, replicated and financially supported.

→ Develop funding schemes, residencies, resource-sharing platforms, and mechanisms for pooling legal and professional expertise that operate both nationally and internationally. Make these solidarity measures accessible to all artists, particularly those in politically or economically challenging contexts, including conflict zones. Encourage alternative modes of movement and collaboration - such as shared international projects, cooperative structures, or mobile artistic initiatives - that foster collective resilience and cross-border engagement.

# Legal and policy reforms

## 1. Safeguard artistic freedom

→ In line with the ongoing work across the cultural sector in Europe to develop concrete tools[130], and in support of the proposal by the Chair of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament, Nela Riehl[131], we strongly endorse the development and adoption of an EU Artistic Freedom Act. This Act should recognise the multifaceted and complex nature of artistic freedom, addressing not only political pressures - which are essential to tackle - but also economic challenges, social polarisation, and constraints on freedom posed by digital technologies. It should examine not only instances of suppressed artistic expression, but also the barriers that prevent people from engaging with or considering cultural expression in the first place. Crucially, robust mechanisms must be established to measure and monitor the state of artistic freedom in Europe, encompassing all forms of censorship and self-censorship.

Furthermore, we fully support other proposals featured in the Discussion Paper of Culture Action Europe '*Towards the Culture Compass: A Sector Blueprint'*, in the section on artistic freedom coordinated by the Reset! Network[132]:

→ Integrate artistic freedom into the Rule of Law Report by expanding the chapter on media freedom and pluralism to cover the full spectrum of expression, explicitly including artistic and academic freedoms.

→ Establish a European Observatory on Artistic Freedom as a dedicated, independent body to monitor and report violations, in collaboration with organisations with proven expertise.

→ Develop an EU Artistic Freedom Index to raise public awareness and strengthen accountability, drawing on data from the observatory and civil society partners. Modeled on the World Press Freedom Index or the Academic Freedom Index, it would provide an annual ranking of Member States based on the state of artistic freedom.

We recommend that similar structures and processes - specific laws, indexes, observatory and reports, are implemented at the national levels.

## 2. Adopt and improve laws regulating the status of the artist

→ Following the recommendation of the OMC report on working conditions published in 2023, governments should establish specific, coherent, and comprehensive legislation covering all areas of artistic work[133]. Such frameworks must ensure that no cultural professional - regardless of labour regime, discipline, or professional pathway - is excluded from protections or support.

→ Governments, trade unions, and professional associations should develop clear, accessible, and up-to-date resources on all legal provisions, regulations, and branch-specific legislation relevant to cultural professionals. This should include cross-border guidance for artists working in multiple countries.

→ Policies must guarantee that artists transitioning between labour regimes, contractual arrangements, disciplines, or multiple artistic professions do not face gaps in rights, protections, or benefits. Systems should be resilient to multidisciplinary or career shifts.

## 3. Enshrine performing arts as a public good for all

→ Performing arts must be recognised as an essential element of social life and citizen development, with their value promoted across political, social, and educational spheres to ensure long-term prioritisation and integration into everyday social fabrics. Artistic education should be supported at all levels - from daycare and schools to universities and lifelong learning programmes - with a specific focus on marginalised communities to ensure equitable cultural participation. Inclusive artistic practices should be embedded in general education programmes.

→ Cultural access and participation should be monitored regularly across the EU, including infrastructure, accessibility, artistic education, amateur practice frameworks, and opportunities for self-expression. These assessments must identify both existing resources and gaps, particularly for marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, children and young people, and displaced persons, and be institutionalised as a routine policy exercise independent of political shifts. Data collection in assessments should be expanded to include people under 15 years of age.

→ Cross sectoral policy between the arts and primary and secondary education should be developed to enable both exposure to and active engagement in the arts developing artistic literacy from an early age. Culture must take its rightful place as intrinsic to both curricular and extra-curricular activities in educational institutions.

→ Cultural participation tools, such as cultural passports and free admission schemes, should be sustained and stabilised so that organisations can maintain long-term relationships with audiences without compromising their financial viability. Long-term support mechanisms must be provided for cultural organisations to consistently engage diverse audiences, including dedicated funding for cultural mediators and community connectors, particularly from minority groups.

→ The unique value of socially engaged and community art should be recognised, with stable and sufficient funding that allows artists to focus on long-term processes rather than rigid, project-based outputs. Cultural funders, such as ministries and arts councils, should proactively collaborate with other government departments, and stimulate long-term partnerships between the arts and care institutions, education, sports, and community work, to reposition performing arts as an integral part of broader life.

