



IETM REPORT

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PERFORMING ARTS IN TIMES OF THE PANDEMIC

Status quo and the way forward

28 March 2020

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Flanders
State of the art



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

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Performing arts in times of the pandemic: status quo and the way forward

There is no sector in the global economic ecosystem which hasn't been impacted by the current COVID-19 crisis. The performing arts sector, for many obvious reasons, has been hit hard: with an immediate and catastrophic impact on the most fragile part of the value chain - artists, and with significant snow-ball effects rolling out for the rest of the sector.

We have circulated a survey among our members, to get a grip on how the new reality has affected them so far. There is an abundance of surveys flying around in the cultural sector these days. The purposes of ours are to sense the spirit embracing the global performing arts community today, to detect the solidarity mechanisms and survival strategies, as well as to identify the most burning needs and transform them into sensible recommendations for policy-makers.

Here are five takeaways from our members' feedback:

1. Supporting artists means rescuing the entire performing arts ecosystem
2. Performing arts are hit hard, their international aspect is under particular pressure
3. The frozen link with audiences is as detrimental as economic losses
4. Bottom-up solidarity is enormous and tangible
5. Live component of the performing arts must remain alive, even and especially today

Discover more in the following pages.

This report is based on contributions from around 80 members from 23 countries. While we tried to make this report as comprehensive and precise as possible, the text is rather reflecting personal testimonials of our members than a profound research. We will continue collecting the information and updating the report.



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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR?

An incredible number of performances, conferences, festivals, international co-productions, tours, all sorts of events in Europe, Asia, US, Canada and Australia (countries where our respondents are based) have been postponed or cancelled.

Many jobs have already dissolved (especially in Spain and Italy), and people are literally left without any income and possibility to pay their rent. Moreover, independent artists are usually juggling among several jobs, such as teaching, working in a restaurant, retail, so they are hit from all sides.

In some countries, like, in the UK, there wasn't an immediate official order to close venues and cancel activities, while people were recommended to avoid gatherings. Hence venues lost their income, without having the right to resort to insurance.

There is no certainty for the next six - twelve months, and some are concerned about even longer perspectives. Some festivals planned for autumn or next year are being downsized, and often at the cost of international speakers and companies.

Some funding schemes have postponed opening their calls, and for some of those which are open it has become challenging to apply due to the lack of certainty.

Needless to say that the COVID-19 situation has fallen on the top of various political, economic and social turmoils. A few members, based both in the UK and beyond, stated that the negative effects of the current crisis have added to the already visible consequences of Brexit, namely in regards to international festivals.

Some organisations have already attempted to estimate the losses, and the results are terrifying. For instance, according to TINFO (Theatre Info Finland), the ticket income loss has been € 1,7 million

and 80 880 spectators per week; in two months this will mean € 13,6 million loss; all together the income of around 4500 professionals in the theatre sector in Finland is now severely threatened.

The Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague collected data from over 500 cultural operators and produced the [Mapping the Impact of the Ministry of Health's Extraordinary Measures on the Czech Independent Arts Sector](#). According to the replies received, the most negatively impacted fields are the performing arts disciplines: music (44.3 %), theatre (21.1 %), dance and contemporary circus (6.4 %).

The new challenges have obviously impacted everyone's way of working, even those who are able to continue working from home. Finding solutions, reshaping, rescheduling and cancelling activities have implied a lot of efforts, emotions, and hours of work. Staying in touch with those in the worst situations and looking

for solutions for immediate burning problems have been an emotionally draining task as well. Psychological effects of the current crisis are yet to show themselves in the near future.

An Italian member shared their concern that the current crisis might have produced a fear in the audience to be part of large gatherings, and it may take many months to recuperate the habit of people to attend theatres again. A member from Denmark stressed: "The most negative consequences that we face is the lack of communication between artists and audiences. The value of this exchange is far, far greater than the economic one".



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COPING STRATEGIES

Many members said they hadn't undertaken any special measures to rescue their professional activities, as there is just too little they could do amidst the abrupt suspension of normal life coupled with huge uncertainty.

While it is obvious that the most tangible solutions have to emerge on the government level, one powerful source of relief that the sector has naturally and proactively embraced is Solidarity.

