

ON
THE
MOVE

CULTURAL MOBILITY FLOWS

Mental Health,
Well-being and International
Cultural Mobility

REPORT AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Co-funded by
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On the Move is the international information network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 78 members from 29 countries. Since 2002, On the Move provides regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and advocates for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multi-annual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

On the Move regularly commissions researchers to investigate different themes closely related to the network's activities and the work carried out by its members. Reflecting on transversal concerns and key areas of artistic and cultural mobility, the network tries to establish a clearer picture of the current movements and trends while formulating policy recommendations.

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Foreword

Numerous studies and cultural initiatives, at local, national, and European levels, have explored the diverse ways in which the arts and culture contribute to the well-being and overall health, including mental health, of the population. Extensive research has provided robust and tangible evidence of how the sector bolsters the sustainability and resilience of societies, especially when engaging with vulnerable communities. Yet, the well-being and mental health of the creative workforce itself remain significantly under-researched.

In recent years, however, mental health has increasingly gained attention alongside other pressing concerns within the cultural sector, such as the impacts of gender-based violence, the precarious working conditions of arts professionals, discrimination faced by parenting, caregivers, or disabled cultural workers, the psycho-social pressures experienced by refugee artists, and anxieties related to climate change, among others.

Cross-border mobility is frequently regarded as a vital aspect of a professional career, not merely for the cultural and intellectual enrichment it fosters, but also for the economic stability it can provide. The international dimension is especially crucial for artists and cultural practitioners whose local or national ecosystems fail to offer such opportunities. These individuals must often navigate a complex landscape of paradoxes and tensions inherent in cultural mobility: balancing professional obligations with personal life while regularly travelling far from home and family, striving for financial stability while remaining reliant on foreign gatekeepers and funders, applying for international opportunities while facing visa denials, or seeking refuge in a safer country yet lacking the status or knowledge to operate effectively in a new environment.

This publication builds upon a Cultural Mobility Webinar¹ that examined the impacts of international cultural mobility on the mental health and well-

being of artists and culture professionals. It also follows recent online and in-person initiatives led by On the Move members to explore the positive and negative impacts of international cultural mobility on mental health and well-being.

The first chapter presents an analysis of calls for cultural mobility opportunities posted on the On the Move website since January 2020. The data therefore concentrates on funded programmes, generally one-off calls or calls related to temporary or shifting programmes rather than permanent ones, which are separately listed in On the Move's mobility funding guides.

The second chapter builds upon the contributions provided by key experts during the webinar and in additional interviews, with the aim of better identifying the challenges met by artists and culture professionals, while presenting existing practical guidance and local initiatives.

The third chapter summarises evidence from recent literature on the mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals. It places particular emphasis on the risks and stressors arising from limited access to, the management of, and the practical challenges associated with transnational mobility.

Ultimately, the publication provides recommendations to all culture stakeholders, to European Union institutions, and to local, regional and national authorities. The recommendations are derived from the sources analysed above, and reinforce observations and recommendations appearing in relevant policy documents addressing the mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals.

We wish you an inspiring read!

Yohann Floch,
Director of Operations

¹ The recording of the Mobility Webinar as well as its Key Resources are accessible on the On the Move website: <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/mobility-webinar-mental-health-well-being-and-international-cultural-mobility>

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Data Analysis: 'Mental health and well-being' in open calls for participation

by Claire Rosslyn Wilson

This document presents an analysis of calls for cultural mobility opportunities posted on the On the Move website during a period of more than four years from 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2024. The data reflects the website's editorial policy and focus, which is on funded programmes that cover at least some of the costs of travel (or that offer remuneration in the case of online/remote programmes). In line with On the Move's editorial policy, there are no calls that have application fees. The calls that are posted to the website are generally one-off calls or calls that relate to temporary or shifting programmes rather than permanent ones (which are separately listed in the mobility funding guides).

Mental health and well-being are not listed as a separate theme on the website, nor is there a category that indicates where such costs are provided. Therefore, to find out which calls centred mental health and well-being, this research took a broad approach. As mentioned throughout this report, mental health and well-being is a challenge that appears in many facets of an artist's creative practice, and this is especially the case when focusing on cultural mobility. Mental health is interlinked with a number of areas and can be impacted by employment, national and international conflicts, family commitments, environmental crises, sector changes, and more. In an attempt to obtain an overview of these elements from On the Move website data, a number of approaches were taken. As an initial overview, a search was undertaken for open calls that specifically announced health, well-being and care in the title of the call, indicating that these calls put these topics at the centre of the call.

The second approach was to analyse the calls which provided 'access costs', which include additional

funding for those with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities, or those who otherwise had obstacles to their participation. This is particularly relevant for the cases in which insufficient financial support for things such as childcare lead to poorer mental health or well-being outcomes. The third approach was to cast the net wider, paying attention to other factors that might impact mental health, such as open calls that address working conditions (a category on the website), visa applications (analysing those organisations that provide funding for visa application fees), conflict (through keyword searches) or calls that address minority groups (through keyword searches).

These approaches give an indication of the relevant open calls on the website, however it is possible that some open calls were missed, for example those that had elements of care or well-being as a part of a more general call. Therefore, the aim of this section is to provide an insight into key trends as well as some relevant case studies.

Mental health, well-being and care

Out of the 2,853 calls posted to the On the Move website in the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2024, there were 20 open calls that mention health (more generally), well-being and care in their titles. Care was the most common term used in these calls (with 15 open calls using this term), followed by health (four calls, although none specifically mentioned mental health) and well-being (one call).

A total of 19 of these open calls were from Europe-based organisations with one organisation based in the USA, although there was one targeted at artists in and from Africa and its diasporas and one that was open to artists from the Arab world (who were residing in Europe). Additionally, one call had a co-organiser based in India. There were no discernible trends in terms of location of the organisers or co-organisers,

with Germany, Spain and Belgium each having three open calls, closely followed by Austria, Italy and Slovenia with two each.

In terms of the types of open calls, there were 11 residencies (55%), four meetings, two for funded projects (particularly at the ideation stage), two for presenting work and there was one fellowship. There were four open calls that were for online opportunities (20%).

With regards to fees offered, this ranged from only travel costs or travel with modest fees (for a short meeting, for example) to 15,000 EUR (for fees and production costs) for a three-month residency. Two of the calls were open to receiving children and/or partners and both these calls covered accommodation and travel for the additional attendees.

Access costs

Another way to examine mental health, well-being and care in open calls published on the website is through 'access costs'. This additional fee might open opportunities to those with family or caring duties who would not otherwise have the time or resources to apply for mobility opportunities or to disabled artists and cultural professionals who face additional challenges in cultural mobility. Two previous On the Move reports explore these topics in more detail: *Cultural Mobility Flows – Parenting and International Cultural Mobility*² and *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals*.³ These are both important reports for this study, as they reflect two factors that can impact the mental

health and well-being of artists and these reports analyse the types of opportunities open to these groups.

To give a brief overview, in the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2024 there were 50 out of 2,853 (1.8%) open calls posted on the On the Move website that made an explicit commitment to covering additional costs faced by parent artists and professionals, while there were 71 open calls (2.4%) that provided access costs more generally. It is worth noting that in recent years a relatively large percentage of open calls providing access costs are connected to Culture Moves Europe funding. For example, since 31 May 2023 (when the Culture

² Ellingsworth, J., Floch, Y. and Verstraete, K. (November 2023), *Cultural Mobility Flows – Parenting and international cultural mobility. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <http://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-parenting-and-international-cultural-mobility>

³ Baltà Portolés, J.; Dowden, S.; and Ellingsworth, J. (June 2024), *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <http://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-international-mobility-disabled-artists-and-culture>

Moves Europe launched its first call) and 31 August 2024, 18 out of 35 of the calls with access costs were connected to Culture Moves Europe funding, amounting to 51.4% of those open calls.

These two reports related to parenting and disabled artists can provide more detailed analysis of the open calls, but it is worth highlighting here that further financial support and care of these target groups can contribute to more positive experiences. For example, there are some open calls on the website that were open to accepting families or dependents, but they did not offer financial support and therefore this information is not reflected in the gathered data. However, this welcoming of dependents, stated in the open calls, might create a space for care described in this report, where, as Sophie Dowden explains, 'the focus should be on the human side of hosting artists and the efforts involved in providing meaningful care and support'. By creating a welcoming space where the challenges

of caregiving are centred or at least mentioned in the open call, opportunities can create a space where parenting artists can feel more supported beyond the making of artwork itself. Another approach taken in some of the open calls was to consider the actual needs of parents to develop their work. For example, the McColl Center's Artist-in-Residence Programme in the USA⁴ offers a complimentary summer camp for children aged 6–14, which also takes into consideration the timing of the residency for artist parents (which takes place during school holidays for the northern hemisphere). Meanwhile, the Massa Mare residency for musicians and sound artists experiencing motherhood (based in Suralita, Spain)⁵ acknowledges the energy required in parenting, when they describe the residency as being 'devoted to music and contemporary sound research led by artists who are immersed in the process of motherhood and who need time and space to develop their projects'.

Working conditions

Of the calls analysed during this period, there were few calls that were published in the category of 'working conditions'. Some examples include a call for artists who want to explore how work will look like in the future,⁶ a workshop dedicated to the transformations that labour is undergoing as a result of the current technological revolution⁷ and a programme of artistic residencies designed to test survival strategies amidst the ongoing threat of performing arts extinction.⁸ One UK call has taken an interesting approach by paying Real Living Wage⁹ to selected curators from lower socio-economic backgrounds during a twelve-month curatorial

training programme, in an attempt to diversify the profession. Such an approach provides the stability in which the basic needs are supported, thereby easing the pressure that comes with seeking out funded projects, allowing the curators to focus on developing professionally.

Another area that can add to the stress of artists and cultural professionals working in the sector is the rapid pace of work, that can be seen in intense touring schedules, undertaking many projects at the same time, lack of time for research, reflection or professional development, and the need to travel

⁴ McColl Center: Artist-in-Residence Programme 2025 (USA): <http://on-the-move.org/news/mccoll-center-artist-residence-programme-2025-usa>

⁵ Suralita: 2024 Massa Mare Residency for Musicians and Sound Artists Experiencing Motherhood (Spain): <http://on-the-move.org/news/suralita-2024-massa-mare-residency-musicians-and-sound-artists-experiencing-motherhood-spain>

⁶ Urban Innovation Unit: Work Upside Down (Romania): <http://on-the-move.org/news/urban-innovation-unit-work-upside-down-romania>

⁷ Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli: FeltrinelliCamp Workshops (Italy / Online): <http://on-the-move.org/news/fondazione-giangiacomo-feltrinelli-feltrinelliscamp-workshops-italy-online>

⁸ Dorothy Michaels: REMOLINO Residency Programme for Artists from Portugal, Spain, Italy or Greece (Spain): <http://on-the-move.org/news/dorothy-michaels-remolino-residency-programme-artists-portugal-spain-italy-or-greece-spain>

⁹ New Curators: Curatorial Training Programme for Individuals from Lower Socio-economic Backgrounds (UK): <https://on-the-move.org/news/new-curators-curatorial-training-programme-individuals-lower-socio-economic-backgrounds-uk>

to a range of places on tight schedules. Heightened mobility and varied projects can contribute to a financially robust portfolio of activities, but it can put pressure on individuals working at such a fast pace, meaning that they might spend less time at home. There are a number of open calls that are trying to address this, through supporting slower forms of travel, often to address environmental sustainability, although a slower pace could feasibly benefit people on the level of well-being. However, as highlighted in the Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2023,¹⁰ slower travel is not always financially supported in full, and individuals often need to cover the additional travel expenses out of production budgets or artist fees. The Culture Moves Europe initiative does provide additional funding for more sustainable travel, but the per diem does not cover these additional days of travel and the additional 350 EUR might not be sufficient to cover the slower and more expensive forms of transport. These combined factors might, in fact, make slower travel more stressful for artists and cultural professionals, shifting the responsibility to the individual rather than the structural frameworks. One area that perhaps does provide more support for slower ways of working are the residencies and project support that focus on process and research rather than outputs. In these cases, artists are supported while they take the time to develop their practice, rather than spending the period to develop a specific piece of work.

Another key challenge in working in the sector is regarding professional development; finding the time and the resources to undertake professional development and training can be a challenge, especially for individuals and freelancers. As reported in the Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2024,¹¹ out of the training open calls listed on the website

the median time for training was 6.5 days, while in only 32.1% of training calls some form of stipend or grant to pay the beneficiary for the time spent on the training activity was provided. In a positive step, 5.7% of training calls offered to cover access costs, which could help open these opportunities to those facing additional barriers to participation.

Another way to reduce barriers to participation is through online opportunities. As reported in the Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2022,¹² a total of 29.4% of calls featured on the On the Move website in 2021 were organised in a digital/remote format, or as a hybrid of online work and in-person activity (against 26.1% in 2020). However, by 2023 this had decreased again, perhaps in response to fatigue with online events and interactions, and in 2023 there were 13.9% calls that were either digital/remote format or hybrid (a drop-off that was first seen in 2022 with 15.5% of calls either online or hybrid). Although online opportunities do open up opportunities for those who are less able to travel (due to visa restrictions, financial limitation, disabilities, or caring responsibilities) the prevalence of online work can disrupt boundaries between private and professional activities, leading to burnout and poorer mental health. Additionally, the use of online programmes can 'reinforce geographical inequalities as people on the periphery are channelled into digital projects while people at the centre may exercise choice.'¹³

This geographic inequality can also happen within territories, and not only across borders. This can range from depopulation, the lack of creative networks or infrastructure or the inability to earn a sustainable income while living in remote locations. Some calls on the website sought to raise awareness for these issues and make a bridge between artists.