→ Investments should also expand the geographical and social reach of arts and culture through infrastructure development, touring initiatives, and programmes outside urban centres. Recognition systems  should be rethought and made more inclusive to value a diverse range of works and expressions, including minority and diasporic culture, socially engaged art, and work in rural or underrepresented regions, rather than solely prioritising urban visibility and  high-profile awards based on westernised standards of quality.

→ A specific government agency or role responsible for cultural participation and rights should be established to coordinate policies to guarantee equitable access, monitor implementation, and provide guidance and support to local authorities, schools, and cultural institutions, ensuring that cultural rights and opportunities are embedded across all relevant sectors.

# Glossary

**Artistic freedom:** refers to 'the freedom to imagine, create and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference or the pressures of non-state actors. It includes the right of all citizens to have access to these works and is essential for the wellbeing of societies'. Artistic freedom embodies the following rights: the right to create without censorship or intimidation; the right to have artistic work supported, distributed, remunerated; the right to freedom of movement; the right to freedom of association; the right to protection of social and economic rights; the right to participate in cultural life[134].

**Cultural rights:** refers to rights that protect the development and expression of cultural identities and encompass the right to access and participate in culture, heritage, and other resources that enable individuals and communities to develop, consolidate, and express their identities[135].

**Censorship:** refers to the practice of limiting or prohibiting the creation, distribution, or access to information, ideas, or artistic expressions on the basis of moral, political, religious, security-related, or other considerations, typically carried out by a government, institution, or other power group.

**Performing arts:** refers to live artistic practices, such as theatre, dance, opera, circus, spoken word, opera, mime, puppetry, performance art, and other time-based forms, in which performers present creative work directly to an audience, whether in a physical venue, outdoors, or online.

**Public good:** refers to a good that provides value to society, from which no one can be excluded, and whose provision does not depend on individuals' ability to pay for it. As a result, delivering such a good typically relies on public funding and state support.

**Self-censorship:** refers to the act or strategy of voluntarily restricting or modifying one's speech or actions to avoid causing offence or disturbance to others, without any formal or official directive to do so. The term 'self-censorship', as used in this report, refers to the tendency of cultural and creative workers and organisations to modify or restrict their own expression. This is often done in an effort to maintain or gain recognition, visibility, and support, protect their image and reputation, or shape it in a specific manner[136].

# Endnotes

01    These events include the Arts Festivals Summit 2025 Edinburgh (April 2025); IETM Plenary Meeting in Berlin (May 2025); Circostrada FRESH STREET #5 in Great Yarmouth (May 2025); and EDN's Think-in event in Turin (June 2025).

02    Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024). A Comparison of Youth Loneliness in Europe in 2024. [online] Available at: https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/next-generation-and-society/project-news/a-comparison-of-youth-loneliness-in-europe-in-2024?etcc_ctv=GegenEinsamkeit%3AJungeErwachse-nest%C3%A4rkerinGesellschafteinbinden&cHash=7cb5a882a927b2686598d9f666272a77  [Accessed 28 August 2025].

03    Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?* London: Economist Intelligence Unit, p. 8.

04    European Commission, 2025. *2025 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_25_2053 [Accessed 22 September 2025].

05    UNESCO, 2022. *Final Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022*. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/10/6.MONDIACULT_EN_DRAFT%20FINAL%20DECLARATION_FINAL_1.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2025].

06    Council of the European Union, 2023. Cáceres Declaration on Culture as an Essential Public Good. Available at: https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/paginas/2023/20230926_caceres-declaration.aspx [Accessed 1 October 2025].

07    The Democracy Index assesses the state of democracy in 165 countries, scoring them on a 0–10 scale across five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. (Democracy Index 2024, p. 6).

08    Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?* London: Economist Intelligence Unit, p. 8.

09    Ibid, p. 13

10    European Parliament (2023) *EP Spring 2023 Survey: Democracy in Action – One Year Before the European Elections. European Union*. Available at: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3093 (Accessed: 22 September 2025).

11    Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?* London: Economist Intelligence Unit, p. 13.

12    European Union (2024) *European Union priorities 2024–2029*. Available at: https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/european-union-priorities-2024-2029_en (Accessed: 22 September 2025).

13    European Commission (2024) *Democracy and our values*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/democracy-and-our-values_en (Accessed: 22 September 2025).

14    European Commission, 2019. *Priorities 2019–2024*. [online] Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_en [Accessed 22 September 2025].

15    European Commission, 2020. *European Democracy Action Plan*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ga/ip_20_2250 [Accessed 22 September 2025].

