



EAIPA

The European Association
of Independent Performing Arts

Fairness in Focus: EAIPA Interim Report

With the international conference “Walk the Line – Fairness for the Independent Performing Arts in Europe”, EAIPA took stock of national developments affecting the independent performing arts: Stirred up by the Covid-19 pandemic, decade-long debates about the social situation of artists suddenly started to show progress, new laws were written, new funds were instated.

During this conference, on March 25th 2022, participants spent an intensive day exchanging information about structures and processes, about their developments and findings. Many topics led to animated discussions, with an extensive amount of information being shared – so much so, that EAIPA decided to further pursue some of the discussed issues in a smaller format that would allow a more in-depth look:

With “Fairness in Focus”, EAIPA has launched a series of online events, each focusing on a different aspect of “fairness” for artists: funding structures, social insurance, fair pay and intermittency.

Fairness in Focus # 1: Funding Structures

The first event in this series took place in November 2022 and focused on the most complex subject: How are the independent performing arts funded? A crucial question for a sector that is known for its precarious living and working conditions.

The event started off with an overview of thirteen different countries, comparing national and capital budgets, and a general inventory of available funding tools.

This general overview already made it painstakingly clear how little data is available regarding the independent performing arts. In several countries budget expenditures for the independent sector are not available, while other countries' figures were only based on estimates provided by representative organisations. The reason for this lack of data is partly due to the lack of recognition: In some parts of Europe, contemporary independent performing arts are still not recognized as a genre in its own right and are either subsumed in some funding schemes for contemporary arts in general (including fine arts, literature, etc.) or considered to be part of the amateur, community or commercial theatre sector.

In preparation for this online event, EAIPA tried to venture further into these complex funding structures to get a more detailed impression of the reality of an independent artist's working and living conditions. Seven countries participated in a survey, delivering more detailed information about their funding and providing answers to crucial questions, such as: How many calls are published per year? How many people are applying for funds and how high is the success rate? What is the average funding amount for a project or long-term subsidies?

The results show a highly fragmented “system” – or, rather, not a system but a range of opportunities. In the

few countries that could provide data, success rates were between 10 % and 20 %. Usually, artists do not get funding on a regular basis but only every two years, and the ones who can successfully secure subsidies from one funding body usually still need to apply for one or several other calls to be able to have enough financing to realise their project.

There are funding opportunities for project-based work, for 1-, 2-, (sometimes 3-) and 4-year-funding, travel grants, stipends and scholarships, and sometimes one-time only grants dedicated to a specific topic or situation. Comparison of the average funding rates shows that project or long-term funding in one country means something completely different in another: Independent groups that received 1-year funding from the city of Vienna in 2021 received grants ranging from € 40,000 to € 90,000. In comparison, Slovenian organisations received 1-year project grants ranging from € 2,000 to € 12,000. In Austria and Germany, the state mainly subsidises projects that have already secured their main funding from a federal region, whereas in the European North, such as Iceland and Finland, but also in Slovenia, the most important grants are paid for by the national budget. The extremely low success rates in Finland and Iceland leave an impression of fierce competition: Most of their grants report a success rate of only 9 %.

Every grant has its own application process, including different forms, budget structures, funding criteria and accounting regulations.

Artists and companies therefore need to cultivate an extensive knowledge of applications, deadlines, funding systems and their requirements; to know whether certain funding opportunities are complementary or incompatible, and the ins and outs of the accounting procedures.

Accumulating this kind of knowledge, as well as the time that needs to be invested in the writing process of an application, its management and the completion of the final account and report, are tasks that are not financially covered by grants.

In the discussions following the presentation of the survey results, experts from different countries shared experiences that illustrated whether and how funders have tried to revise existing structures and why it is important to draw inspiration from international examples. Mikael Kinanen from the Finnish association "Teatterikeskus" explained how independent groups can be "institutionalised" in Finland. A system that opens up the possibility for independent groups to receive higher and more stable funding and, theoretically, also foresees the possibility of established theatres to be "downgraded" if the situation calls for action. In a lived reality, however, Mikael reports that initial hopes

of improvement were only met half-way: As the overall funding did not increase, the budget for newly institutionalised groups is still drawn from the independent sector, leaving less funding available for other groups in the independent performing arts community.

Miha Satler from the Slovenian association "Društvo Asociacija" gave insight into the score system of the Slovenian application process and how the funds are then distributed based on applicants' score levels.

Orri Huginn Ágústsson from Iceland, on the other hand, shared that project funding is the only available funding scheme for Icelandic independent performing artists. Theoretically, long-term funds exist, but no group has been able to secure long-term funding over the past years.