¹⁰ Ben Safia, S.; Ellingsworth, J.; and Ntsali Mlandu, U. (March 2023), *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2023*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-yearbook-2023>

¹¹ Ellingsworth, J.; Persson, B.; and Rodrigues, V. (March 2024), *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2024*. On the Move, available at <https://www.on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-yearbook-2024>

¹² DeVlieg, M.A.; Ellingsworth, E.; Le Roux, A.; and Organtini, C. (April 2022), *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2022*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-yearbook-2022>

¹³ DeVlieg, M.A.; Ellingsworth, E.; Le Roux, A.; and Organtini, C. (April 2022), *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2022*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-yearbook-2022>

For example, the 3piedras residency in Spain explored the challenge of rural repopulation¹⁴ while the Brazilian organisation Silo – Arte e Latitude Rural developed a residency based on resilience,¹⁵

to name a few examples. It could be argued that digital opportunities might also help to alleviate the isolation felt by those in rural or remote areas.

Visas

Another indicator to consider is whether the open calls provide visa costs. A total of 126 calls in this period supported visa costs, 4% of the total calls. This financial support cannot ensure that the visa applications are successful, are granted in a timely manner, or are well-communicated throughout the process of course (all elements that can ease

the stressful application process) but the financial commitment does imply more active support for the process on the part of the open call organisers. It also eases the financial burden of such applications, which, along with other mobility costs, can be prohibitive.

Conflicts and artists at risk

When searching for open calls that supported artists at risk, a total of six calls were found, four of which were from the Martin Roth Initiative in Germany, which supports the temporary relocation to Germany for artists and cultural actors at risk. This call is an interesting example, as it also provides financial support for additional personnel for the host organisation and counselling by the MRI and further training (for example on topics such as safety, sensitive public relations, psychosocial support), in addition to support for the artists themselves. This initiative provides adequate resources not only for the artists, but also for the cultural workers, creating a supportive environment that might address challenges such as burnout or

overwhelm due to the lack of skills in a specific area. The two other calls related to artists at risk were also based in Germany, from GreenHaven Artist Residencies¹⁶ and Ars Electronica.¹⁷ The latter was for Ukrainian artists in response to the war, providing support and visibility to artists living in oppressed political systems.

In addition to the calls that specifically address artists at risk, there are also a number of calls that respond to recent conflicts and political repression, such as residencies for Belarussian artists and cultural practitioners,¹⁸ Janina Katz Residency for writers and translators from Belarus and Ukraine (intended to be a safe haven for women artists

¹⁴ 3piedras / CDAN - Centro de Arte y Naturaleza: Rural Knowledge Residency (Spain): <http://on-the-move.org/news/3piedras-cdan-centro-de-arte-y-naturaleza-rural-knowledge-residency-spain>

¹⁵ Silo – Arte e Latitude Rural: Resilience Artist in Residence (Brazil): <http://on-the-move.org/news/silo-arte-e-latitude-rural-resilience-artist-residence-brazil>

¹⁶ An initiative of On the Move member TGR The Green Room (Germany): <https://www.thegreenroomforartists.de/greenhaven-artist-residencies>

¹⁷ Ars Electronica: Open Call for Artists at Risk, 'State of the ART(ist)' (Online / Austria): <http://on-the-move.org/news/ars-electronica-open-call-artists-risk-state-artist-online-austria>

¹⁸ New Democracy Fund: Residencies for Belarussian Artists and Cultural Practitioners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine): <http://on-the-move.org/news/new-democracy-fund-residencies-belarussian-artists-and-cultural-practitioners-armenia>

forced to leave their countries),¹⁹ a collaborative project for photographers from Southeast Asia, Mexico, Nigeria, Ukraine and Kazakhstan (to join a global discussion around themes of occupation, annexation, colonialism and censorship)²⁰, and ten calls to support Ukrainian artists or to maintain collaborations between Ukraine and Europe (including one emergency residency programme for Ukrainian artists and families to be hosted in Germany²¹). As well as these once-off open calls, there was also the Europe-funded project Culture Helps / Культура допомагає, which was established to support displaced Ukrainians and the Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors in response to the war and which was responsible for three of these calls. One of the project partners, zusa, also co-organised a residency to reflect on solidarity in Europe and mental well-being of artists and cultural professionals, in which additional funds were provided for dependent children.²² The programme also provided external mental health support in the form of individual sessions and group circles, which are a fixed component of the residency programme in the zusa organisation.

Since 7 October 2023, the Institut français in Jerusalem's Sawa Sawa Residency Programme has announced two open calls in which Palestinian and French counterparts designed a residency programme that organised approximately 50 residencies (20 in Palestine²³ and 30 in France²⁴). There are other similar open calls that respond to moments of emergency or crisis, such as the Fanak Fund Shararat Amal international emergency fund for Lebanon in 2021 (an emergency fund for artists/cultural activists in exile/refugees in Lebanon)²⁵ or five calls responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (two of which were from Asia).

There are also calls that support refugees more generally, such as the Nora Artist in residence programme for refugees exiled in France (aimed at artists, researchers and culture professionals from the Near and Middle East and from Africa, who have recently received refugee status in France)²⁶ and an open call from the Mondriaan Fund for artists with a refugee background (for visual artists who have come to the Netherlands as a refugee).²⁷ Although small in number, these open calls directed at populations who are undergoing stress due to conflict, demonstrate possible approaches to care and solidarity for those in crisis situations.

¹⁹ Kraków UNESCO City of Literature: Janina Katz Residency for Writers and Translators from Belarus and Ukraine (Poland): <http://on-the-move.org/news/krakow-unesco-city-literature-janina-katz-residency-writers-and-translators-belarus-and>

²⁰ Beyond the Silence: Collaborative Project for Photographers from Southeast Asia, Mexico, Nigeria, Ukraine and Kazakhstan (Online): <http://on-the-move.org/news/beyond-silence-collaborative-project-photographers-southeast-asia-mexico-nigeria-ukraine-and>

²¹ Karne Kunst: Emergency Residency Program for Ukrainian Artists and Families (Germany): <http://on-the-move.org/news/karne-kunst-emergency-residency-program-ukrainian-artists-and-families-germany>

²² zusa: 'What's Next?' Residencies for Artists and Cultural Professionals (Germany): <http://on-the-move.org/news/zusa-whats-next-residencies-artists-and-cultural-professionals-germany>

²³ French Institute: Sawa Sawa Residency Programme Open Call (Palestine): <http://on-the-move.org/news/french-institute-sawa-sawa-residency-programme-open-call-palestine>

²⁴ French Institute: Sawa Sawa Residency Programme for Palestinian Artists (France): <http://on-the-move.org/news/french-institute-sawa-sawa-residency-programme-palestinian-artists-france>

²⁵ Fanak Fund: Shararat Amal International Emergency Fund for Lebanon: <http://on-the-move.org/news/fanak-fund-shararat-amal-international-emergency-fund-lebanon>

²⁶ ACCR: Nora 2021 – Artist in Residence Programme for Refugees Exiled in France: <http://on-the-move.org/news/accr-nora-2021-artist-residence-programme-refugees-exiled-france>

²⁷ Mondriaan Fund > Open Call Artists with a Refugee Background: <http://on-the-move.org/news/mondriaan-fund-open-call-artists-refugee-background>

Supporting more vulnerable communities

Support and solidarity can also be seen in some of the open calls that address minority or vulnerable communities that might feel isolated or persecuted. Open calls such as the Critical Queer Solidarity youth exchange (for young people creating queer cinema),²⁸ can create a much-needed space where artists can express themselves more freely. Other calls that address LGBTQIA+ communities include an open call for workshop proposals from Nordic-based LGBTQIA+ artists working in live art and interdisciplinary performance²⁹ and five calls addressed to queer artists. This latter category included a diverse range of online and in-person projects, including one focused on African Feminisms³⁰ and a residency hosted in Türkiye,³¹ as well as three based in Europe.

Another potentially vulnerable group are those who have migrated to another country or region. A process of migration might impact an artist's or cultural practitioner's mental health and well-being

through the loss of networks and community, loss of income as they adapt to their new country, or language barriers, to name just a few challenges. Initiatives such as Ettijahat's Zad Programme aim to address these challenges by providing a support framework designed to promote mobility and communication for artists from the Arab region residing in Europe.³² The Mophradat call targeted at artist caregivers from the Arab region residing in Europe,³³ mentioned at the start of this essay, also aims to create a space to network and share experiences, potentially addressing the isolation that migrants can feel. In addition, the call intersects with the challenge of raising a family as a practising artist, highlighting that the impacts on mental health and well-being that are outlined in this essay do not necessarily exist in isolation; it is a reminder to take an intersectional and tailor-made approach to addressing the challenges related to the mental health and well-being of artists and creative professionals.

²⁸ Critical Queer Solidarity: Queer Cinema in the Mountains (Austria): <http://on-the-move.org/news/critical-queer-solidarity-queer-cinema-mountains-austria>

²⁹ Warehouse9: Call for Workshop proposals from LGBTQIA+ artists in the Nordic Region (Denmark): <http://on-the-move.org/news/warehouse9-call-workshop-proposals-lgbtqia-artists-nordic-region-denmark>

³⁰ Goethe-Institut: Queer Encounters In African Feminisms (Online): <http://on-the-move.org/news/goethe-institut-queer-encounters-african-feminisms-online>

³¹ Kaos GL: Ankara Queer Art Program Artist Residency 2022 (Turkey): <http://on-the-move.org/news/kaos-gl-ankara-queer-art-program-artist-residency-2022-turkey>

³² See for example Ettijahat: Zad Programme for the Mobility of Artists from the Arab Region Residing in Europe at <https://on-the-move.org/news/ettijahat-zad-programme-mobility-artists-arab-region-residing-europe>

³³ Mophradat: At Home with the Kids Residency for Caregivers (Greece): <http://on-the-move.org/news/mophradat-home-kids-residency-caregivers-greece>

Mental Health and Well-being: The challenges of international cultural mobility

by Sophie Dowden

This report is built on the contributions that have been kindly provided by the panellists in On the Move's Cultural Mobility Webinar on the mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals, as well as through additional interviews with experts in the field, with the aim of highlighting the stressors and risks they face when engaging internationally. In addition to the range of benefits that arise from transnational cultural mobility, artists and cultural workers face pressures and uncertainties whose presence is structural, related to developments in the cultural ecosystem, systemic inequalities and even the biological and psychological experience of being human.

Structural imbalances

The research of Joris Janssens, Expert Culture and Regional Development at IDEA Consult,³⁴ in the context of the performing arts in both Flanders and in an international context, demonstrates how the cultural and creative sectors have moved into a space of hypermobility as a result of fundamental economic shifts within the sector.

In the past, a performing artist might form part of a fixed ensemble, produce a piece in the local context and then go on tour in their own country

followed by international touring. Now there is much greater fragmentation; there is a transnational system of co-production and presentation in which each production is a patchwork of several different sources of income from many different countries.

This fragmentation of resources has been an acceleration factor in the mobility of artists and cultural workers across the cultural and creative sectors.

³⁴ Joris Janssens, guest panellist at the Cultural Mobility Webinar, is an expert with extensive experience when it comes to research (qualitative and quantitative) and strategic guidance within culture. Joris Janssens works for governments, organisations and networks, at the local, supra-local, Flemish and international level. Since 2019 Joris has been working for IDEA Consult in the fields of culture, leisure and tourism. Previously, he was Head of Research and Development at Kunstenpunt (Flanders Arts Institute) and Director of VTI (Institute for the Performing Arts in Flanders). Before that, he worked at the KULeuven and he obtained a Ph.D. in Germanic Language and Literature in 2004. More information about IDEA Consult available at <https://ideaconsult.be/>

‘Relationships are more short term and in order to develop a production, you really need to tie together a lot of knots. We also see in the research that artists have less sustainable support in helping them to do so. So it is quite clear that this really has a direct impact on the situation of people in our sector ... It’s not a matter of your wish to engage in a faster way in this internationalisation; it’s really a matter of survival in this shifting context.’

Joris Janssens, Expert Culture and Regional Development at IDEA Consult (Belgium)

Recent research Joris Janssens has carried out on the sustainable career development of circus artists in Flanders includes responses from artists on what has caused them to leave or consider leaving the profession. These artists cite the stress, the emotional pressure to be able to survive in this ecosystem, as well as the lack of stability and security. The chance of physical injury and how to manage if it happens is a further factor. There are many elements that make it extremely difficult for people to sustain work and these impact artists’ well-being and mental health.

To be an artist is inherently dangerous to a person’s health, Heather O’Donnell, Director of TGR, The Green Room,³⁵ reminds us. There are many studies that show that artists are at particular risk of physical impairments, psychological impairments and occupational hazards. Furthermore, humans are designed to be habitual, system-developing creatures; mobility and migration exist as a kind of liminal space.

To engage in international mobility is to put oneself in a very vulnerable position, in which a person becomes more susceptible to physical, psychological and social impairments because they are operating on a very intense level with their human capacities.

Heather O’Donnell notes that these situations can be dangerous but they can be invigorating as well. These contrasting experiences do co-exist. As a culturally mobile artist, a person has the potential to share and participate in life-affirming aspects of growth. Simultaneously, this comes with a lot of vulnerabilities, precarities and insecurities that make international cultural mobility a less safe way of making a living.