16   Ibid.

17   Bentzen, N., 2025. E*uropean Democracy Shield.* European Parliamentary Research Service, p. 2.

18   European Commission. (2024) *Democracy and our values* [online]. Available at: https://commission. europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/democracy-and-our-values_en [Accessed 22 September 2025].

19   Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?* London: Economist Intelligence Unit, p. 3

20   Culture Action Europe, 2024. *State of Culture Report*, p. 96

21   European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Hammonds, W., Culture and democracy, the evidence – How citizens' participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion – Lessons from international research, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/39199, pp. 29-31.

22   Council of the European Union, 2025. *Programme: A Strong Europe in a Changing World, July 1 – December 31, 202*5. Danish Presidency, p. 45.

23   The Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Declaration on the necessity of culture as media as  safeguards of our European democracies.

24   European Commission, 2025. *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme for the period 2028–2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818*. COM(2025) 550 final. [pdf] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0550 [Accessed 22 September 2025].

25   Ibid

26   European Parliament, 2025. *Plenary debate on 31 March 2025*. [online] Available at: https://www. europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debate-details.html?date=20250331&detailBy=date [Accessed 22 September 2025].

27   European Commission. *A Culture Compass for Europe. COM (2025) 785 final*, 12 November 2025. Brussels.

28   Examples include the Open letter '*Resistance Now: Free Culture*' by the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) / Free Republic of Vienna, the European Theatre Convention (ETC), the Prospero – Extended Theatre platform, Opera Europa; the *Bratislava Declaration* issued during the International Conference OpenCulture! organised by Open Culture! Platform on May 29–30, 2025, in Slovakia, and signed by 209 organisations and individuals; *Reset! Chronicles 2024: Into Europe's Threats to Cultural Independence and Artistic Freedom*; *Call for Artistic Freedom and Autonomy of the Arts (2024)* by Culture Action Europe; and the *Call on the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) to document and monitor violations of artistic freedom in Europe* initiated by the European Composer and Songwriter Alliance.

29   Freemuse, 2025. *The State of Artistic Freedom 202*5.

30   Council of Europe (2023). *Free to Create: Artistic Freedom in Europe.*

31   UNESCO 2019, Artistic Freedom, UNESCO

32   Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2025. Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. [online] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights [Accessed 22 September 2025].

33   Cited in United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010. *Report of the Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights: Preliminary study on cultural rights.* A/HRC/14/36. [pdf] Available at: https://docs.un.org/ en/A/HRC/14/36 [Accessed 22 September 2025].

34  Indirectly cited in the Summit Report: 9th World Summit on Arts & Culture, 2023, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, Sydney, NSW, p. 21.

35  Culture Action Europe, 2024. *State of Culture Report*, pp. 75-76.

36  UNESCO 2022, Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing culture as a global public good, p. 44

37  OECD (2022), The Culture Fix: Creative People, Places and Industries, Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED), OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/991bb520-en, p. 18

38  Eurostat, 2025. *General government expenditure by function (COFOG) (custom dataset)*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp__custom_11114667/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=97e0e001-2826-4d20-bafc-11e667bce4df [Accessed 1 October 2025].

39  The excessive deficit procedure is a mechanism designed to ensure that EU member states return to or maintain discipline in their governments' budgets. It is enacted if a member state exceeds the reference values for deficit or debt. The nine countries that are currently under this procedure are Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Council of the European Union, 2025. *Excessive deficit procedure.* [online] Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/excessive-deficit-procedure/?utm_campaign=20250620-ecofin-edp&utm_content=visual-card&utm_medium=social&utm_source=x.com [Accessed 1 October 2025].

40  Helsinki Times, 2025. *Economists warn Purra's budget cuts threaten growth targets.* [online] 7 August. Available at: https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/politics/27613-economists-warn-purra-s-budget-cuts-threaten-growth-targets [Accessed 24 September 2025].

41  Bermúdez, M., 2024. *Ninho's Statement against the Government's Cuts in the Finnish Culture Sector.* Ninho. [online] Available at: https://www.ninho.fi/2024/11/12/ninho-statement-against-governments-cuts-in-finnish-culture-sector/ [Accessed 24 September 2025].

42  Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024. *EUR 8.45 billion budget proposal for the Ministry of Education and Culture for 2025*. [online] Available at: https://okm.fi/en/-/eur-8.45-billion-budget-proposal-for-the-ministry-of-education-and-culture-for-2025 [Accessed 24 September 2025].

43  Walfisz, J., 2024. *As France slashes its culture budget, how do other European countries compare? Euronews, 18 April.* [online] Available at: https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/04/18/as-france-slashes-its-culture-budget-how-do-other-european-countries-compare [Accessed 27 September 2025].

