



Council of the
European Union

161092/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 10/11/23

Brussels, 10 November 2023
(OR. en)

14713/23

CULT 131
EMPL 517
SOC 727

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Improving the working conditions for artists and other cultural professionals - <i>Policy Debate</i>

Following consultation of the Cultural Affairs Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached background note, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 24 November 2023.

Improving working conditions for artists and other cultural professionals*Presidency discussion paper***1. Introduction**

Culture is a core element of Europe's identity and community. It is an integral component of sustainable development and an indispensable tool for strengthening common European values such as diversity, the promotion of equality and mutual respect. In addition, culture contributes to projecting Europe internationally while strengthening social cohesion and generating unquestionable social benefits as well as economic benefits.

The growing economic relevance of cultural and creative sectors (CCS) should not be forgotten, nor should their potential for growth, especially within the framework of a sustainable, digital and inclusive production model. According to Eurostat, the CCS in the European Union employ 7.7 million people (3.8% of the EU's total active population) and account for 1.2 million companies.

However, CCS have certain specific features compared to other productive sectors. They include very diverse and heterogeneous economic activities, where self-employment and micro-enterprises predominate. In addition, they have a high level of intermittency, and consequently, irregularity in their incomes. These features have an impact on the sector's labour market: working conditions are often marked by instability, a lack of job security, the combination of several jobs, limitations in terms of access to contributory benefits or low incomes. CCS therefore have a workforce which, despite being characterised by a high level of education, often faces precarious economic and social conditions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CCS were one of the most affected economic sectors, and the precarious conditions facing CCS workers were further evident. This was particularly clear as culture became one of the main factors ensuring the well-being of society, especially during lockdowns. The unstable conditions facing artists, professionals and creative and cultural workers were further exacerbated by the fact that national social security systems did not take account of the labour particularities unique to CCS.

Currently, despite the progress made by Member States, the working conditions of artists, professionals and creative and cultural workers have yet to be improved.

At European level, the need for a European statute for artists has been raised several times. A measure of this kind could help to achieve more appropriate, fair and transparent working conditions for CCS.

Taking into account the high level of heterogeneity in various Member States, as borne out by the stocktaking exercises in the conclusions on the recovery and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors, the work carried out by the European Commission's OMC expert group on the status and working conditions of artists has been of particular relevance. The resulting report, published in mid-2023, has generated great interest.

Furthermore, it should be noted that significant changes are currently taking place in Europe's production model. This, without a doubt, directly affects CCS and their artists, professionals and workers.

The transition towards a green and digital economy is creating fresh opportunities for CCS. New technologies have introduced tools that have changed the processes of creation, production, distribution and consumption of cultural and creative products, modifying existing business models and generating new ones. In addition, this trend seems to be accelerating even more with the latest developments such as artificial intelligence and virtual worlds. At the same time, the European Green Deal is bringing about changes in citizens' behaviour and demands, to which CCIs will need to respond.

All these circumstances require learning and training programmes for agents of the cultural ecosystem to allow them to adapt and evolve. In addition, as well as opportunities, there are also significant challenges that must be reviewed to ensure fair and equitable remuneration throughout the value chain.

Although most of the challenges faced by the CCS labour market cannot be addressed by cultural policies, it seems appropriate to discuss the existing weaknesses and possible ways of improving the socioeconomic conditions of CCS workers. This would enhance the artistic freedom and creativity of CCS and allow them to flourish. As mentioned in the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, ensuring fair working conditions for all cultural and creative professionals is a priority in order to ensure that more voices can be heard from this independent and dynamic sector.

2. Questions for the debate

On the basis of the above, the Presidency would like to invite Ministers to focus their interventions on the following issues:

1. In your country, what new or existing measures have been taken to improve the living and working conditions of artists, creators and cultural workers?
 2. What aspects could be addressed at European level to achieve a basic common framework applicable to the working conditions of artists and cultural professionals, bearing in mind that it should facilitate the mobility of artists and cultural professionals as a positive achievement for the sector?
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