Structural inequalities

‘Cultural gaps are also somehow based on feeling observed and excluded. So it comes from a huge factor like systemic racism, which is the higher up issue and can be experienced by many, but also it stays within the small details that are connected to language or habit. So all this consistent shift that often puts the pressure on cultural professionals and artists is something that can, in the long term, affect your balance or the energy level that you experience.’

Chiara Organtini, Project Manager of Lavanderia a Vapore (Italy)³⁶

³⁵ Heather O’Donnell, guest panellist at the Cultural Mobility Webinar, is the founding director of TGR, The Green Room in Cologne, a centre providing support systems for performing artists. O’Donnell is also a former professional musician (pianist), a psychologist (M.Sc.) and an Artistic Systemic Therapist-in-training (DGSF 2024). She works with stage artists and arts organisations in developing supportive working conditions and environments. Heather O’Donnell has been a guest lecturer at the iArts School in Hangzhou, China, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, the Ostrava Music Festival in the Czech Republic, and a jury member at the Concours international de piano d’Orléans (2012). She taught in the Humanities Department of the Eastman School of Music from 2017 to 2019. More information about TGR available at www.thegreenroomforartists.de

³⁶ Interviewee Chiara Organtini works as a curator, focusing on the performing arts and the dance field. Her practice centres on investigating how artistic practices can work inside specific locations, but she has also engaged in different European cooperation projects with festivals and regenerated spaces. Based in Turin, she works as project manager of Lavanderia a Vapore, a dancehouse and research space. She is also a board member of the European Dance Development Network (EDN).

Inequalities are often at the core of these questions, emphasises Krystel Khoury, independent cultural manager working in the Arab region and Europe.³⁷ Artists are working within very different realities; while some people are experiencing the effects of hypermobility, for others there is a lack of mobility and a lack of opportunities for travelling and crossing borders.

Based on her experience, well-being is related to more than just financial resources; it is also related to contextual situations that are sometimes overwhelming because of the political and social realities artists and cultural workers live in outside Europe. In these cases, mobility is a hard-to-reach opportunity and therefore, in tackling hypermobility it is also important to tackle lack of mobility.

Krystel Khoury of course recognises that mobility can have a positive impact on wellbeing because it is sometimes a door to enable people to practise their art and exchange with peers outside of local contexts. However, it can also have a negative impact when the relocation is forced (see more in the Forced Migration section of this report). Discussion on this topic is complex and nuanced, so it is essential to take into account the different realities that exist depending on location and the different power structures present in each place.

Moreover, some of the countries that are putting up the highest barriers to travel and migration today are often the same countries that profited from colonialism yesterday, says Cyrine Gannoun, Director of Théâtre Al Hamra in Tunis.³⁸

'I discovered in France that there is no limit to dreams when you are young. You see, when you are a teenager in France or in Italy or in Canada, when you are 12 or 13 years old [and you are asked] "What do you dream to be?", even if you say "astronaut", it's kind of possible. It is not the case in our country. When we were young, there were a lot of questions like "What do you think is possible that you can be in the future?". It's not what you want to be, it is what is possible. And I heard something really that broke my heart two days ago. It's a real video, asking a young Palestinian boy, "When you grow up, what do you want to become?" And he says, "In Palestine, we don't even grow up." So we don't have the same rights in all [parts of] the world. We do not have an equal chance. Mobility is part of dignity, to be able to move, to go, to be back when you want, to choose where you study, to choose where you learn, to choose who you help, to choose when you go back to your country.'

Cyrine Gannoun, Director of Théâtre Al Hamra (Tunisia)

³⁷ Krystel Khoury, guest panellist at the Cultural Mobility Webinar, has a Ph.D. in anthropology of dance and intercultural dynamic, and is a dramaturg and performing arts researcher from Beirut. Her practice and writings are interested in embodied knowledge and body politics, collaborative choreographic processes, and arts education. Since 2006, she has been collaborating with numerous Arab and European cultural organisations on designing and conducting artistic exchange programmes. From 2017 to 2019, she was the Artistic Director of the Open Border Ensemble at the Münchner Kammerspiele in Munich. She is presently the head professor of the Institut Supérieur des Arts et des Chorégraphies (ISAC) at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, in Brussels and the Programmes and Grants Associate at Mophradat asbl (Brussels/Athens) working with artists from/in the Arab world. More information about Mophradat available at <https://mophradat.org/en>

³⁸ Interviewee Cyrine Gannoun is a Tunisian artist, actress and director specialising in theatre and dance, who directs the Théâtre Al Hamra in Tunis. In addition to this, Cyrine Gannoun is an expert in cultural management and cultural policy, working with different structures as an advisor, including the Ministry of Culture. She has carried out research studies on artists, mobility and cultural policy in Tunisia as well as in Arab, MENA and African regions and teaches cultural management at the Université Paris Dauphine-PSL in Tunis.

Stressors and impacts

Experiences of the visa process

‘If we have never had a visa rejection in our lives or we never have been through the process of applying for a visa, we can never understand what it means on so many levels. Imagine the logic of rejection, of not being able to go somewhere. Although the planet belongs to everybody in a way, of course, [in practice] it doesn’t.’

Krystel Khoury, Independent Cultural manager Working in the Arab region and Europe (Belgium)

The visa process can be very burdensome. ‘It’s really like Dante with no Virgil to help him get out of hell. It’s just like travelling an Inferno without any guidance,’ says Sepehr Sharifzadeh, freelance performing arts producer and Artistic Director of the NH Theatre Agency.³⁹ It can take a long time to prepare all the required documents and it is expensive, not just for the visa itself, but also for the translation of these documents. Sometimes this includes months of bank statements, which can add up to hundreds of pages and sometimes 1,000–2,000 EUR in costs.

In Sepehr Sharifzadeh’s experience, there are better and worse countries to apply for a visa as an Iranian. This is partly due to differing political structures. For instance, the Institut français has a very close relationship to French embassies, while for the Goethe-Institut this is not the case. The result is that the Institut français can be, and is, an actor in supporting visa applications of artists and cultural workers in a way that the Goethe-Institut is not.

In the face of rejection after the effort of submitting an application, there is also the realisation of the inequalities in who is able to move from one place to another, says Krystel Khoury. ‘It can be lived as a very personal rejection of you having the right to move. It’s not shared because other people have the rights. You just know we are all equal, but some people are more equal than others.’

‘It is exactly like when you are in jail, even if you are in a country. What is a jail? What is a prison? It is a place where they put you and you are not allowed to go out until they decide,’ Cyrine Gannoun reflects. These decisions of who is allowed to move can be influenced by prejudices. In North Africa, for example, the presence of illegal migration has led many countries to assume that anyone coming from the region is in an illegal situation and will not return to their country. This generalistic approach causes a lot of frustration and operational issues, as well as blocking the opportunity for artists to develop their art.

Cyrine Gannoun has seen a lot of people move to other countries, then, once they have their residency and their citizenship – and thereby their opportunity to travel – the first thing they do is to go back home.

‘I lived for 30 years as someone with only Tunisian nationality, so I was asking for a visa every time. Now, since ten years ago – because I lived and studied in Paris and I made a family there – I have a French passport. After two or three years, once I had my French passport, I went back to my country. Now I’m free to move.’

Cyrine Gannoun, Director of Théâtre Al Hamra (Tunisia)

³⁹ Interviewee Sepehr Sharifzadeh is the artistic director of the NH Theatre Agency, which works on touring artists from Iran and promoting the Iranian theatre internationally. Currently based in Brussels, he is working as a freelance performing arts producer as well as an advisor with different institutions, festivals and organisations. Sepehr also created the International Alliance of Producers, Agents and Distributors of Performing Arts (PADA), currently uniting over 130 members from more than 30 different countries.

However, even gaining another citizenship does not always resolve the challenges. Sepehr Sharifzadeh personally knows several people who hold a non-Iranian passport, but just because they had travelled to Iran (in the past five years) or were born in Iran, their visa has either been rejected or an answer was withheld for a long period.

These processes can also mean taking extraordinary measures in order to get a visa. On one occasion, to get a visa for Romania, he had to live in Tbilisi, Georgia, for one month, all for a visa for an event that only lasted ten days. This entailed a financial and mental health burden simply to have the right to promote an artist that he works with.

‘The stress that these young people have that I’m working with in Iran ... they are touring in Iran and they are all dependent on me working magic to get them their visas and sometimes I just can’t do it. Just last year, I didn’t manage to get visas for three people to go to Austria even though I had this friend in the European Commission [who had helped in another case] ... All of these young people, they all keep texting me separately, “Do you think I will get the visa?” and it really tears my heart not to be able to help them, like “Sorry, I don’t know how to do it.” I even dream about it when I’m waiting for a visa, until I get the visa and I go to the festival. I keep dreaming about that because some of these festivals I’ve been going to for years and still nowadays I have to wait for a visa to get there. Then I keep dreaming I’m in the festival and then I wake up. This is me doing this for 11 years. So you can imagine the mental health impact it has had on me.’

Sepehr Sharifzadeh, freelance performing arts producer (Belgium) and Artistic Director of the NH Theatre Agency (Iran)

Experiences of financial barriers

Beyond visas, there are other financial barriers that can reduce opportunities to engage in and benefit from international cultural mobility, explains Sepehr Sharifzadeh. Differences in economic realities in different countries can make travelling in wealthier countries an economic challenge that is reliant on external funding (for example, from a hosting festival) or the support of family or personal savings. ‘Without [the support of my family] I could not have done it and then this impacts our financial life. This impacts our personal growth. Career growth. This impacts mental health,’ he says.

Beyond this, Sepehr Sharifzadeh continues, sanctions on Iran mean that Iranians do not possess international bank accounts and are not able to conduct international bank transactions. As a result, it creates problems for receiving payments from organisations in other countries and awareness of this issue is variable. The safest available solution is to receive payment in cash. Sometimes a festival will want to pay via proxies, but this is risky and can lead to long delays.

Experiences with inviting organisations

Stressors do not stop at the point of arrival either. Chiara Organtini, Project Manager of Lavanderia a Vapore, sees the eagerness of artists to embrace opportunities and their curiosity to capture inspiration. However, this enthusiasm can be accompanied by frustration with the context they find themselves in. They may start to become aware of the fact that the level of openness and understanding of diverse perspectives needs to be improved in some way. This cultural encounter could be impacted by elements such as cultural differences, ability, or gender, to name a few. This encounter could be improved for both sides through language accessibility, clear communication protocols, and more access to cultural knowledge.

As newcomers continue to adapt, they may also experience a sense of nostalgia or homesickness that lingers, even while they are content in their new environment. Chiara Organtini points out that this bittersweet feeling might not always be apparent to others and could be a barrier to addressing mental health in such situations. This raises questions about

whether enough space is being made in practice for sharing these emotions with others to allow people to unpack and address these complex feelings.

Burnout

‘This experience of burnout in culture, burnout in non-profit structures, it’s pervasive. So somehow in the data, the pandemic just put a fluorescence on it ... What exactly are the stresses or the challenges that are causing this? We tried to map out some of them.’

Lucy Perineau, previous Communications and Publications Manager at ENCC, European Network of Cultural Centres (Belgium)

Burnout can arise from a combination of many reasons, including multitasking and the seasonality of workloads, says Lucy Perineau⁴⁰ who has carried out research on cultural workers’ burnout amongst ENCC’s members.⁴¹ There can be a belief amongst cultural workers that their low salary will somehow be compensated for by the passion that they put into the work and the value that they get out of it. Eventually they find out that this passion will not pay, for example, for their children’s music lessons. At some point this trade off no longer seems worth it.

Lucy Perineau also highlights the spillover into the personal sphere because of overtime due to, for instance, evening rehearsals or unfinished projects. The uncertainty of artistic processes, while well understood, can make planning difficult and cultural workers are frequently carrying out mediation on many levels: with institutions, with audiences, with artists, and with their bosses. These extra hours and continued negotiations can add to the pressure cultural managers feel.

There is also some anxiety sometimes around legitimacy, with the need to justify an organisation’s work and its funding, which is frequently done on a project basis. Staff can take this responsibility very seriously, which can lead to very long hours. Cultural organisations’ survival often relies on this project model, which can cause imbalances and tension, as staff rely on this funding model for their work. These factors come together ‘in an explosive mix’, Lucy Perineau explains.

While it is the subject of more discussion these days, mental health is still largely a taboo topic. Lucy Perineau has seen that in practice this causes it to be perceived as an individual issue, possibly shameful or incapacitating in terms of whether someone will be able to continue their career in the same way.

In order to take action on this front and create structural support within a cultural organisation, there are various paths that can be pursued, according to Lucy Perineau. Awareness needs to be present on many levels. For example, on the individual level there is a fear of showing fragility in mental and physical health among performing artists, which executive levels of cultural organisations need to be more aware of and address as a structural problem.

On the policy level, the issue of mental health and well-being is something that interacts with the debate around artists’ and cultural workers’ working conditions. The huge elephant in the room is project-based funding, which is not really discussed because the solution is not evident.

However, there are some possible paths for action. Organisations should develop a mental health policy, which should interact with their human resources policy and be adapted to their situation. This can build solidarity, mitigate risk, increase motivation and ensure fair distribution of tasks.

⁴⁰ Interviewee Lucy Perineau, in her capacity as Communications and Publications Manager at the European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC), developed a focus on the topic of mental health in the teams of cultural centres when it surfaced as a common issue during the pandemic. Her articles on the subject concern post-pandemic burnout, mental health and working conditions in culture as well as digital ethics for cultural organisations. Lucy Perineau is French-American and has a background in visual arts, cartooning and translation.