44  Audureau, W., Dassonville, A., Derœux, I., Ferrer, M., Maad, A., Romain, M. & Vaudano, M., 2025. *What's in the French state's 2025 budget*. Le Monde, 7 February. [online] Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2025/02/07/what-s-in-the-french-state-s-2025-budget_6737882_8.html [Accessed 27 September 2025].

45  Noce, V., 2025. F*rench culture sector faces 'violent' cuts as parliament adopts 2025 budget*. The Art Newspaper, 7 February. [online] Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/02/07/french-culture-sector-faces-violent-cuts-as-parliament-adopts-2025-budget [Accessed 27 September 2025].

46  Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 2025. *Bund plant 2025 mit rund 2,25 Milliarden Euro für Kultur und Medien – Kulturstaatsminister Weimer: „Bundesregierung bleibt engagierter und zuverlässiger Partner für Kultur und Medien".* [online] Available at: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/bund-plant-2025-mit-rund-2-25-milliarden-euro-fuer-kultur-und-medien-kulturstaatsminister-weimer-bundesregierung-bleibt-engagierter-und-zuverlaessiger-partner-fuer-kultur-und-medien--2356294 [Accessed 25 September 2025].

47  Rodriguez y Romero, J., 2025. *The surprising turn in the Federal Culture Budget 2025: Facts on the current debate*. Kunstplaza, 28 August. [online] Available at: https://www.kunstplaza.de/en/press-releases/turning-the-federal-culture-household-facts/ [Accessed 27 September 2025].

48 Westdeutsche Zeitung (WZ), 2025. *Kulturpass für Jugendliche endet – Kritik wird laut*. [online] Available via Westdeutsche Zeitung website: https://www.wz.de/kultur/kulturpass-fuer-jugendliche-endet-kritik-wird-laut_aid-135491007 [Accessed 27 September 2025].

49 Deutscher Bundestag, 2025. *Haushalt 2026: Kulturetat des Bundes soll steigen*. hib-Kurzmeldung, 18 August. [online] Available at: https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/kurzmeldungen-1105610 [Accessed 27 September 2025].

50 Walfisz, J., 2024. *Berlin announces huge €130 million cuts to culture budget*. Euronews, 27 November. [online] Available at: https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/11/27/berlin-announces-huge-130-million-cuts-to-culture-budget [Accessed 24 September 2025].

51 bbk berlin, 2025. *Press release by bbk berlin: Without art and culture, there is no diversity*. Without diversity, there is no secure democracy! 12 September. [online] Available at: https://www.bbk-berlin.de/en/news/12092025-press-release-bbk-berlin-without-art-and-culture-there-no-diversity-without-diversity [Accessed 27 September 2025].

52 KulturNetzKöln, 2025. *Statement on the 2025/2026 budget*. [online] Available at: https://kulturnetz-koeln.de/en/news/statement-on-the-2025-2026-budget/ [Accessed 27 September 2025].

53 Pecqueur, A., 2024. *Italy: Giorgia Meloni's cultural takeover*. Le Monde Diplomatique (English edition), July. [online] Available at: https://mondediplo.com/2024/07/14italy [Accessed 29 September 2025].

54 Finestre sull'Arte, 2024. *Senate passes budget bill: here are measures for culture and tourism*. [online] Available at: https://www.finestresullarte.info/en/news/senate-passes-budget-bill-here-are-measures-for-culture-and-tourism [Accessed 30 September 2025].

55 Claesson, S. & Gordan, R., 2025. *Kulturbudgeten 2026 – nu lägsta andelen sedan 2000*. Magasin K, 22 September. [online] Available at: https://magasink.se/2025/09/kulturbudgeten-2026-nu-lagsta-andelen-sedan-2000/ [Accessed 27 September 2025].

56 Kulturrådet, 2024. *Kulturrådet i kulturbudgeten*. [online] Available at: https://www.kulturradet.se/nyheter/2024/kulturradet-i-kulturbudgeten/ [Accessed 29 September 2025].

57 Maclachlan, E. & Gustavfsson, E., 2024. *Budget Cuts Threaten the Future of Sweden and Finland's Cultural Sector*. Reset! network, 12 November. [online] Available at: https://reset-network.eu/budget-cuts-threaten-the-future-of-sweden-and-finlands-cultural-sector/ [Accessed 29 September 2025].

58 Campaign for the Arts, 2025. *What did the 2025 Spending Review mean for the arts?* 12 June. [online] Available at: https://www.campaignforthearts.org/news/what-did-the-2025-spending-review-mean-for-the-arts/ [Accessed 1 October 2025].

