

All CCS and Cross-sectoral All Europe Countries Working Conditions

What do you mean by ‘status of the artist’?

CREATIVESUNITE

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An overview of frameworks addressing working conditions in the cultural sectors in EU countries.

In light of the challenges brought to the forefront by the pandemic, the concept of the 'status of the artist' spelled out by UNESCO back in 1980, has gained new importance. It framed many discussions and even made its way into the names of new laws.

But what exactly do we mean by the 'status of the artist'? Who qualifies as an 'artist,' and what does this 'status' entail? What kind of frameworks can truly impact the working conditions of artists? Is there a noticeable trend within EU countries to harmonise definitions, regulations, or eligibility criteria for supporting cultural workers?

Spoiler alert: such a distinct trend does not exist. The diverse historical and political backgrounds, legislative landscapes, social protection systems, societal attitudes toward the cultural sectors and other factors contribute to a diversity of approaches. This diversity is evident even in the basic terminologies used in laws and programmes – 'cultural worker', 'creative professional', 'art worker', 'professional in culture', 'creative person' – the list goes on.

Even if these different denominations also mean (sometimes slightly) different things, there appears to be a tendency to expand these definitions to encompass a broader spectrum of professions and artistic disciplines. This is because it has been increasingly acknowledged that challenges faced by artists are similar to those encountered by other professionals in creative sectors, and the talent drain is a negative trend affecting the entire cultural ecosystem.

Another fundamental aspect of the status of the artist is the 'why' – why grant a special status? Is it in response to the unique challenges faced by those in the cultural sectors, or is it based on the specific achievements and values they contribute, or perhaps a combination of both? The answer to this question shapes the path toward defining the benefits associated with the status and the conditions for obtaining it.

A noteworthy development in recent years, with a possible continuation into the future, is the emergence of comprehensive national laws addressing various facets of artists' status – from labour contracts and unemployment benefits to education and mobility programmes. The 'status of the artist' domain is multifaceted and complex, spanning different policy fields, legislative branches, and varied labour regimes. The situation is complicated by the inclination of art workers to transition between these regimes and take on multiple jobs. This complexity, coupled with notorious gaps across countries, poses particular challenges for artists working internationally. That is why the trend of consolidating legislative tools, at least at the national level, seems to be logical and will hopefully bring about a positive change.

Regardless of the chosen path, it is important that the framework for artists' status is clear to artists themselves. It should be effective - across various situations cultural workers end up in due to the nature of their work, and inclusive - leaving no one behind.

Explore our comprehensive overview of frameworks addressing working conditions in the cultural sectors across EU countries.

Read the paper here

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