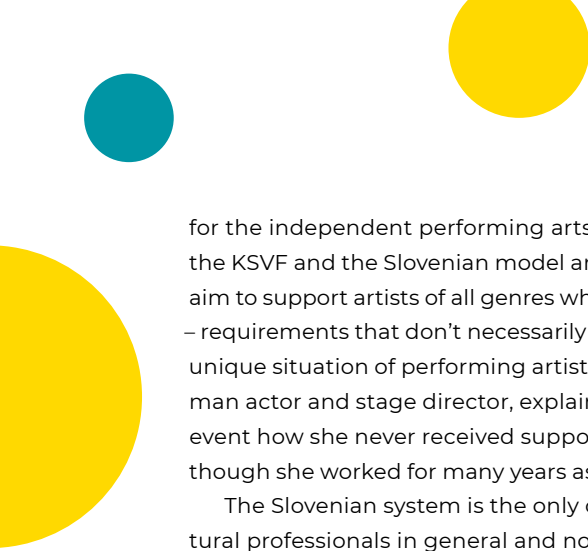
Nina M. Kohler from "t.punkt" Switzerland talked about how the scene in Zurich entered into a dialogue with the local funding administration to revise their funding schemes. The wish of the sector was to have more long-term funding schemes, to have more security for future planning. Both a promising and daring change, as the "unsuccessful" applicants face the possibility of receiving no funding for several years to come. From EAIPA's perspective, it was interesting to hear how political will and dialogue with the scene can bring about change in the funding systems available for artists, whilst being well aware that the situation of Swiss artists is comparatively privileged.

Following the event, EAIPA released a press statement featuring recommendations for funders in Europe to revise their artistic development policies, to harmonise their funding structures and to strengthen and/or establish structures that support applicants in their administrative and organisational workload.

Fairness in Focus # 2: Social Insurance

The second event of the online series was scheduled for January and focused on systems that support artists' social security contributions. The comparison included four systems: The German "Künstlersozialkasse – KSK", the Austrian "Künstlersozialversicherungsfonds – KSVF", the Austrian "IG – Netz" and the Slovenian system for artists and cultural workers in which social insurance is covered by the state budget.

What all four systems have in common is that they are national systems that fully or partly cover compulsory social insurance costs for artists. The odd one in this comparison was the "IG Netz", as it is the only system that supports costs for employed artists and the only fund solely instated




for the independent performing arts sector. The KSK, the KSVF and the Slovenian model are all systems that aim to support artists of all genres who work self-employed – requirements that don't necessarily take into account the unique situation of performing artists. Laura Kiehne, a German actor and stage director, explained during the online event how she never received support from the KSK, even though she worked for many years as an artist in Germany.

The Slovenian system is the only one that supports cultural professionals in general and not “just” artists – a stipulation that was often heavily criticised in Austria and Germany: There are many cultural professionals involved in the production process of a performance. People who depend just as much on the available funding but are not granted any support from the German KSK or the Austrian KSVF.

The historical development of all presented systems portrayed the political climate in which these systems were developed as predominantly left-wing: In Austria and Germany, the implementation of social security systems can be traced back to individual artists and politicians who were part of the social democratic party. The Slovenian system, on the other hand, is more of a remnant of former Yugoslavia – a time when artists and cultural workers were mainly public employees.

Another finding that all systems seemed to share is that they barely scratch the surface of what artists actually need. The invited experts from the three countries stressed that, while they are grateful for any support, they also have to point out many shortcomings: all of the systems for self-employed artists only offer compensation for sick leave after a period of several weeks. And even then, the daily allowance is below average living standards. In Slovenia, no accident insurance is provided – an especially alarming situation for dancers and circus artists. Another harsh reality is the long-term outlook for artists who receive benefits in the portrayed systems: none of the systems ensure retirement pay-outs above the poverty threshold. In Slovenia, artists will most likely end up receiving the national minimum pension, which amounts to € 652 per month (value 2022). In Austria, the Association of Independent Performing Arts can only give an estimate, but the organisation knows from consultations with individuals that many artists receive pension payments below the poverty threshold and depend on a “compensatory allowance” that raises their monthly payments to € 1,110.26 (single households, value 2023) or to € 1,751.56 (for couples, value 2023) per month.

The Covid pandemic also resulted in a big discussion in Germany. As performing artists fell through the cracks of the national security systems, it became even more apparent



that something needed to change. The German Association of Independent Performing Arts (BFDK) launched the project “Systemcheck” in order to conduct extensive research into the working conditions and social security of self-employed and hybrid workers in the performing arts and to develop recommendations that can lead to improved and better standards. During the online event, Elisabeth Roos from the German association shared how their discussion paper “*In search of fair systems. Examining social security for artists in Europe*” compares social security structures for artists from different European countries and how difficult it can be to translate these into the German context.

The event showed that, despite the establishment of funds that have the purpose of improving the social security of artists, they still fall short of creating an ecosystem that can be considered “fair” or “sustainable”. Each of the funds in the presented comparison has some stipulations that either disqualify artists if they earn “too much” (the stated maximum income allowed in all cases is still below any national average income), or they discourage any ambitions of artists to secure additional income from employed and/or non-artistic work.

The upcoming online events of EAIPA will look into other, additional advances of the European independent performing arts communities to secure better working conditions:

On May 11th, the last event of this series with the title “Fairness in Focus # 4: intermittency systems” will compare systems in countries that have recognised the unique situation of performing artists and their project-based work. This will see a comparison of “artist statuses” in European countries that offer artists easier access to unemployment benefits.