59 DFS (Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd), 2024. *Guide til kulturpasset*. Available at: https://dfs.dk/nyheder/nyheder/guide-til-kulturpasset/ [Accessed 1 October 2025].

60 Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (2022). *Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme*. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/campaigns/basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme/ (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

61 Visual Artists Ireland (2025). *Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme*. Available at: https://visualartists.ie/how-to-manual/basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme (Accessed: 30 September 2025)

62 Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (2025). *Minister O'Donovan announces 6-month extension to the Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme*. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/press-releases/minister-odonovan-announces-6-month-extension-to-the-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme/ (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

63 Dagg, J. (2025) *Basic Income for the Arts in Ireland: Qualitative Report*. May 2025.

64    Creatives Unite (2025) 'I*reland: Basic Income for Artists Boosts Creativity and Wellbeing*', Creatives Unite. Available at: https://creativesunite.eu/article/ireland-basic-income-for-artists-boosts-creativity-and-wellbeing (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

65    Chambre des Députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (2024) 'Un budget à la hausse pour soutenir le secteur de la culture', *Chambre des Députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*. Available at: https://www.chd.lu/en/budget2025-culture (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

66    Chronicle.lu (2025) '2025 to be Dedicated to Access to Culture and Strengthening the Sector', Chronicle.lu. Available at: https://www.chronicle.lu/category/culture/53038-2025-to-be-dedicated-to-access-to-culture-and-strengthening-the-sector (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

67    Stadt Zürich (2023) *Kulturleitbild 2024–2027.* Zürich: Stadt Zürich Kultur.

68    World Cities Culture Forum, 2025. *A stage for all: Zürich introduces transparent funding model with Kultur Labor.* [online] Available at: https://worldcitiescultureforum.com/city-project/culture-laboratory-zurich/ [Accessed 5 October 2025].

69    artFAQ, 2025. *artFAQ – production platform for dance, theatre and performance in the Zürich region.* [online] Available at: https://www.artfaq.ch/?lang=en [Accessed 5 October 2025].

70    Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and Nandy, L. (2025) *'£85 million to support arts and cultural organisations across the country'*, GOV.UK, 29 May. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/85-million-to-support-arts-and-cultural-organisations-across-the-country (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

71    OutdoorArtsUK (2025) *'A view from Outdoor Arts: £270m Arts Everywhere Funding by DCMS'*, OutdoorArtsUK, 3 March. Available at: https://outdoorartsuk.org/2025/03/a-view-from-outdoor-arts-270m-arts-everywhere-funding-by-dcms/ (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

72    Curious Minds (2025) *'Responding to the Arts Everywhere Fund'*, Curious Minds, 7 March. Available at: https://curiousminds.org.uk/responding-to-the-arts-everywhere-fund-r2l7 (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

73    The respondent has most likely referred to Portugal's Decree establishing the Statute of Professionals in Culture, effective from 2022.

74    Tornedalsteatern, 2025. *Regeringen slår undan benen för Tornedalsteatern.* [online] 22 September. Available at: https://www.tornedalsteatern.se/2025/09/22/regeringen-slar-undan-benen-for-tornedalsteatern/ [Accessed 30 September 2025].

75    Rodriguez, J. & Badillo, A. (2023) *Protecting the cultural heritage of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples, Mondaq* [online]. Available at: https://www.mondaq.com/mexico/indigenous-peoples/1343422/protecting-the-cultural-heritage-of-indigenous-and-afro-mexican-peoples (Accessed: 10 December 2025).

76    Ministero della Cultura, 2024. *Decreto ministeriale 23 dicembre 2024, n. 463: Criteri e modalità per l'assegnazione e la liquidazione dei contributi allo spettacolo dal vivo.* [pdf] Available at: https://spettacolo.cultura.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/D.M.-23-dicembre-2024-n.-463.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2025].

77    Kunst.dk, 2025. *Approval of Performances: Refund Scheme.* [online] Available at: https://www.kunst.dk/english/funding-programmes/approval-of-performances-refund-scheme [Accessed 1 October 2025].

78    Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?* London: Economist Intelligence Unit, pp. 24-25.

79    Culture Action Europe, 2024. *State of Culture Report*, pp. 71-75.

80   Pavesi, I, Laourou, J & Sethi, S, 2025. *Early Warning: AFI and Open Culture 2025 Report. Culture Action Europe*. [pdf] Available at: https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Early-Warning_AFI-and-Open-Culture_2025_Report.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2025].