⁴¹ See Perineau, L. (June 2022), *BRUISED, EXHAUSTED AND BURNT-OUT: A discussion about regenerative approaches to human resources in cultural centres*. Brussels: European Network of Cultural Centres, available at <https://www.encc.eu/articles/bruised-exhausted-and-burnt-out>

Annual meetings with employees are also important, to make sure that expectations and long-term career plans are understood. What are their aspirations in the long term? How can a manager support those aspirations, even if it means that the employee aspires to go to another organisation? To help staff grow with the organisation, it is important to make sure that there is a training policy for employees that is flexible and meets different people's needs.

Finally, sharing the organisation's goals, decisions and changes of courses in a transparent way is key to bringing staff on board with the organisation's journey. By engaging at a structural level, it is possible to support staff in a way that makes the organisation's health better.

Care

Who needs to care?

Care can operate at various levels. For Cyrene Gannoun, making the decision to care for ourselves first is fundamental. As a self-described 'workaholic', she realised that both at work and at home she was constantly active for the benefit of others without resting herself.

Stepping away from the desire to be perceived as always available to help everybody, she took responsibility for her own mental health and began to say she was not available, enjoying having control of her agenda.

Care also comes from communities. Krystal Khoury emphasises 'community' in the context of newcomer artists should include connection with the wider artist community in the region. Furthermore, not all artists coming to a place intend to stay; some seek exchange and to create alliances before they return to their place of origin. The key is to avoid superficial relationships and isolation within a small newcomer community.

Opening doors and facilitating connections has substantial value, Krystal Khoury continues, which in turn creates an artistic community that is better connected and more inclusive. Such connections contribute to the well-being and belonging of newcomers by ensuring they do not feel isolated.

'When I moved here in Brussels last year, one of the reasons that I wanted to be in Brussels is that I have as many friends as in Iran, if not more. Iranian and non-Iranians. Without them I could have really lost my sanity ... For me, it's always about friends and family. It's always about being with them and finding some shelter, some grounding with them. We can talk about issues and it is a refuge as well.'

Sepehr Sharifzadeh, freelance performing arts producer (Belgium) and Artistic Director of the NH Theatre Agency (Iran)

Heather O'Donnell acknowledges the role of personal responsibility and individual choices in terms of care and also emphasises the importance of systemic factors that enable individuals to take care of themselves, including family units, colleague structures, and organisations like orchestras or theatre groups, as well as larger entities like countries and continents. Both personal responsibility and accommodating systems are necessary for effective care in her view.

The influence of the working environment on one's health can also be substantial, for example burnout is considered an occupational hazard rather than a medical condition (see more in the Burnout section of this report). Care then must, in part, include advocacy and working at systemic and structural levels.

Structural and political care

'Policies are needed. It's not just a personal feeling, it's a structural thing that we need to face and we need to face collectively, nationally and globally, adjusting to each specific national situation. There is a need for infrastructure that is not just putting the dust under the carpet, because ... this is not shameful. This is just part of who we are and how our job has been developed.'

Chiara Organtini, Project Manager of Lavanderia a Vapore (Italy)

Embedding care in our systems is a complex challenge, Joris Janssens admits. Individuals may lack control over systems as a whole, but the very act of discussing this together and drawing on systems and/or transition thinking is a good place to begin. There are three steps that he regards as important.

The first step is to create urgency and discuss the negative impacts that artists and cultural workers are suffering, as well as the funding and policy systems' role in persistent issues.

The second step is to analyse these negative aspects and develop ideas and experiments for care and hospitality grounded in values of sustainability. In fact, many people are already engaging in concrete experiments and translating values into practices, so the next step must be to connect, exchange and learn together.

A third step is to engage policymakers and mainstream institutions. The institutionalisation of good practices that have been developed and shared by those carrying out experimentation can serve as an anchor for improving the mental health and well-being conditions of the sector as a whole.

A concrete example already exists in mobility funding systems, Joris Janssens elaborates. After

a number of iterations of i-Portunus, Culture Moves Europe⁴² is trying to create more sustainable mobility, not only in terms of ecological aspects, but also in terms of mental health by looking at work-life balance.

Chiara Organtini also advocates for more artistic investigation into alternative models and collaboration to ensure that good practices are more than a 'unicorn effect'. She suggests that those in the cultural field might consider how they arrange their space and their time – reducing acceleration and consumption, engaging in more long-term accompaniment, leaving unfilled space for unforeseen developments, controlling less and trusting more. There are many avenues to explore. 'It's quite a revolution of priority in project structure,' she says.

Structural support in the sector can also be developed from the outside of the organisations in question. Manifesting his belief that joining forces in order to work with festivals will enable more programming of non-local artists, Sepehr Sharifzadeh created the International Alliance of Producers, Agents and Distributors of Performing Arts (PADA).⁴³ To date, PADA includes more than 30 countries, such as Fiji, Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, Germany and France. PADA also seeks to adapt their narrative based on the local news of people living in these countries.

Humanity in care

Cultural workers need to be available and attentive to the needs of artists, particularly when they are in a privileged position, Krystel Khoury maintains. It is simultaneously an issue that this availability is taken for granted and it is not clear how to measure the emotional labour and availability that cultural workers are providing.

Human interaction and connection need to come first. In one case, Krystel Khoury recounts, the German hosts of artists coming from Syria assumed

⁴² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand/culture-moves-europe>

⁴³ <https://pada.network>

that they needed to provide psychological support. Her reaction was to slow this down, to meet first and have dinner together before bringing psychologists into the equation. At this first stage, the need was for human interaction above all else.

For Krystel Khoury, the focus should be on the human side of hosting artists and the efforts involved in providing meaningful care and support. In her view, a human-centred approach is made up of acts,

action, time, availability and, most importantly, the need to listen first. Understanding and respecting the diverse needs and backgrounds of artists, and the importance of not imposing stereotypes, is central. The value of sharing personal experiences and knowledge to help international artists navigate unfamiliar systems should not be underestimated. This too is a form of caring for and supporting artists during their visits.

‘Recently we had to host an artist coming from Russia and the person needed to acquire a visa and then this led to [me being] the person in-between. So, I was discussing with the artist and then they had to apply for a visa to come to Brussels and the process was taking a long time. On the other side, I received as an answer: “Are you sure you would like to invite this artist? Because there’s a high possibility that they won’t get their visa.” Here, care played a big role in the sense of telling them, “We try and we do and then we see.” We take it step by step. We don’t come with this idea of “Oh, it will never happen, so let’s not do it.” And the whole emotional labour was actually to make sure that while this person is waiting for their visa, whether they will get it or not, to make sure to be in contact, to inform ... but not to be in this negative position of “We don’t know, you might, you might not.” The artist already knows, is already taking a risk. So, to acknowledge it and to say “OK, we’re going to try,” it sounds very simple, but at the same time it requires care and requires a lot of time. It requires answering messages, whenever these messages come, to stay in contact ... Eventually, this person was able to come. [It was] last minute and I’m simply sharing this experience because the person talked about care and came and said “Thank you for caring.”’

Krystel Khoury, Independent Cultural manager Working in the Arab region and Europe (Belgium)

Forced migration of artists and culture professionals

Challenges

Forced migration of artists can broadly be split into two types, explains Manojna Yeluri, Asia Regional Representative at ARC, Artists at Risk Connection.⁴⁴ Firstly, there are situations where a conflict has arisen in a particular region and artists are among those forced to leave their homes in search of a safer place. Secondly, it might be related to artistic freedom, where artists are victims of persecution

or harassment. That can be individual, due to coming from a specific community with a history of persecution, because of the chosen creative medium or a mix of things (like ethnicity, history, orientation, language, etc.).

The lived experiences of artists in these kinds of situations are layered and not well-documented,

⁴⁴ Interviewee Manojna Yeluri is the Asia Regional Representative at ARC, Artists at Risk Connection programme. A lawyer by training, she is based in South India, and is in charge of monitoring all of ARC’s activities in Asia, including South Asia, South-East Asia, East Asia and Central Asia.

she regrets. The relocation process often involves trauma, ostracisation, and isolation, leading to a loss of identity as artists can no longer call their home 'home'. This identity conflict is commonly voiced by artists and often feeds into their work.

Manojna Yeluri highlights that many artists who relocate face barriers to continuing their creative practice due to geopolitical or socioeconomic constraints in their new countries and as such ARC is particularly concerned about ensuring that artists and creative practitioners have the opportunity to maintain their creative practice if they choose to do so. Another focus is remedying loneliness, as usually family will have been left behind. This is something that ARC hopes to address by strengthening networks where artists can connect with each other, as well as through sharing existing resources from the cultural and human rights world.

For many, there is also a transition from being involved in social justice movements and advocacy in their home countries to navigating the question of whether to continue that activism after relocation, she explains. In contrast, others might take up advocacy for the first time in their new environments as diaspora artists in particular can feel they are in a privileged position to advocate for their home countries from afar. Still others might prefer to take the opportunity of being in safety to refocus and reorient themselves creatively. Whatever they choose, these decisions are never easy on the artist, and often take a toll on them.

Needs

In Manojna Yeluri's experience, artists' needs can vary significantly depending on the region and cultural background, but there are some universal elements. These common needs include a sense of community, both personal and professional networks, and a strong desire to reconnect with their artistic work. For many artists, relocating to a new place means starting from scratch in terms of building these connections and accessing resources.

The right kind of psychosocial support and resources are also important, she says, as it is necessary that the therapist should have experience working with artists facing similar experiences. It is beneficial if the therapist shares a cultural background with the artist as well, as this can help bridge the gap and improve the quality of the support.

Providing sustainable support

In a world caught up with mechanistic solutions to problems, which frequently do not work, it is important to stay true to the principle of individualised care, with humane and personalised approaches to support artists and cultural workers, says Heather O'Donnell. There was a strong will to support artists when the Russian invasion of Ukraine started in 2022. As a lot of Ukrainian artists started arriving in Germany, Heather O'Donnell and colleagues made the effort to help in whatever way possible, for example, with housing or visas.

The process was all-consuming, so to achieve greater sustainability, Heather O'Donnell structured it into a programme called the Greenhaven Artist Residency, which supports artists throughout the world. This was a way to meet the challenge of balancing individual care with the need to help a large number of people, but finding the right approach requires constant, ongoing dialogue.

Individualised care when working with artists and cultural workers is resource intensive, she continues, and can often lead to burnout of the cultural workers (see more in the Burnout section of this report). Still, meeting people as individuals and offering help tailored to their specific needs cannot be achieved through pre-formed programmes or generic solutions.

Heather O'Donnell has seen how extra responsibility can be very hard on cultural workers and their mental health, which can include undergoing vicarious trauma and the burden of rejected visas. Burnout is an all-too-frequent issue, she describes.

The rejection of an artist's visa can also impact a whole programme, it can result in the loss of funding and other issues down the line. The burden exists to a lesser extent than for the artist, but cultural workers are impacted by it.

'There's no definitive answer. It's really waking up each day saying:

- What can I do?
- How much can I do?
- How much do I have to stand back and just consolidate right now?'

Heather O'Donnell, Director of TGR, The Green Room (Germany)

Manojna Yeluri explains that ARC serves as a connector in its protection work. ARC receives enquiries from artists who find themselves in distressing situations across the world, especially during conflicts. ARC's primary role is to identify and connect regional partners in the human rights and cultural rights sectors with artists facing forced migration, persecution and threats from both state and non-state actors. Artists seeking support can fill out a comprehensive but simple form on ARC's website, which is in the process of being adapted and translated for different regions to further increase accessibility.

In addition to ongoing dialogues with partners, one way ARC receives input is through regional virtual workshops that bring together key stakeholders, including human rights and cultural organisations as well as artists, to discuss major regional challenges and identify solutions, which in turn facilitates the development of localised needs assessments.

While traditionally not a grant-making organisation, ARC has recently introduced its Global Emergency Grantmaking Fund to address urgent needs (that include but are not limited to relocation, housing and medical needs), as well as its Global Resilience

Grantmaking Fund to support artists from across disciplines in reviving and continuing their creative practices.⁴⁵

In the context of Brussels and Flanders, Joris Janssens recounts how cultural houses often share resources in periods of urgency in order to identify and meet basic human needs (by opening their doors to provide shelter, for instance). However, these actions are often rather ad hoc and are not structurally organised.

Fitting within existing funding structures can also be a challenge, he explains. For instance, 10 years ago there was the initiative Zebrart which aimed to connect refugee artists with the cultural sector in Flanders. There are a lot of stressful issues that refugee artists face, including the lack of a network, the lack of symbolic capital and the lack of connections. Unfortunately, the specificity of the initiative within broader hospitality policies posed a problem for funding of this kind, while on the other hand it was not sufficiently related to artistic excellence or artistic production and development to fit into the arts policy.

Joris Janssens draws our attention to the arts centre Globe Aroma in Brussels,⁴⁶ which is currently engaging in inspiring practices assisting newcomers, emphasising their human-centred approach. What Globe Aroma provides goes beyond an individual approach, he explains, providing a community space where individuals facing displacement can exchange experiences and have access to resources which enable them to develop on a personal level and on an artistic level.

Joris Janssens sees lessons in this approach for the broader sector and believes that creating such spaces should be a shared responsibility involving broader institutional and cultural connections. Establishing these spaces as well-connected centres within cities and sectors, he says, would allow for a much more effective provision of support.