Tinder Box Theatre, UK, have launched a [small fund](#) from their reserves to offer some support to their freelance artists with the view of fundraising to keep this fund going as long as possible.

The overwhelming majority of respondents stated they have paid or are intending to pay artists, technicians and everyone involved, especially those working as freelancers, for cancelled performances and other events. Some are paying reduced amounts, others pay 100% but only for the next couple of months, being concerned about their own financial sustainability.

Some organisations, an example of which is Artsadmin, UK, reorganised their activities in a way that artists could deliver them new services for which they would be paid: online content, blog, micro-commissions, etc.

In Germany, ensemble-netzwerk initiated a [campaign](#) to create an emergency fund for artists to help them make their ends meet, namely to pay the next month's rent. In the same call, they are urging the publicly funded theatres and venues to promptly pay artists all fees for rehearsals and performances which have been cancelled.

In Germany, there are two online petitions focused on independent artists: on [openpetition](#) and [change.org](#).

A common trend is offering online courses, training, workshops to peers for free. A Danish member has been undertaking small-group coaching sessions to help colleagues to deal with the status quo. Performing Arts Hub Norway set up

special Facebook groups to connect artists and companies to exchange information. They have also started a weekly newsletter with updated information about the relevant support measures undertaken in their country.

On that note, many other support organisations, networks and associations have been proactive in addressing the information deficits and collecting relevant resources to guide art professionals through the COVID-19-related challenges. See the [tips' page](#) of ISACS (Irish Street Arts Circus and Spectacle Network).

Many organisations of that type indicated that they augmented their advocacy efforts. Some organisations whose primary mission has never been advocacy have also started campaigns and approached policy makers. However, some members expressed concerns that in those difficult times it is not fair to ask for special attention to the arts, while many other sectors are collapsing. "Spain seems to be really economically unstable at the moment so I feel a bit ashamed for asking for more support for my sector when a lot of friends are being fired from all sorts of jobs".

Some organisations have shifted their focus from purely live arts to the art form involving digital elements. A member based in Romania (public theater) shared that they are writing funding applications that involve telematic theatre (theatre that connects different spaces via video-conferencing) and live-streaming. They are also considering producing online courses or presentations on different topics (especially for young audiences).

The current reality makes many presenting organisations think of a different planning of their seasons which would take into account the future possible corona waves, in 2021 and beyond. A Danish member believes that one of the conditions of new contracts should be the possibility to show performances at the scheduled time or at a time when this would be possible, while there should be an agreement with artists on when they prefer to be paid: "So, the most important clause in a contract becomes the force majeure clause."

One of the common strategies is documenting losses of income (see examples from TINFO, Finland and Arts and Theatre Institute Prague above).

National Campaign for the Arts launched a [survey](#) to monitor losses and impact on Irish arts community.

Julia Popovici, Romanian curator and activist, created a list of all cancelled productions of independent theatre companies.

A German member has also shared that in their theatre they are undertaking an exact documentation of all cancelled activities, in figures, hours, contracts, letters of confirmation, and agreements. The Berlin Bühnen Platform published a [list of stages and concert halls](#) that ceased their activities

The Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague is working on developing a methodology of loss evidence in the sector of live arts during the epidemic.

Live-streaming and creating virtual substitutes to performance were widely mentioned as the only solutions to produce content for audiences. One of the examples is the ["Reconnect Festival"](#) happening on instagram.

At the same time, a member from the US noted that smaller companies simply don't have enough money to live-stream or videotape an event. A member from Romania said that in their case (a public theatre) the cost of live-streaming might be higher than the actual revenue from online ticket-sale: "Our audience might not transition easily and sustainably to online viewing". Moreover, quite a few members expressed their concern with the increasing trend of digitalising live performances. They admit there are not many alternatives, but they are concerned to observe how the value of the live component of their work is transforming.

An Australian member shared: "I am encouraging people to take art to public spaces and pop up where people are still gathering and allowed like supermarkets and parks. We need live performance to be considered part of the solution for all those who really don't care about us yet."