81   Vlaams Belang 202, *Vlaanderen Weer Van Ons*, p. 77

82   Jakonen, O., Renko, V., & Harding, T. (2024). *Challenging the Nordic model? The cultural policies of populist parties in Finland and Sweden*. International Journal of Cultural Policy, 31(1), 16–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2024.2313520

83   Partij Voor Vrijheid 2023, *Nederlanders Weer Op 1*, pp. 29-30

84   Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), 2016. *Grundsatzprogramm: Kultur, Sprache und Identität*. [online] Available at: https://www.afd.de/grundsatzprogramm/#7 [Accessed 1 October 2025].

85   Pavesi, I, Laourou, J & Sethi, S, 2025. *Early Warning: AFI and Open Culture 2025 Report*. Culture Action Europe. [pdf] Available at: https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Early-Warning_AFI-and-Open-Culture_2025_Report.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2025].

86   Copied from: *IETM Report: Perspectives on Artistic Freedom at Risk*, IETM, Brussels, July 2025.

87   Deutscher Bundestag, 2024. *Drucksache 20/13627: Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP – Nie wieder ist jetzt – Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken*. [pdf] Available at: https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2025].

88   Ward, B., 2024. *Germany's Muddle on Antisemitism. Human Rights Watch*. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/11/germanys-muddle-antisemitism [Accessed 30 September 2025].

89   Mann, I. and Yona, L., 2024. *Who Gets to Define Jewish Identity in Germany?* Verfassungsblog. Available at: https://verfassungsblog.de/who-gets-to-define-jewish-identity-in-germany/ [Accessed 30 September 2025].

90   Deutsche Welle, 2024. *Germany passes controversial antisemitism resolution*. [online] Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/germany-passes-controversial-antisemitism-resolution/a-70715643 [Accessed 30 September 2025].

91   Peticijos.lt, 2025. *Lietuvos kultūros bendruomenės peticija prieš LR Kultūros ministerijos politinį išmainymą*. [online] Available at: https://www.peticijos.lt/visos/87581/lietuvos-kulturos-bendruomenes-peticija-pries-lr-kulturos-ministerijos-politini-ismainyma/#petition-signature [Accessed 5 October 2025].

92   The Brussels Times, 2025. *Culture Minister 'disagrees' with Bouchez that her role serves no value*. [online] Available at: https://www.brusselstimes.com/1381059/culture-minister-disagrees-with-bouchez-that-her-role-serves-no-value [Accessed 30 September 2025].

93   Harris, G., 2025. *UK culture minister says scrapping department would be 'absolute madness'*. The Art Newspaper. Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/05/23/it-would-be-absolute-madness-uk-culture-minister-insists-department-will-not-be-scrapped [Accessed 30 September 2025].

94   Read more here: RTÉ, 2025. *Arts Council 'regrets' €6.7m IT failure, PAC hears*. RTE Culture, 29 May. [online] Available at: https://www.rte.ie/culture/2025/0529/1515547-public-accounts-committee/ [Accessed 5 October 2025].

95   Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, 2025. *Despite divisive political rhetoric, DEI is alive and well, 14 February*. [online] Available at: https://www.hsfkramer.com/notes/employment/2025-posts/UK-US-DEI-alive-and-well [Accessed 1 October 2025].

96   European Commission, 2025. *Corporate sustainability reporting.* [online] Available at: https://finance.ec.europa.eu/capital-markets-union-and-financial-markets/company-reporting-and-auditing/company-reporting/corporate-sustainability-reporting_en [Accessed 1 October 2025].

97   World Federation of Advertisers (WFA), 2023. *Wave II of Global DEI Census shows high recognition of industry efforts, but no improvement on inclusion, 15 June.* [online] Available at: https://wfanet.org/knowledge/item/2023/06/15/Wave-II-of-Global-DEI-Census-shows-high-recognition-of-industry-efforts-but-no-improvement-on-inclusion [Accessed 1 October 2025].

98   Pew Research Center, 2024. *Views of DEI have become slightly more negative among U.S. workers, 19 November.* [online] Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/19/views-of-dei-have-become-slightly-more-negative-among-us-workers/ [Accessed 1 October 2025].

99   Hardy, S. & Schraepen, T., 2024. *The state and effects of discrimination in the European Union. OECD Working Paper No. 26.* [pdf] OECD. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/the-state-and-effects-of-discrimination-in-the-european-union_71c60e9f/7fd921b9-en.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2025].

100  United Nations, 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 27.* Available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights [Accessed 1 October 2025].

101  UNESCO, 2022. *Final Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022.* Available at: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/10/6.MONDIACULT_EN_DRAFT%20FINAL%20DECLARATION_FINAL_1.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2025].