⁴⁵ For ways to support ARC, reach out to members of the ARC team or see the 'Get Involved' page on the ARC website: <https://artistsatriskconnection.org/get-involved>

⁴⁶ <https://www.globearoma.be/en/>

A Scoping Review of Recent Resources

by Yohann Floch and Milica Ilić

This section reviews recent literature on the mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals, emphasising the risks and stressors linked to transnational mobility. It underscores that both mobility excesses and restricted access to mobility contribute to mental health strain. The challenges of managing mobility, coupled with precarious work conditions, irregular income, and complex administrative barriers, further intensify these pressures, making mobility a key factor in the overall well-being of artists and culture professionals.

The research in this section faced some limitations; although its scope is global, it is restricted to resources available in English and French, which inherently narrows the range of perspectives considered. Many references are tied to EU policies or those of national and regional governments that have the resources to propose and promote research in relation to cultural policies and well-

being, as well as the experiences and needs of artists in these contexts. As a result, this limitation may reduce the inclusion of perspectives from other regions, highlighting the need for broader and more holistic research on mobility and well-being that fully incorporates the experiences, challenges, and innovative solutions emerging from diverse contexts.

A growing interest in mental health and well-being

The issue of well-being, particularly in relation to health and mental health, is gaining increasing importance in societal debates. It is now recognised as a relevant issue in shaping governmental policies. Policymakers are paying more attention to well-being by collecting and analysing relevant data and proposing specific actions aimed at incorporating well-being and happiness as criteria in policy decisions. This shift reflects a growing understanding that well-being should be a central focus in public policy to improve overall societal outcomes.

There have been several key moments that have advanced well-being on a policy level: The OECD has been holding its World Forums on Well-Being since 2004, and proposes 'beyond GDP' policy tools to measure impact of policies on the lives of people; the UN has given the subject a prominent place in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (published in 2015), aiming to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages'; The World Health Organisation makes an urgent call for 'well-being societies' in its Geneva Charter for Well-being; around the globe policymakers look

into well-being indicators⁴⁷ and the potential of the well-being economy.⁴⁸

Not only has data collection on well-being increased, expanding the knowledge base, but a paradigm shift is also underway. Well-being is becoming central to the narrative change necessary for society to prioritise human experience in its definition of progress. This shift reflects a growing recognition that traditional metrics of development, such as economic indicators, need to be complemented by measures that reflect the quality of life of individuals and communities.⁴⁹ The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act that the Welsh government voted in 2015 is an important example.⁵⁰

Within European institutions, the issue of mental health is also gaining ground. After extensive consultation with Member States, stakeholders, and citizens, the European Commission adopted the Communication⁵¹ on a comprehensive approach to mental health, designed to assist Member States and stakeholders in swiftly addressing mental health challenges. This communication emphasises a comprehensive, prevention-oriented, multi-stakeholder strategy, recognising that mental health intersects with various policy areas and needs to be approached transversally.

The combination of multiple crises that have swept across societies worldwide has accelerated the growing interest in measuring well-being and implementing corresponding policies. Global society is undergoing radical shifts. Income inequality and the deepening of the divide between the wealthy and the low-income population continue to grow.⁵² The environmental crisis, along with the effects of the ongoing climate change, increasingly impacts human well-being and health of the planet.⁵³ The ongoing, newly launched or escalating conflicts across the globe, including the war in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Yemen, to name only a few, bring not only extreme danger, but also insecurity, poverty, and deteriorating mental health. These conflicts also raise profound questions about future relations between peoples and states.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown just how fragile the health system is, with its devastating impact on the lives and health of people across the globe and the unprecedented strain it put on the economy, education and the world of work.⁵⁴

In the meantime, in a less dramatic but still radical and comprehensive ways, the digital revolution is challenging and reshaping the foundations of traditional political and societal structures,

⁴⁷ The United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Ecuador, among others, have incorporated measuring statistics on well-being in their policy making processes.

⁴⁸ The Economy of Well-Being is defined as the capacity to create a virtuous circle in which citizens' well-being drives economic prosperity, stability and resilience, and vice-versa (that those good macroeconomic outcomes allow to sustain well-being investments over time). It specifically highlights the need for putting people at the centre of policy and moving away from an attitude of 'grow first, redistribute and clean up later', towards a growth model that is equitable and sustainable from the outset. See OECD (2019), *The Economy of Well-Being*, available at [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC\(2019\)2&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC(2019)2&docLanguage=En)

⁴⁹ Barrington-Leigh, C. P. (18 March 2022), 'Chapter 3: Trends in Conceptions of Progress and Well-being' in *World Happiness Report 2022*. McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy, and Bieler School of Environment, McGill University, available at <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2022/trends-in-conceptions-of-progress-and-well-being/>

⁵⁰ *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. Sustainable Futures Division of the Welsh Government, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents>

⁵¹ European Commission (7 June 2023), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health*, available at https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en European Commission (7 June 2023). Factsheet: A New EU Approach to Mental Health, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_23_3051

⁵² According to the UN's *Inequality – Bridging the Divide*, while inequality between countries has improved in the last 25 years, inequality within countries has deteriorated, leading to a situation where today 71 percent of the world's population live in countries where inequality has grown.⁵ See <https://www.un.org/en/un75/inequality-bridging-divide>

⁵³ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023), *AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023*. IPCC, available at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

⁵⁴ World Health Organization (13 October 2020), *Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems – Joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO*, available at <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>

while reinforcing the growing tendency towards misinformation and authoritarianism.⁵⁵

The global decline in mental health is undoubtedly linked to these combined crises.⁵⁶ The growing interest in mental health and well-being has fostered a deeper knowledge and understanding of mental health issues. While there is increasing focus on well-being within policymaking and wider societal discussions, these advancements are

frequently challenged and called into question by the radical changes taking place in society and the environment we live in.

The time is ripe for concentrated efforts to limit the lasting impact of the current crises and to implement ambitious initiatives for advancing well-being and preventing illness. It is crucial to promote and protect mental health while providing care for those in need.⁵⁷

The mental health and well-being of people belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups

Although mental health and well-being are issues relevant for the entire society, their decline particularly affects certain parts of the population. The anxiety and depression resulting from the multiple crises and aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic were noted in the 2023 edition of the Country Health Profiles report,⁵⁸ prepared by the OECD and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. The report provides a particularly worrisome assessment of the mental health of children and young people. Supporting this conclusion, the Allianz Foundation's survey of 10,000 young adults in five European countries shows the deep anxiety that young adults share about their future, particularly in terms of equality, safety and unity in their

respective countries.⁵⁹ Also according to the latest World Happiness Report, the level of satisfaction of adolescents in comparison with adults is dropping. At the same time, in European societies the ageing population brings the risk of dementia, greatly affecting the quality of life.⁶⁰

Migrants and refugees face numerous stressors that impact their mental health before, during, and after migration. Conditions like depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are more prevalent among these groups compared to host populations. Many also encounter barriers to accessing mental health services and experience disruptions in their care.

⁵⁵ See the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach* (COM/2018/236 final), available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0236>

⁵⁶ The World Health Organization's *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all* (2022), noted an increase of 28% and 26% for major depressive disorders and anxiety disorders, respectively in just one year. See <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338>

⁵⁷ World Health Organization (2022), *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*, available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338>

⁵⁸ European Commission, *Country Health Profiles 2023*, available at https://health.ec.europa.eu/state-health-eu/country-health-profiles_en

⁵⁹ Morris-Lange, S. (ed.) (October 2023), *The Movers of Tomorrow? How Young Adults in Europe Imagine and Shape the Future*. Berlin: Allianz Foundation, available at https://res.cloudinary.com/allianz-foundation/image/upload/v1698685633/The_Movers_of_Tomorrow_final_f8f4ce1534.pdf

⁶⁰ Helliwell, J. et al (2024), *World Happiness Report 2024*. Oxford: University of Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, available at <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/>

Globally, disasters and emergencies often disproportionately impact the disability community, and the Covid-19 pandemic was no exception. People with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 due to three key factors: an increased risk of poor health outcomes from the disease, reduced access to routine healthcare, and the negative social impacts of pandemic mitigation efforts. It has heightened risks, exacerbated unmet health needs, and disproportionately affected the socio economic lives of people with disabilities worldwide.

The complexity of mental health challenges across these diverse groups demonstrates the importance of addressing the specific needs of each vulnerable population. However, it is crucial to ensure that we adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach, recognising that many other groups – including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, people living in poverty, the homeless, and people in conflict zones – also face unique and significant mental health challenges. Ensuring that no one is left behind requires a holistic, culturally sensitive, and equitable approach to mental health care and well-being.

Better mental health and well-being through arts and culture

In recent years, a growing number of studies have looked into the connection between arts and culture and health, making clearer the essential contribution of arts for the health of society and individuals. In 2019, the WHO scoping review⁶¹ investigated thousands of studies tackling the topic of arts and culture and well-being, in order to provide evidence of the arts' impact on health and well-being. The review demonstrated the role of arts on both mental and physical health, in reinforcing prevention as well as in treatment. It called for more ambitious cross-sectoral connections between the arts and health sectors, encouraged evidence-based approaches and promoted the recognition of the added value of arts for health.

The more recent CultureForHealth review⁶² complemented and further reinforced the findings of the WHO review, demonstrating how arts and

culture play a vital role in enhancing mental health and well-being. Not only do they complement medical responses, but they also offer methodologies that are effective in both prevention and treatment. Arts and culture provide a holistic approach to health, with positive impacts at the individual, community, and economic levels. Moreover, the review proves the potential of artistic participation in enhancing active citizenship engagement around the issue of health, be it through empowering patients and fostering a better communication around health issues or enhancing dialogue with policymakers.

Arts engagement contributes to social cohesion by reducing loneliness, promoting prosocial behaviours, and decreasing aggression and discrimination, while enhancing social consciousness.⁶³ This is particularly true for more vulnerable groups. Taking part in artistic activities can play a significant role in

⁶¹ Fancourt, D.; and Finn, S. (2019), *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. In Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf>

⁶² Zbranca, R.; Dâmaso, M. et al. (2022), *CultureForHealth Report – Culture's contribution to health and well-being. A report on evidence and policy recommendations for Europe*. Culture Action Europe, available at <https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/knowledge/>

⁶³ Fancourt, D.; Warran K.; and Aughterson, H. (2020), *Evidence Summary for Policy: The role of arts in improving health & wellbeing. Report to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport*. London: University College London, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929773/DCMS_report_April_2020_finalx_1_.pdf

processes that are key for maintaining a sense of community, processing traumatic experiences and preserving the personal identity of forcibly displaced people. Arts activities also have a positive impact on the host community, reinforcing inclusion and social acceptance, creating a sense of community and better processing the inclusion of newcomers.⁶⁴

Likewise, participation in artistic activities seems to be a relevant method to improve well-being of people living with dementia⁶⁵ and research shows strong evidence of artistic activities fostering social development in children, improving prosocial skills, social competence, and emotional development.⁶⁶ Furthermore, artistic engagement has the potential to benefit a diverse array of vulnerable groups by providing avenues for expression, fostering connection, and enhancing well-being. It is essential to ensure that opportunities for artistic participation are accessible to all.

Although not often mentioned in documents advocating for the well-being economy, culture also might play a significant role in the implementation of a new economic and social paradigm. As the well-being economy seeks to move away from

the interests of the capital and concentrate on the needs of people and the planet, culture could propose a platform to test and implement ideas in a collective conversation on possible futures – ‘a realm in which the collective conversation about our future well-being can take place’.⁶⁷ In this sense, culture contributes to the redefinition of democratic processes and institutions and to a sense of shared purpose.⁶⁸ Culture here remains valuable not only as the essential goal to work towards, but also as a methodology to achieve the necessary transformation of society, and establish a culture-based social prescription policy.⁶⁹

Cultural stakeholders have started to develop a narrative towards culture as a key contributor to the good health and well-being of the population, based on the many studies recently published; as WHO’s report *Arts and Health: Supporting the Mental Well-being of Forcibly Displaced People* states, ‘Investment in the arts means investment in improving social integration and cohesion, and can contribute to mental well-being for all. Supporting arts, arts therapies and cultural activities can benefit the mental health and well-being of all people’.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ World Health Organisation (2022), *Arts and Health: Supporting the Mental Well-being of Forcibly Displaced People*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, available at <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people>

⁶⁵ Helliwell, J. F. et al. (2024), *World Happiness Report 2024*. Oxford: University of Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, available at <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/>

⁶⁶ Fancourt, D.; Warran K.; and Aughterson, H. (2020), *Evidence Summary for Policy: The role of arts in improving health & well-being. Report to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport*. London: University College London, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929773/DCMS_report_April_2020_finalx_1_.pdf

⁶⁷ McCartney, G. et al. (2023), *Culture as an objective for and a means of achieving a Wellbeing Economy*. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 10, 718, available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02240-6>

⁶⁸ McCartney, G. et al. (2023), *Culture as an objective for and a means of achieving a Wellbeing Economy*. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 10, 718, available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02240-6>

⁶⁹ Barinova, Y. (2023), *2nd Policy Lab: Culture, Social Resilience and Well-Being*. Policy Labs by ERSTE Foundation and the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Vienna: ERSTE Foundation, available at <https://www.erstestiftung.org/en/publications/policy-lab-report-july-2023/> See also KEA European Affairs (2023), *Policy Labs for the Ukrainian Recovery | Culture, Social Resilience, and Well-Being*. Vienna: ERSTE Foundation, available at <https://cultureactioneurope.org/knowledge/policy-labs-for-the-ukrainian-recovery-report>

⁷⁰ World Health Organisation (2022), *Arts and Health: Supporting the Mental Well-being of Forcibly Displaced People*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, available at <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people> See also Cicerchia, A. (January 2023), *Youth, Mental Health and Culture – Brainstorming Report*. Brussels: Voices of Culture Goethe-Institut, available at https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/docs/voices-of-culture/voices-of-culture-brainstorming-report-youth-mental-health-culture-2022_en.pdf or Dâmaso, M.; Dowden, S.; and Smith, C. (2023), *Compendium of sustainable culture-based solutions for well-being and health*. CultureForHealth. Brussels: Culture Action Europe, available at https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/06/C4H_Compendium_V2LP.pdf

The mental health and well-being of arts and culture professionals

While culture is widely recognised for its positive impact on the health and well-being of the general population, including on people belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups, only a limited number of studies address the well-being of arts workers themselves. This gap highlights the need for more research into the mental health challenges faced by individuals in the arts sector, who often deal with various stressors such as precarious employment, emotional labour, and financial instability.