OVERVIEW OF THE SUPPORT MEASURES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENTS

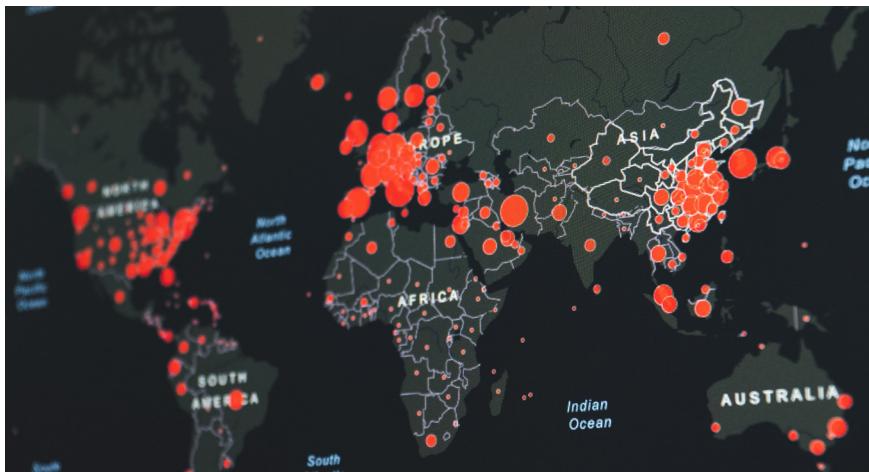
Some cultural, consultancy and media organisations have been collecting information on different governments' responses to the COVID-19 crisis since the very beginning and are continuing to update the data as new measures see the light.

- **Compedium's overview** (Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain) The Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends is a web-based and permanently updated information and monitoring system of national cultural policies and related development. The Compedium mobilised their expert authors to gather country specific information on the implications for the sector and the current measures being taken. The responses received are updated frequently.
- **BYP Group's summary** on 24 governments' responses for the arts and creative industries. BYP Group (Australian consultancy providing services to the creative, public and community sectors) are gathering news on how governments and arts funding agencies respond around the world to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the arts and cultural sectors. They are including general measures which are most relevant to the arts and creative industries, as well as targeted measures for these sectors.
- **KEA's collaborative map** to track the coronavirus policy measures. KEA European Affairs is an international policy design research center specialised in culture and creative industries as well as sport. The map collects all the measures and actions by country and on the European level. Since it is a collaborative work, the map is subject to regular updates.
- **Resources' page compiled by On the Move, Cultural Mobility Information Network, and Circostrada, European Network for Circus and Street Arts:** a comprehensive list of resources on government measures across the world, campaigns and online petitions, statements, sector-specific information and advice and much more.
- **The Art Newspaper's summary of measures (24 March)** taken in the UK, US, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy. Update on Germany on [Artnet News](#). Situations in Iceland (link to come on IETM's website), [Romania](#) and [Bulgaria](#).

Looking at the countries' lists, one may suspect that a considerable number of governments, also within the EU, haven't undertaken any significant measures to support their artistic communities. Whether this impression is valid or just based on a lack of information online, we hope to get some news about the missing countries, and we will share them with you.

Commenting on the actions taken by their governments, some members expressed concerns that the rescue packages might be compiled from crucial budget lines, such as internationalisation, mobility grants, etc (namely, in Finland). A few members highlighted the issue of small and medium-sized companies and theatres that cannot benefit from public money, nor are they eligible to apply for the support for self-employed artists. In Germany and especially in Italy, artists find the support mechanisms highly bureaucratic. In Italy there is also an issue related to the absent or imprecise definitions of professional statutes in the arts, which makes it difficult for artists to receive the economic support other professional categories benefit from. The overall concern is that there is too little vision on a long-term support strategy, amidst many helpful but short-term measures. In many countries, there is a little hope that some extra subsidies will be available for culture, at least for the performing arts.

Moreover, in some countries art professionals feel the rescue plan is being shaped without proper consultations with the sector.



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EU'S RESPONSE

The European Commission's strategy of mitigating the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is outlined [here](#).

In a nutshell

The Commission considers that the COVID-19 pandemic qualifies as an "unusual event outside the control of government". This allows accommodating exceptional spending to contain the COVID-19 outbreak such as health care expenditure and targeted relief measures for firms and workers.

In the coming weeks, € 1 billion will be redirected from the EU budget as a guarantee to the European Investment Fund to incentivise banks to provide liquidity to SMEs and midcaps. This will help at least 100,000 European SMEs and small midcaps with about € 8 billion of financing.