102  Council of the European Union, 2023. *Cáceres Declaration on Culture as an Essential Public Good.* Available at: https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/paginas/2023/20230926_caceres-declaration.aspx [Accessed 1 October 2025].

103  Polivtseva, E., 2024. *Culture after the EU elections: what to expect. Culture Policy Room, 1 October.* Available at: https://www.culturepolicyroom.eu/insights/culture-after-the-eu-elections-what-to-expect [Accessed 1 October 2025].

104  Alþingi (2023). *Þingsályktun um aðgerðaáætlun um eflingu barnamenningar 2024–2028.* Available at: https://www.althingi.is/altext/153/s/1840.html [Accessed 30 September 2025].

105  Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2025. *The Seimas approved the law regulating cultural policy.* Available at: https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=1&p_t=288964 [Accessed 30 September 2025].

106  Ibid.

107  Lietuvos Respublikos kultūros ministerija (2024) *Kitų metų biudžeto projekte – papildomos lėšos kultūros turiniui, kultūros darbuotojų atlyginimams, Gedimino kalnui, kultūros įstaigų plėtrai* [online]. Available at: https://lrkm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/kitu-metu-biudzeto-projekte-papildomos-lesos-kulturos-turiniui-kulturos-darbuotoju-atlyginimams-gedimino-kalnui-kulturos-istaigu-pletrai/ (Accessed: 10 December 2025).

108  Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte (2025) *'Presentación del Plan de Derechos Culturales', Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 8 July.* Available at: https://www.cultura.gob.es/en/actualidad/2025/07/250708-presentacion-plan-derechos-culturales (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

109  Stortinget, 2023. *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission.* [online] Available at: https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/News-archive/Front-page-news/2022-2023/the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission/ [Accessed 1 October 2025].

110   The White House, 2025. *Executive Order: Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, 29 January.* [online] Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/  [Accessed 30 September 2025].

111   The White House, 2025. *Executive Order: Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, 20 January.* [online] Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/  [Accessed 30 September 2025].

112   NPR, 2025. *Sweeping cuts hit NEA after Trump administration calls to eliminate the agency. NPR, 3 May.* [online] Available at: https://www.npr.org/2025/05/03/nx-s1-5385888/sweeping-cuts-hit-nea-after-trump-administration-calls-to-eliminate-the-agency [Accessed 30 September 2025].

113   European Commission, 2025. *Europeans' attitudes towards culture.* [online] Available at: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3364 [Accessed 1 October 2025].

114   European Commission, 2013. *Cultural access and participation.* [pdf] Available at: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1115 [Accessed 1 October 2025].

115   Giurge, L.M., Whillans, A.V. and West, C., 2020. *Why time poverty matters for individuals, organisations and nations. [pdf] Working Paper No. 22.* Available at: https://cssh.northeastern.edu/gap/wp-content/uploads/sites/62/2024/07/wp22.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2025].

116   Cultural Policy for Arts Education - *African-European Practises and Perspectives*, 2022. P. 6 Available at https://www.peterlang.com/document/1177344

117   UNESCO, 2025. *Global Report on Cultural Policies: Culture  —  the Missing SDG.* [online] Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/global-report [Accessed 2 October 2025], p. 58

118   According to the latest data from UNHCR and other international agencies, 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced globally by the end of 2024 reaching records high: UNHCR, 2025.

119   Polivtseva, E. and Stambke, F., *The Situation of At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals. Policy and Practice in the EU: Pathways, Impediments and Patchwork Solutions – Volume 2 Cultural Policy Analysis*, On the Move, 2025, available at on-the-move.org/resources.

120   Global Expression Report, 2025. *The Global Expression Report 2025.* [online] Available at: https://www.globalexpressionreport.org/ [Accessed 2 October 2025].

121   European Festivals Association, 2025. *Artistic Freedom Workshop: Arts Festivals Summit 2025.* [online] Available at: https://www.european-festivals.eu/news/artistic-freedom-workshop-arts-festivals-summit-2025 [Accessed 3 October 2025].

122   This was not a yes/no question - it was an invitation to cite examples of self-censorship, so a considerable number of respondents (41%) left the response field blank. It is unclear whether this was because they chose not to answer for various reasons or because the concept of self-censorship did not apply to them.

123   UNESCO, 2025. *Global Report on Cultural Policies: Culture  —  the Missing SDG.* [online] Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/global-report [Accessed 2 October 2025], p. 299

124   Creatives Unite n.d., T*his is how we work, last seen 5 September 2024,* https://creativesunite.eu/work-condition/ (see section 'Artistic freedom')

125   Ibid, p. 70

126   Ibid.

127   Ibid, p. 61

128  Ibid, p. 64

129  European Parliament, 2023. *EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors*. European Parliament resolution of 21 November 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on an EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors (2023/2051(INL)). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0405_EN.pdf [Accessed 2 October 2025].