Artists often find their work deeply rewarding and satisfying. They derive deep meaning and pride from their work, feeling that their art contributes value to others. Key factors supporting their well-being include the freedom to set their own goals, manage their schedules, and work on diverse, appealing tasks that align with their personal values. Opportunities to learn and develop further enhance their occupational satisfaction. Interaction with peers and supportive work communities is crucial, as it fosters idea sharing, peer learning, and mutual support.⁷¹

However, both artists and culture professionals face significant work-related stress. The 2022 Arts and Culture Barometer which looked at the occupational well-being of artists, showed that over half responding artists were concerned about their mental well-being. 40%, particularly performing artists, have considered or already changed

professions in the past year, with younger artists feeling the pressure the most.⁷² Irregular income is a major issue – many artists rely on unrelated jobs to sustain themselves, leaving little time for their creative work. Beside unpredictable income, other factors influence the precarity of artistic work: non-standard work patterns, irregular working conditions, work processes that are time-consuming and labour-intensive, with uncertain outcomes. Many artists work part-time, lack long-term contracts, and frequently combine employment with self-employment, with self-employment being higher than in the rest of the society.⁷³ The constant competition for grants, lack of feedback, and social recognition add to their stress. While collaboration and control over their work provide some relief, most artists lack access to occupational health services, work while sick, and struggle to recover from work-related stress.⁷⁴

In the context of mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals, burnout is an important factor. In a study conducted in the framework of the BurnoutAid project,⁷⁵ authors analysed the specificity of the burnout phenomenon in non-governmental cultural organisations. This research shows that burnout is driven by individual factors such as excessive dedication to work, perfectionism, idealism, strong sense of responsibility, and poor coping mechanisms, as well as organisational factors including unstable finances,

⁷¹ Ruusuvirta, M.; Lahtinen, E.; Rensujeff, K.; and Leppänen, A. (2023), *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2022. Taiteilijoiden työhyvinvointi*. [Arts and Culture Barometer 2022. Occupational Wellbeing of Artists]. Cuporen verkkojulkaisu 72. Helsinki: Cupore, Center for Cultural Policy Research, available in Finnish (Summary in English) at <https://www.cupore.fi/en/publications/cupore-s-publications/occupational-well-being-of-artists>

⁷² Ruusuvirta, M.; Lahtinen, E.; Rensujeff, K.; and Leppänen, A. (2023), *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2022. Taiteilijoiden työhyvinvointi*. [Arts and Culture Barometer 2022. Occupational Wellbeing of Artists]. Helsinki: Cuporen verkkojulkaisu 72. Cupore, Center for Cultural Policy Research, available in Finnish (Summary in English) at <https://www.cupore.fi/en/publications/cupore-s-publications/occupational-well-being-of-artists>

⁷³ Culture Action Europe and Dâmaso, M. (2021), *The Situation of Artists and Cultural Workers and the Post-COVID-19 Cultural Recovery in the European Union*. Research for CULT Committee, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2021\)652250](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2021)652250)

⁷⁴ Ruusuvirta, M.; Lahtinen, E.; Rensujeff, K.; and Leppänen, A. (2023), *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2022. Taiteilijoiden työhyvinvointi*. [Arts and Culture Barometer 2022. Occupational Wellbeing of Artists]. Helsinki: Cuporen verkkojulkaisu 72. Cupore, Center for Cultural Policy Research, available in Finnish (Summary in English) at <https://www.cupore.fi/en/publications/cupore-s-publications/occupational-well-being-of-artists>

⁷⁵ <https://burnout-aid.eu/>

poor leadership, unclear roles, excessive workloads, and lack of autonomy. According to this study, cultural organisations often demand self-sacrifice and have unrealistic standards, contributing to stress. Additionally, toxic work environments, such as those involving discrimination or harassment, can further harm mental health.⁷⁶

The study carried out by the French artist collective CURA⁷⁷ depicts the climate in the music sector as conducive to stress, violence, and precarity with which passionate individuals are confronted. As the study shows, 22% of the music professionals that responded suffer from anxiety, while 15% suffer from depression, and an equal number from burnout.⁷⁸ In another study carried out within the Australian entertainment sector (which includes performing artists, technicians and industry support workers), levels of anxiety within the respondents are 10 times higher than those of the general population, and the number of suicide attempts more than double of those of the general population.⁷⁹

Another French study points out a negative dynamic – the significant deterioration of relations between companies and programmers, due to lack of resources and the acceleration of production processes that weaken mutual trust. As a result of this situation, professional burnout and psychosocial risks are increasing alarmingly among those involved in performing arts, particularly

among artistic directors. The sector has a growing number of people suffering from burnout and depression linked to overwork. In addition to the human suffering that this causes, this deterioration of mental health weighs heavily on the vitality of artistic creation.⁸⁰

At the European level, a study of the health and well-being of professional musicians highlights additional factors (and although it specifically derives from information on the music sector, the analysis may also give indications on other artistic disciplines). It reveals that musicians often share certain traits such as interpersonal and intrapersonal sensitivity, ruminative thinking, and neuroticism. When combined with performance anxiety and high-stress environments, these traits can create a harmful mix, leading to mental health issues like depression, sleep disturbances, anxiety, social isolation, and addiction. The adrenaline highs and lows associated with performing, along with the waiting periods between shows, can also trigger substance abuse as a coping mechanism.⁸¹

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the already fragile position of artists and cultural workers, and these effects are likely to be felt across the sector in the coming years. The pandemic left many organisations radically fragile and a number of artists sought to leave their artistic practices and search for a non-cultural job, which has ongoing effects on the overall arts ecosystem.⁸²

⁷⁶ Burnout Aid (202), Social Study Results On Burnout In Polish, Croatian And Slovenian NGOs. Burnout Aid, available at https://burnout-aid.eu/uploads/social_study_results_burnout_aid-60a65dcba94e2.pdf

⁷⁷ <https://www.cura-music.org/>

⁷⁸ Collectif CURA (2022), *Santé Mentale & Bien-Être Dans l'Industrie de la Musique : Risques psychosociaux, précarité et violences sexistes et sexuelles chez les artistes et leur entourage professionnel*. Collectif CURA, available in French at https://www.cura-music.org/_files/ugd/19010c_67b4a004ccaa41f182bc29126f2d4908.pdf

⁷⁹ Van den Eynde, J.; Fisher, A.; and Sonn, C. (2016), *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report*. Melbourne: Victoria University, available at https://crewcare.org.au/images/downloads/WorkingintheAustralianEntertainmentIndustry_FinalReport_Oct16.pdf

⁸⁰ Jean, Y. (15 November 2023), *Mieux produire, Mieux diffuser – Contribution publique*. Paris: Syndicat des criques et compagnies de creation, available in French at https://compagnies.org/pistes_de_travail/contribution-du-scc-au-plan-mieux-produire-mieux-diffuser
See also, for example, the open letter 'Les pro.(...) ne sont pas des variables d'ajustement' [Arts workers are not adjustment variables]. Paris: L'Association des Professionnel-le-s de l'Administration du Spectacle, available in French at <https://www.lapas.fr/product-page/lettre-ouverte-les-pro-ne-sont-pas-des-variables-d-ajustement>

⁸¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (Vermeersch, L.; Van Herreweghe, D.; Meeuwssen, M.; et al.) (2023), *The Health and Wellbeing of Professional Musicians and Music Creators in the EU – Insights from Research for Policy and Practice*. Brussels: Publications Office of the European Union, available at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/481949>

⁸² Culture Action Europe; and Dâmaso, M. (2021), *The Situation of Artists and Cultural Workers and the Post-COVID-19 Cultural Recovery in the European Union*. Research for CULT Committee, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2021\)652250](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2021)652250)

In the broader context of health and well-being, forcibly displaced artists face particular pressures. Often dealing with ongoing trauma, they frequently move between various resources, as their challenges are persistent rather than isolated incidents. Beyond direct persecution, artists may grapple with long-term psychological and emotional trauma. Achieving lasting stability often requires sustained collaboration with organisations or a series of short-term opportunities to ensure continuous support and security.⁸³

The well-being of artists and culture professionals, particularly those from vulnerable communities, is

shaped by intersecting pressures related to their socio-economic status, cultural identity, and access to resources.⁸⁴

There are also deeper systemic issues that influence the well-being of artists and culture professionals. Amongst other issues arising from the arts economic model, a particular challenge is the mystification of artistic labour, which promotes the idea that art is not labour but rather an expression of individual creativity, which stands outside of the economy. In this sense, artistic labour is not recognised and is often unpaid, which has an impact on the working conditions and self-worth of the artists.⁸⁵

Mental health, well-being, and the international circulation of arts and culture professionals

Although mobility and well-being have not been extensively studied together as a stand-alone topic, some research highlights their intersection with other critical factors in the arts sector, such as socioeconomic circumstances, working conditions and financial stability. These interconnected elements underline the need for a more holistic approach in addressing the health and well-being challenges artists face. There is now a significant amount of research at all scales – from the international to the local – that documents the strong relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and health outcomes. As the World Health Organisation puts it: 'The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system. These circumstances

are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.'⁸⁶

Within the present research, we will use the definition of mobility as proposed by On the Move in the *i-Portunus Operational Study – Mobility Scheme for Artists and Culture Professionals in Creative Europe Countries*: 'mobility is a central component of the professional trajectory of artists and culture professionals. Involving a temporary cross-border movement, often for educational, capacity-building, networking, or working purposes, it may have

⁸³ Fine, G.; and Trébault, J. (26 January 2021), *A Safety Guide for Artists*. New York: ARC, Artists at Risk Connection, available in English, Spanish and French at <https://artistsatriskconnection.org/guide/safety-guide-for-artists>

⁸⁴ Cid-Vega, A.; and Brown, A. (2023), 'Reimagining communities of care in the performing arts: A call for a community-based task-sharing approach to address the mental health needs of performing artists' in *SSM – Mental Health*, Volume 3, available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2023.100222>

⁸⁵ Praznik, K. (8 December 2020), 'Wages for and against Art Work: On Economy, Autonomy, and the Future of Artistic Labour' in RESHAPE, available at <https://reshape.network/article/wages-for-and-against-art-work-on-economy-autonomy-and-the-future-of-artistic-labour>

⁸⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (Harrisson, D.; and Jenson, J.) (2013), *Social innovation research in the European Union: approaches, findings and future directions: policy review*. Publications Office of the European Union, available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/86b50f05-2b71-47d3-8db3-4110002b0ccb/language-en>

tangible or intangible outputs in the short term, and/or be part of a long-term professional development process. Mobility is a conscious process, and those involved in it, whether by directly engaging in it or by supporting it, should take into consideration its cultural, social, political, environmental, ethical and economic implications.⁸⁷ The operational study has demonstrated the various benefits of the mobility of artists and culture professionals, including professional development through acquiring new skills, creative exploration, new perspectives on the work, increased visibility, as well as psychological benefits like enhanced self-esteem from recognition and grants.