The Commission is committed to protect workers from unemployment and loss of income to avoid permanent effect.

The Commission will furthermore accelerate the preparation of the legislative proposal for a European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme aiming at supporting Member State policies that preserve jobs and skills.

Moreover, the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#) will facilitate the deployment of the European Social Fund – a fund geared towards supporting workers and healthcare.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund could also be mobilised to support dismissed workers and those self-employed under the conditions of the current and future Regulation. Up to € 179 million is available in 2020.

With regard to culture, the EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency), which inter alia manages Creative Europe, published [this message](#) to the attention of beneficiaries, contractors and experts.

On 26 March the European Parliament approved in an extraordinary plenary session three urgent proposals as part of the EU's joint response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Corona Response Investment Initiative, meant to channel €37 billion from available EU funds to citizens, regions and countries hit the hardest by the Coronavirus pandemic, was adopted with 683 MEPs voting in favour, 1 against and 4 abstentions. Sabine Verheyen, the Chair of EP Committee on Culture and

Education, stressed that "it is imperative that businesses and individuals in the cultural and creative sector <...> get access to this financial support". Read the press release [here](#).

On 23 March, Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth said on Twitter: "Let us not forget that #Covid19 is also tremendously affecting independent artists all over Europe. We are working with the EU Ministers of Culture to limit the effects of this pandemic and to safeguard an essential part of our European identity and history." Concrete measures are yet to be taken.



COVID-19: final vote in EP plenary to approve crucial EU support measures - © EP

THE WAY FORWARD

One of the questions on our survey was about which measures policy-makers should take to rescue the sector. Based on the responses, we compiled the following list of recommendations which we would like to bring to the attention of the EU, national and local authorities (where such measures have not been introduced yet). A more focused and comprehensive policy document is in progress.

Immediate measures

1. Provide emergent support and create hardship funds for everyone working on a freelance basis, including self-employed and freelance artists; grants should be bureaucracy-free and easy to manage
2. Encourage all public entities to pay all contracts and agreements, including those of cancelled events
3. Provide clear and accurate information on what help is available for artists at local, national and European levels
4. Provide free legal advice, including on how to use force-majeure clauses
5. Maintain the existing funding schemes and adapt their rules:
 - a. Apply flexibility to all funding instruments, allowing beneficiaries to decide whether they should postpone, cancel or transform activities, depending on type of activity and circumstances of each situation
 - b. Extend funding cycles, allowing beneficiaries to execute projects beyond the funding term
 - c. Make sure the co-funding intended for Creative Europe projects is not frozen by national and local authorities

Mid-term solutions

1. Undertake a comprehensive review and calculation of the crisis-related financial losses and compensate as much damage as possible
2. Enable the sector to emerge from the crisis by augmenting subsidies for the arts and culture in 2020 and beyond
3. Rescue the international dimension of the performing arts, ensuring that the internationalisation budgets do not collapse under the current crisis' pressure and due to the redistribution of finances

Long-term perspective

1. Integrate culture and the arts in economic and social regeneration strategies recognising their tremendous value for the well-being of citizens, as well as their power to unite people, even in times when it is impossible to commune
2. Involve the performing arts sector stakeholders in the dialogue on how to design a long-term strategy for reviving and strengthening the sector
3. Encourage and empower the sector to readjust their business models through access to consultancy, strategic advice and exchange of best practices
4. Set a cross-border line for helping artists under existential threat
5. Make sure future (similar) crises do not undermine the sector again:
 - a. Explore the possibility of introducing a universal basic income
 - b. Set-up an EU / global cross-border line for helping artists whose economic survival is under threat

CONCLUSION

Our current focus is to keep the conversation with and among our members going, listen to them, process their feedback and help pave the way to the collective revival of our performing arts community which must remain connected across borders.

We would like to finish this report by encouraging words of Pippa Bailey, one of our long-term Australian members: "The opportunity now is enormous and while we unlearn and relearn new behaviours and local connections there is so much opportunity for the arts to help people adapt. That is where I am focused."



The first IETM Members' talk held on Zoom on 20 March 2020, where members were asked to describe how the network could support them and what they could offer to the rest of the network in the upcoming weeks of lockdown.