130  Culture Action Europe. (2025). *Resistance Now Together Updates*. [online] Available at: https://cultureactioneurope.org/advocacy/resistance-now-together-updates/ [Accessed 2 Oct. 2025].

131  European Parliament, 2025. *Plenary debate on 31 March 2025*. [online] Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debate-details.html?date=20250331&detailBy=date [Accessed 22 September 2025].

132  Culture Action Europe. (2025). *Towards the Culture Compass: A Sector Blueprint*. [online] Available at: https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Towards-the-Culture-Compass-A-Sector-Blueprint.docx-1.pdf [Accessed 2 October 2025], pp. 9-10

133  European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals – Report of the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) group of EU Member States' experts*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/46315, p. 96

134  UNESCO 2019, Available at: https://www.unesco.org/creativity/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/01/arti stic_freedom_pdf_web.pdf  [Accessed 7 December 2025].

135  Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2025. Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. [online] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights [Accessed 22 September 2025].

136  Culture Action Europe, 2024. *State of Culture Report*, p. 153.

**ANNEX - Respondents to the survey**

In total, 223 individuals responded to the survey

**Members of networks** (multiple choice was possible)

> ASSITEJ - 98; IETM - 76; EFA - 14; EDN - 13; Circostrada - 12

**Respondents by country** (multiple choice was possible):

> Germany – 20; Italy – 17; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – 16; Spain – 14; Sweden – 13; Finland – 11; Denmark – 11; Netherlands (Kingdom of the) – 10; Czechia – 8; France – 8; United States of America – 7; Ireland – 7; Belgium – 6; Ukraine – 6; Croatia – 6; Greece – 6; Portugal – 5; Serbia – 4; Hungary – 4; Romania – 4; Lithuania – 4; Latvia – 4; North Macedonia – 4; Luxembourg – 3; Norway – 3; Poland – 3; Japan – 3; Switzerland – 3; Israel – 3; Georgia – 3; Slovakia – 3; Chile – 3; Iceland – 3; Nigeria – 3; South Africa – 2; Mexico – 2; Türkiye – 2; Australia – 2; Bulgaria – 2; Taiwan – 2; Senegal – 2; United States Virgin Islands – 2; Mali – 2; Estonia – 2; Cyprus – 2; Slovenia – 2; Liechtenstein – 2; Uganda – 2; San Marino – 2; Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2; Malta – 1; Rwanda – 1; Austria – 1; Russian Federation – 1; Cuba – 1; Democratic Republic of the Congo – 1; Armenia – 1; India – 1; Democratic People's Republic of Korea – 1; Egypt – 1;  Guatemala – 1; Hong Kong – 1; Indonesia – 1; Iran (Islamic Republic of) – 1; Jordan – 1; Kyrgyzstan – 1; Lebanon – 1; Libya – 1; Malaysia – 1; Morocco – 1; Pakistan – 1; Palestine – 1; Philippines – 1; Republic of Korea – 1; Saudi Arabia – 1; Singapore – 1; South Sudan – 1; Sudan – 1; Syrian Arab Republic – 1; Tajikistan – 1; Tunisia – 1; United Arab Emirates – 1; Uzbekistan – 1; Yemen – 1.

**Respondents by discipline** (multiple choice was possible):

> Interdisciplinary – 71; Theatre – 68; Dance – 68; Performance / Live Art – 57; Drama – 45; Outdoor Art – 28; Puppetry – 25; Circus – 23; Music – 21; Storytelling – 19; Spoken Word – 17; Visual Mediums – 14; Opera – 13; Mime – 10; Clowning – 9; Other – 7.

**PERFORMING ARTS COALITION**

Between Rhetoric and Reality:
Cultural Rights, Artistic Freedom, and Democratic Resilience

**Author:**
Elena Polivtseva

**Coordinated by:**
Alice Brunot, Circostrada
Ása Richardsdóttir, IETM
Eva Broberg, EDN
Kathrin Deventer, EFA
Louis Valente, ASSITEJ

**Design by:**
Milton Pereira

**Co-organised by:**

International Association of
Theatre & Performing Arts for
Children & Young People

CIRCO STRADA
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

EUROPEAN
FESTIVALS
ASSOCIATION

EDN European
Dance Development
Network

International network
for contemporary
performing arts

**With the support of:**

january 2026