However, mobility is also a subject around which numerous tensions are crystallised. Depending on their base country, their social status or their abilities, artists and culture professionals do not have the same access to mobility, and access is highly dependent on context. In certain regions, mobility is almost expected, placing pressure on artists to be constantly on the move. This can significantly affect their ability to engage locally and impact their quality of life. Conversely, in other regions, mobility is much less accessible and fraught with complex challenges. In these contexts, mobility remains a rare privilege reserved for a fortunate few who can benefit from its positive effects.⁸⁸

In their work dealing with transnational and post-national artistic practices, the artists working within the RESHAPE project identified mobility practices as a point of tension in respect to the well-being of artists. Working within a system equating mobility with success, artists in some contexts are pressured into hypermobility, moving constantly between residencies and venues, which often leads to exhaustion and burnout. In contrast, in other regions the exclusion of those unable to be mobile, due to

visa restrictions, socio-economic factors, or the devaluation of certain artistic practices, is creating a sense of isolation and disconnect. In the words of the artists: 'these risks represent a strong impact on the mind, our capacity to connect deeply to others, and therefore our political possibility for action.'⁸⁹

For those who do have access to mobility, it can be both a blessing and a burden. While it offers positive opportunities, this benefit is often overshadowed by the pressures of excessive mobility and the resulting lack of a locally rooted presence: 'Cultural workers are circulating the global markets just like commodities. They are in the peculiar situation of being both privileged and precarious. Privileged, because even the possibility of thinking about a career in the arts already requires a solid social and material base; and because the consequences of that choice are usually hidden behind success stories. Precarious, because freelance work in a stagnated economy with unstable income leads to depression, anxiety, burnout, frustration and sadness, and makes them question their professional choices and capacities within a permanent identity crisis'.⁹⁰

This ambivalent impact of mobility is also illustrated eloquently by the words of artist Sarah Vanhee: 'Our travelling is not so very different from that of an economic migrant who is forced to travel out of necessity, in our case the economic need to be someplace. It makes everything very fleeting and temporary. It detaches us from our own environment, given that it is difficult to maintain friendships and relationships in the places where we live. And that is also not possible in those other places we travel to. Internationalisation does allow for the expansion of relationships, for making friends and sharing a discourse across borders, but at the same time, it conceals a great danger for the political dimension of art and of being an artist.'⁹¹

⁸⁷ On the Move (2019), *i-Portunus Operational Study – Mobility Scheme for Artists and Culture Professionals in Creative Europe Countries*. Brussels: Goethe-Institute, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/i-portunus-operational-study>

⁸⁸ On the Move (2019), *i-Portunus Operational Study – Mobility Scheme for Artists and Culture Professionals in Creative Europe Countries*. Brussels: Goethe-Institute, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/i-portunus-operational-study>

⁸⁹ Bobrikova, M. Et al. (9 December 2020), 'Transnational and Postnational Practices Manual' in RESHAPE, available at <https://reshape.network/prototype/transnational-and-postnational-practices-manual>

⁹⁰ Vasilev, Y. (28 January 2021), 'Circulating artists, defunded infrastructures' in Springback Magazine, available at <https://springbackmagazine.com/read/circulating-artists-defunded-infrastructures-europe/>

⁹¹ Kennes, N. (13 November 2017), *Touring Abroad, Episode 2: SELAH SUE*. Kunsten.be, available at <https://medium.com/flanders-arts-institute-kunstenpunt/touring-abroad-e35647c5318f>

Touring artists in particular face unique challenges that can severely strain personal relationships and lead to exhaustion. A recent U.S. study on the mental health of touring musicians revealed alarming levels of suffering. Nearly half of those surveyed were clinically depressed, and many experienced anxiety and suicidal thoughts. The demanding lifestyle of constant travel, isolation, and lack of stability further exacerbates mental health struggles, painting a grim picture of life on the road for many in the sector.⁹² Many of these findings are confirmed by the testimonials of artists and professional associations in Canada,⁹³ the United Kingdom,⁹⁴ and France.⁹⁵

The arts sector is caught between two realities: on the one hand the necessity of mobility for professional development and on the other the negative personal impact it can cause. Artists need to travel for research, networking, and project collaboration, however, the nomadic lifestyle in some parts of the sector creates stress, disrupts work-life balance, and leads to administrative burdens which all disrupt the well-being of artists and culture professionals. This is also particularly valid for certain vulnerable groups, such as forcibly displaced artists and culture professionals, disabled artists and culture professionals,⁹⁶ or those with caring responsibilities⁹⁷ that are prevented from accessing mobility due to a variety of barriers ranging from practical through administrative to more systemic reasons.

The impacts of mobility impediments

The visa system, in particular the Schengen visa code which regulates access to the countries signatories of the Schengen agreement,⁹⁸ is considered as a major barrier to mobility of artists and culture professionals. It restricts free travel, severely limiting access to networking, education, and training, and significantly reduces work opportunities. Additionally, it causes considerable

stress for numerous artists and culture professionals from countries whose citizens require visas.

Issues surrounding visa policies and their implementation have been long standing. In 2012, On the Move published a report⁹⁹ with a set of recommendations with regards to visa procedures. The second study on the same topic, with a focus

⁹² Newman C.; George R. P. et al. (January 2022), 'Mental health issues among international touring professionals in the music industry' in *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Volume 145, 243-249, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022395621007330>

⁹³ Groguhé, M. (24 January 2023). 'Artistes épuisés, tournées annulées' in *La Presse*, available in French at https://www.lapresse.ca/arts/musique/2023-01-24/artistes-epuises-tournees-annulees.php?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=manch

⁹⁴ See the research section of the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine available at <https://www.bapam.org.uk/research/>

⁹⁵ Le Moloco, Médecine des Arts et la FEDELIMA (2017), *La Santé du musicien dans les musiques actuelles*, available in French at https://www.fedelima.org/IMG/pdf/actes_colloque_sante_du_musicien_musiques_actuelles.pdf

⁹⁶ Baltà Portolés, J.; Dowden, S.; and Ellingsworth, J. (June 2024), *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-international-mobility-disabled-artists-and-culture>

⁹⁷ Ellingsworth, J.; Floch, Y.; and Verstraete, K. (November 2023). *Cultural Mobility Flows – Parenting and international cultural mobility. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-parenting-and-international-cultural-mobility>

⁹⁸ The current list of countries includes Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Czechia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

⁹⁹ Di Federico, E.; and Le Sourd, M. (2012), *Artists' mobility and visas: A step forward*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/artists-mobility-and-visas-step-forward>

on African countries and the Schengen space¹⁰⁰ and published more than 10 years later, has shown little progress, with many original recommendations still remaining valid. Moreover, additional administrative and financial requirements are being introduced for those allowed to enter the EU without a visa,¹⁰¹ further enhancing the barriers to mobility.

The reports emphasise arbitrary visa decisions, humiliating procedures, and lack of transparency as key factors that impact mental health, that affects artists and culture professionals from third countries in particular. The visa process remains downgrading and deeply unjust, as the report explains: 'It is based on a set of implicit biases that are Eurocentric and the political Global North centric and that pertain to policing movement.'¹⁰² The visa procedures are overwhelmingly perceived as reinforcing discrimination and marginalisation: 'An alternative world-building requires us to view this matter from the perspective of those most vulnerable to discrimination in our societies so that we can have a full picture of the extent of the harm in order to be able to imagine possibilities that centre equity and justice. The black, African experience is a particular experience that carries multiple vulnerabilities in this context, and these can be compounded by possessing a gender identity that is marginalised, such as being womxn or gender queer, or being disabled, economically disadvantaged, etc. to compound and intersect struggles.'¹⁰³

While other travellers face similar challenges, artists are disproportionately impacted due to the

nature of their work, which often involves frequent travel, short-notice invitations, and precarious working conditions. Their irregular and low income complicates the requirement for proof of financial means. Unlike other travellers, artists often face all these challenges simultaneously, making the visa process especially difficult to navigate. In the words of Kenyan artist Ogutu Muraya, 'I decided to no longer apply for EU visas. It became too difficult for me to convince myself to go through with this periodic process of justifying my existence in order to gain temporary approval from a system that is undeniably discriminatory. A system whose biases and filters disproportionately affect people of colour. Of course, this decision has consequences for my work and mobility as an artist and a person.'¹⁰⁴

More than three quarters of respondents from the 2023 survey of On the Move declared having experienced problems during visa application processes. The refusals are frequent, regardless of the countries involved. The application experience was described as stressful, anxiety inducing, complex and racist. Beyond the immediate stress and humiliation, visa rejections have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only individual careers but also finances, local arts sectors, and audiences, adding to the insecurity, precarity and low self-esteem that artists and culture professionals experience. Respondents highlighted significant losses due to visa rejections, including missed networking opportunities, inability to collaborate with peers, diminished visibility, and lost income, all affecting their livelihood.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ellingsworth, J. (September 2023), *Schengen Visa Code and cultural mobility: Latest insights with a focus on artists and culture professionals from the African continent*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/schengen-visa-code-and-cultural-mobility-latest-insights-focus-artists-and>

¹⁰¹ For more information on the ETIAS travel authorisation, visit https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias/what-etias_en

¹⁰² Ntsali Mlandu, U. (November 2023), *An invitation to transform your vision of the cultural mobility ethic from an African perspective*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/invitation-transform-your-vision-cultural-mobility-ethic-african-perspective>

¹⁰³ Ntsali Mlandu, U. (November 2023), *An invitation to transform your vision of the cultural mobility ethic from an African perspective*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/invitation-transform-your-vision-cultural-mobility-ethic-african-perspective>

¹⁰⁴ Muraya, O. (12 September 2020), *I Am Multitudes*. Originally published by the magazine Etcetera, issue 161, 7–85 and republished by RESHAPE at <https://reshape.network/article/i-am-multitudes>

¹⁰⁵ Ellingsworth, J. (September 2023), *Schengen Visa Code and cultural mobility: Latest insights with a focus on artists and culture professionals from the African continent*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/schengen-visa-code-and-cultural-mobility-latest-insights-focus-artists-and>

The mental health and well-being of arts and culture professionals belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups

Artists from vulnerable groups face many of the same challenges as their peers, but these issues are often intensified due to their unique circumstances. International mobility plays a crucial role in expanding opportunities for disabled artists and culture professionals. Cross-border mobility not only offers inspiration and learning opportunities but is also essential in the sense of accomplishment and professional achievement.¹⁰⁶ However, a major challenge in the mobility of disabled artists is the lack of awareness and knowledge of their specific needs and the necessary steps and procedures they are required to undertake when engaging in mobility. Factors such as time spent caring for their bodies, navigating complex administrative processes, and ensuring the accessibility of venues, can increase stress for disabled artists as they operate in a world often unprepared to accommodate their needs. Poor communication can add further strain and exacerbate stress, placing the burden of ensuring accessibility on the artists themselves. Additionally, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is growing concern about the heightened health risks disabled individuals face, as the virus disproportionately impacts those with fragile health conditions.¹⁰⁷

Forcibly displaced artists are another particularly fragile group. They may have faced severe risks, threats, or dangers and suffered severe trauma. Acknowledging the various ways these traumatic experiences can impact an individual's mental

and physical well-being is vital, as recovery and healing are nuanced and individualised processes. Persecution can not only be dangerous but also isolating. One of the most important steps to protect mental and physical well-being is to build a broad, diverse, and supportive community of peers. It is essential that survivors are provided with the time, space, resources, and support needed to recuperate safely.¹⁰⁸

Compounding these challenges is visa insecurity, which has been linked to more severe mental health issues in asylum seekers and refugees. Those with insecure visa status were five times more likely to experience high levels of depression and anxiety than those with permanent residency or citizenship, with women twice as likely to report distress compared to men. The current trend toward temporary protection visas can have further harmful effects, especially for women, and prolonged refugee processing times only extend uncertainty and insecurity.¹⁰⁹

Considering these interconnected challenges, more research is needed at the intersection of multiple pressures and struggles faced by artists and culture professionals belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups, as well as others who also face significant mobility barriers. Ensuring that their unique experiences and needs are fully understood and addressed is essential for fostering their well-being and professional development.

¹⁰⁶ Baltà Portolés, J.; Dowden, S.; and Ellingsworth, J. (June 2024), *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-international-mobility-disabled-artists-and-culture>

¹⁰⁷ Baltà Portolés, J.; and Ellingsworth, J. (May 2023), *Time to Act: Two Years On, Data-led Insights on Performing Arts and Disability in Europe*. On the Move and British Council, available at <https://www.on-the-move.org/resources/library/time-act-two-years-data-led-insights-performing-arts-and-disability-europe>

¹⁰⁸ Fine, G.; and Trébault, J. (2021), *A Safety Guide for Artists*. New York: ARC, Artists at Risk Connection, available in English, Spanish and French at <https://artistsatriskconnection.org/guide/safety-guide-for-artists>

¹⁰⁹ Newnham, E.; Pearman A.; Olinga-Shannon, S.; and Nickerson A. (2019), 'The Mental Health Effects of Visa Insecurity for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum: a Latent Class Analysis' in *International Journal of Public Health*, volume 64, 763–772, available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00038-019-01249-6>

Conclusions

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the mental health challenges and well-being concerns faced by artists and culture professionals, including in relation to transnational mobility. Although the intersection of mobility and well-being has not been studied extensively as an independent topic, there is substantial evidence that these factors are interlinked. This connection is put under further pressure due to the precarious working conditions, financial instability, and the various adversities that artists encounter in their professional lives. Understanding these challenges in an interconnected manner is vital to developing effective support systems and policies that promote the well-being of individuals in the arts sector.

A more holistic approach is needed, starting with research and solution design. While it is important to focus on methods that address the well-being of individual artists or culture professionals, it is equally critical to understand the broader political economy shaping the sector.¹¹⁰ The organisational models and mechanisms within the arts ecosystem significantly influence stakeholders' well-being. Addressing these root causes can help mitigate negative effects and envision models that better align with the values of the sector, societal changes, and evolving artistic practices.

Examining the mental health and well-being of artists and culture professionals through the lens of mobility highlights a critical tension; while mobility is essential for career growth, self-worth, and community connection, it is also embedded in

a system that intensifies pressure on individuals, leading to work-life imbalances, stress, and administrative burdens. For those with access, mobility offers numerous opportunities for self-development. However, for those excluded by economic, political, and administrative barriers, it remains an unattainable luxury.

To better understand these tensions and their development, further research is necessary. It is also crucial to engage in a broader dialogue with various stakeholders to explore alternative organisational models and practices that more effectively address the needs of artists and the communities they support.

The multiple and interconnected crises affecting our societies are exerting increased pressure on the arts sector. Yet, these crises also offer valuable insights that can inform the development of future organisational models. For instance, social, institutional, and organisational structures could incorporate the lived experience of generations of migrants, applying essential lessons in mobility, adaptation and resilience to their structures and ways of working.¹¹¹

By prioritising the health and well-being of artists and culture professionals, cultural stakeholders can create a more sustainable and supportive environment. This approach ensures that transnational mobility becomes a source of well-being and personal growth, while also contributing to a more inclusive and diverse society.

¹¹⁰ Musgrave, G. (2022), 'Music and Well-Being vs. Musicians' Well-Being: Examining the Paradox of Music-Making Positively Impacting Well-Being, but Musicians Suffering from Poor Mental Health' in *Cultural Trends*, 32(3), 280–295, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2022.2058354>

¹¹¹ Gorashi, H. (2021), 'Breaking the 'Otherness' Fixation'. Original in Dutch, first published by *De Helling* (Dutch version); *Green European Journal* (English version), available at <https://www.eurozine.com/breaking-the-otherness-fixation/>

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations have been derived from the above data analysis, combined with insights from mobility stakeholders and desk research. We formulate here a set of observations and recommendations for public authorities at different levels, as well as for stakeholders in the culture field.

We collectively still have much to learn regarding mental health and well-being. Other sectors are more advanced in relation to protection, prevention, and treatment (for example the professional sports sector, where valuable approaches were developed towards physical injuries and mental health conditions); social inspection frameworks and protective measures from other industries should serve as sources of inspiration. This is supported by reports that highlight that strong links should be established with the health, education, and employment sectors.

Many of the texts referenced in this research provide general recommendations on the mental health and well-being of arts and culture workers or focus on specific actions for those belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups. In line with On the Move's focus on the international circulation of arts and culture professionals and their works, this segment will highlight recommendations specifically related to well-being and international mobility. The actions proposed here create conditions that

improve mental health and foster a stronger sense of well-being for mobile professionals.

Despite this specific focus, the research underscores that the most effective approach is a holistic one. To implement an efficient long-term strategy for enhancing well-being, stakeholders should adopt a comprehensive view and combine these recommendations in complementarity with existing broader research on mental health and well-being.

Additionally, further study is needed for several groups of artists and culture professionals. There is a notable gap in knowledge regarding the mental health and international mobility of arts and culture workers in specific regions, such as Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe, and the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. As the number of freelance and self-employed professionals continues to rise, an analysis of their cross-border mobility practices in relation to their unique working conditions would be valuable. Further research is also required on the experiences of arts and culture workers belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Recommendations to all arts and culture stakeholders

All stakeholders should:

- give due consideration to all facets of the health and well-being in the arts and culture field;
- addressing long-term risks and overlooked stressors, such as lack of access to international mobility opportunities, visa issues and related administrative burdens, financial insecurity, and social and performance anxiety, among many others;
- prioritise the health and well-being of artists and culture professionals, focusing on both physical and mental well-being;
- adopt measures, to effectively address these concerns¹¹² which include supporting information provision and projects that enhance well-being and reinforce mental health of artists and cultural professionals;
- foster a culture of well-being and resilience¹¹³ in cultural organisations, for example by appointing a mental health referent to help create an open environment for discussing mental health and addressing early signs of mental health issues;
- develop strategies to reduce workplace factors contributing to mental ill-health, while offering comprehensive guidance for those facing challenges;¹¹⁴
- benefit from training in hospitality and in international mobility practices (for all workers involved in hosting artists and culture professionals), with a particular emphasis on disabled workers, forcibly displaced creatives, artists and culture professionals with caring responsibilities and other workers belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups; and
- review and adapt of administrative, financial, production, presentation and other procedures.

The arts and culture field should promote awareness, understanding, and knowledge of the intersections between arts, culture and diversity and inclusion; adapt and adopt existing guidelines for the well-being of touring artists and culture professionals,¹¹⁵ and promote their use among artists and arts workers.

¹¹² Baltà Portolés, J. (June 2021), *Dance and Well-being, review of evidence and policy perspectives*. Barcelona: European Dancehouse Network, available at https://www.ednetwork.eu/uploads/documents/59/EDN_Dance%20%26%20Well-being%20Full%20Publication.pdf

¹¹³ Overkleeft, E. (2023), *Wellbeing in the (Cultural) Workplace – A Report on Trans Europe Halles Members' Participation in the Wellbeing Hours Programme*. Trans Europe Halles, available at <https://www.teh.net/news/wellbeing-hours-open-call-2023/>

¹¹⁴ See for example the Creative Freedom manifesto on mental health first aid, available at <https://www.creative-freedom.org/manifesto-in-practice>

¹¹⁵ See for example, The Arts Wellbeing Collective (2019), *Tour Well – Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing on tour*. Melbourne: The Arts Wellbeing Collective, available at <https://artswellbeingcollective.com.au/resources/tour-well-promoting-positive-mental-health-and-wellbeing-on-tour/> and The Arts Wellbeing Collective (2019), *Tour Well for Tour Managers – Tips and techniques for designing tours to promote positive mental health and wellbeing*. Melbourne: The Arts Wellbeing Collective, available at <https://artswellbeingcollective.com.au/resources/tour-well-for-tour-managers-designing-tours-to-promote-positive-mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

Recommendations to European Union institutions

The European Union should:

- support Member-States in developing structures and exchanging forward-looking practices that provide mental health protection, prevention and treatment, including for artists and culture professionals on the move;¹¹⁶
- ensure that resources are dedicated to improving the specific conditions of mobile disabled artists,¹¹⁷ forcibly displaced artists and culture professionals,¹¹⁸ artists and culture professionals with caring responsibilities,¹¹⁹ emerging artists and culture professionals, and those belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups;
- support and encourage opportunities for creatives to network, exchange experiences and practices, build and share knowledge, and advocate for better cross-border mobility conditions; and
- recognise the international mobility of artists and culture professionals as essential to a vibrant European society, recognise the international mobility of artists and culture professionals as essential to a vibrant European society (through, for example, granting preferential treatment for cultural journeys that meet Schengen visa code entry conditions, establishing contact points with European and international cultural organisations to incorporate their insights into the revision of the Schengen visa code, and mandating Member States to regularly monitor external service providers and others).¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; Vermeersch, L.; Van Herreweghe, D.; Meeuwssen, M. et al. (2023), *The Health and Well-Being of Professional Musicians and Music Creators in the EU – Insights from Research for Policy and Practice*. Brussels: Publications Office of the European Union, available at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/481949>

¹¹⁷ Baltà Portolés, J.; Dowden, S.; and Ellingsworth, J. (June 2024), *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-international-mobility-disabled-artists-and-culture>

¹¹⁸ Newnham, E. A.; Pearman, A.; Olinga-Shannon, S. et al. (2019), 'The mental health effects of visa insecurity for refugees and people seeking asylum: a latent class analysis' in *International Journal Public Health*. 64, 763–772, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01249-6>

¹¹⁹ Ellingsworth, J.; Floch, Y.; and Verstraete, K. (November 2023), *Cultural Mobility Flows – Parenting and international cultural mobility. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-parenting-and-international-cultural-mobility>

¹²⁰ See detailed recommendations in dedicated policy reports: Di Federico, E.; and Le Sourd, M. (2012), *Artists' mobility and visas: A step forward*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/artists-mobility-and-visas-step-forward> and Ellingsworth, J. (September 2023), *Schengen Visa Code and cultural mobility: Latest insights with a focus on artists and culture professionals from the African continent*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/schengen-visa-code-and-cultural-mobility-latest-insights-focus-artists-and>

Recommendations to local, regional and national authorities

Member-States, including authorities active at local and regional levels, should:

- work jointly with policymakers at all levels to develop a set of joint and complementary instruments to enhance well-being and mental health;
- develop a framework and tools for monitoring and disseminating information about the well-being of artists and culture professionals in relation to mobility;
- channel resources to ensure that timely and comprehensive information is shared with all national/regional/local stakeholders, including artists, hosting cultural organisations, mobility funding bodies, and policymakers;¹²¹
- ensure that resources are dedicated to improving the specific conditions of mobile disabled artists,¹²² forcibly displaced artists and culture professionals,¹²³ artists and culture professionals with caring responsibilities,¹²⁴ emerging artists and culture professionals, and those belonging to minorities, marginalised and vulnerable groups;
- support and encourage opportunities for creatives to network, exchange experiences and practices, build and share knowledge, and advocate for better cross-border mobility conditions;
- establish a comprehensive framework (and provide resources) for artists and culture professionals who have experienced significant risks or trauma, ensuring they have access to vital medical and psychological care in their recovery;¹²⁵
- support artists and culture professionals active in the field of health and well-being with adequate funding, including for the specific (emotional, psychological, etc.) support for both freelance and employed artists;
- recognise the cost of health and well-being support as a legitimate expense in budgets and proposals submitted by artists for relevant projects;¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ruusuvirta, M.; Lahtinen, E.; Rensujeff, K.; and Leppänen, A (2023), *Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2022. Taiteilijoiden työhyvinvointi*. [Arts and Culture Barometer 2022. Occupational Wellbeing of Artists]. Cuporen verkkojulkaisu 72. Helsinki: Cupore, Center for Cultural Policy Research, available in Finnish (Summary in English) at <https://www.cupore.fi/en/publications/cupore-s-publications/occupational-well-being-of-artists>

¹²² Baltà Portolés, J.; Dowden, S.; and Ellingsworth, J. (June 2024), *Cultural Mobility Flows – The International Mobility of Disabled Artists and Culture Professionals. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-international-mobility-disabled-artists-and-culture>

¹²³ Newnham, E. A.; Pearman, A.; Olinga-Shannon, S. et al. (2019), 'The mental health effects of visa insecurity for refugees and people seeking asylum: a latent class analysis' in *International Journal Public Health*. 64, 763–772, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01249-6>

¹²⁴ Ellingsworth, J.; Floch, Y.; and Verstraete, K. (November 2023), *Cultural Mobility Flows – Parenting and international cultural mobility. Report and Policy Recommendations*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/cultural-mobility-flows-parenting-and-international-cultural-mobility>

¹²⁵ Fine, G.; and Trébault, J. for Artists at Risk Connection (26 January 2021), *A Safety Guide for Artists*. New York City: PEN America, available in English, Spanish and French at <https://artistsatriskconnection.org/guide/safety-guide-for-artists>

¹²⁶ Naismith, N. (2019), *Artists Practising Well*. Aberdeen: Robert Gordon University, available at <https://doi.org/10.48526/rgu-wt-235847>

- support professional development and capacity building programmes aiming to equip cultural leaders with adequate knowledge and skills in human resources management, personnel and external contributors' well-being and mental health;
- implementing equality, diversity, and inclusion policies;¹²⁷ and
- support and encourage connections between the arts and culture sector and other sectors with relevant expertise in managing mobility-related mental health, such as sports, education, health and other sectors.¹²⁸

Detailed recommendations focusing on visa processes can be found in On the Move's studies.¹²⁹ These include digitising application processes (currently underway),¹³⁰ establishing a centralised and long-term training system for Consulates' and Embassies' staff as well as external agencies, granting preferential treatment to artists and cultural professionals, and monitoring external service providers, among other measures.

In relation to at-risk and displaced artists and culture professionals, and in line with the Council of Europe conclusions,¹³¹ Member-States should:

- secure a framework and procedures which will ensure a timely transition to permanent visa status for forcibly displaced artists and culture professionals;¹³²
- strengthen diasporic organisations and networks to effectively meet the needs of new immigrants, ensuring that diaspora communities can sustain both existing and new support initiatives.¹³³
- ensure long-term support to organisations that assist forcibly displaced artists and culture professionals and deliver specialised services throughout the rehabilitation and recovery journey; and

¹²⁷ Perineau, L. (June 2022), *Bruised, Exhausted and Burnt-Out, A discussion about regenerative approaches to human resources in cultural centres – Report*. Brussels: European Network of Cultural Centres, available at <https://cloud.encc.eu/s/KEjtM8W6mgonLcc>

¹²⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; Vermeersch, L.; Van Herreweghe, D.; Meeuwssen, M. et al. (2023), *The health and well-being of professional musicians and music creators in the EU – Insights from research for policy and practice*. Brussels: Publications Office of the European Union, available at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/481949>

¹²⁹ See detailed recommendations in dedicated policy reports: Di Federico, E.; and Le Sourd, M. (2012), *Artists' mobility and visas: A step forward*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/artists-mobility-and-visas-step-forward> and Ellingsworth, J. (September 2023), *Schengen Visa Code and cultural mobility: Latest insights with a focus on artists and culture professionals from the African continent*. On the Move, available at <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/schengen-visa-code-and-cultural-mobility-latest-insights-focus-artists-and>

¹³⁰ European Parliament (18 October 2023), 'MEPs adopt digital visas to boost the security of the Schengen area' in *News European Parliament*. European Parliament, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20231013IPR07131/meps-adopt-digital-visas-to-boost-the-security-of-the-schengen-area>

¹³¹ The Council of the European Union (26 May 2023), 'Council Conclusions on At-risk Artists and Displaced Artists' in *Official Journal of the European Union*. The Council of the European Union, available at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023XG0526\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023XG0526(02))

¹³² Newnham, E.-A.; Pearman, A.; Olinga-Shannon, S. et al. (2019), 'The mental health effects of visa insecurity for refugees and people seeking asylum: a latent class analysis' in *International Journal Public Health*. 64, 763–772, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01249-6>

¹³³ Bogerts, L.; and Yilmaz-Dreger, S. (2024), *Lernen von der Diaspora – Neuanfänge in Kunst und Kultur nachhaltig gestalten* [Learning from the Diaspora – Creating sustainable new beginnings in art and culture]. Stuttgart: ifa-Edition Kultur und Außenpolitik, available at <https://culturalrelations.ifa.de/forschen/ergebnisse/lernen-von-der-diaspora/>

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