

# Fair Pay in the Arts:

The talk of the town or the elephant in the room?



**IETM Report**  
*Fair Pay in the Arts*

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# Introduction

Navigating the realm of artists' working conditions is like exploring a colourful mosaic of concerns. From social security to labour relations, taxation, and artistic freedom, the landscape is complex and varied. While some issues fall under cultural ministries, others are managed by other government departments. In this intricate picture, cultural institutions, unions, and artists themselves all play vital roles. Finally, the perception of artists' labour by the general public is also a massive factor in shaping policies and allocating budgets.

Fair remuneration is an issue that intricately involves all of the aforementioned stakeholders. When legal frameworks are ineffective or non-existent, it depends on everyone's stance and commitment. Collective bargaining can be a significant tool in the arts sector to regulate remuneration, reducing the number of low-paid workers. However, some countries lack comprehensive union practices, leaving certain sectors or types of workers, for instance freelancers, outside their scope or reliant on recommended minimum fees. In many places in the world, the lack of clarity, transparency, and shared understanding around remuneration in the arts continues to foster exploitative practices and undermine the sustainability of artists' livelihoods and careers.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have made this debate unavoidable. Over 10 million cultural jobs have vanished, revealing and intensifying fragilities within the cultural sector<sup>1</sup>. Despite the implementation of numerous new policies and frameworks aimed at improving the situation, studies worldwide continue to identify structural deficiencies within the cultural ecosystem<sup>2</sup>. There is a need for concrete and ambitious actions that surpass mere declarations and partial measures.

Through this publication, **our aim is to extract insights into the various roles that public funders, artists, unions, resource organisations, and institutions, can undertake in promoting and enacting fair pay practices. Furthermore, we aim to shed light on possible gaps in existing frameworks, as well as areas outside of regulations and legal enforcement. Our goal is also to discuss the various dilemmas within the fair pay debate that hinder positive change.**



We gathered several examples of successful policies and advocacy processes and identified obstacles that may prevent the integration of fair practices into policies and everyday operations. Failure to address these challenges could potentially exacerbate existing gaps and create new ones. Looking at the various measures adopted in different countries (although the list is by no means exhaustive) and hearing from sector representatives, **we advocate for a positive perspective on gradual changes and small-step approaches.** At the same time, we also emphasise that **it is important to be vigilant to ensure fair pay interventions do not merely fulfil checkboxes and stifle further debate.**

We hope that this exploration of pathways and nuances can enrich the fair pay discourse and assist arts advocates, funders, and policy-makers in crafting meaningful strategies tailored to their local and national contexts, or sparking this crucial conversation in areas where it has yet to happen.

To produce this paper, we conducted desk research and interviewed experts from both the art sector and government agencies: Celina Loh from [FRANK Fair Artist Pay](#) (UK); Irma McLoughlin from [Theatre Forum](#) (Ireland); Leanne Hoogwaerts and Pien van Gemert from [Kunsten'92](#) (the Netherlands); Karen Verlinden from [Perform Europe](#) (Belgium); Kate Schaffner from [Creative Australia](#); Pippa Bailey, producer and director (Australia); Shona McCullagh from [Auckland Arts Festival](#) (New Zealand); Ulrike Kuner from [IG Freie Theaterarbeit](#) (Austria); Valérie Quilez from [Kultur | lx – Arts Council Luxembourg](#) (Luxembourg).

1 UNESCO 2022, p. 44

2 Examples include UNESCO's report on the implementation of the 1980 Recommendation on the Status of the Artist (2023), the EU Report on Working Conditions, the ILO paper on the African cultural and creative economy, and many national studies, such as the 'Good work review' by the Creative PEC (UK), report 'Profile of Creative Professionals New Zealand' by Creative New Zealand, Arts and Culture Barometer by the Arts and Culture Promotion Finland, and many more.

# Public funding: catalyst of fairness?

Collective bargaining plays a crucial role in regulating remuneration levels within the arts sector. Countries with extensive collective bargaining coverage typically have a lower proportion of underpaid workforce<sup>3</sup>. Various examples demonstrate how union representation fosters transparency and establishes clear frameworks for both art organisations and workers<sup>4</sup>.

However, the global collective bargaining landscape is very fragmented and diverse. Some countries have robust union practices and comprehensive collective agreements that govern the entire creative sector, such as performing arts, film, visual arts, etc. However, the lower incomes of cultural workers mean that where representative bodies do exist, they tend to be less well-resourced and therefore less able to effectively advocate and campaign on behalf of their members<sup>5</sup>. Other countries lack union representation for the arts - entirely, or have limited coverage, focusing only on specific disciplines, protecting only union members, or only certain types of contracts, for instance, excluding self-employed workers. Where collective bargaining is not available for freelancers in the cultural and creative sectors, trade unions and professional associations typically provide recommended minimum fee lists<sup>6</sup>.

**In instances where fee standards are merely advisory or absent altogether, the role of public funders in promoting fairness in the arts becomes particularly vital. This paper delves into these specific scenarios.**

## Fair pay in funding programmes

In areas lacking regulatory frameworks on remuneration, the most common space for public funders to play a role is broadcasting fair pay principles through their funding schemes. This can involve integration of compliance with defined remuneration scales as part of agreements with public institutions, or establishing fair pay as a recommendation or criterion for funding applications.

One of the ways of enforcing fair remuneration is asking organisations to provide more details about how they are going to implement a concrete set of rules, such as a more holistic code of practice developed by the sector or compliance with fee rates recommended by professional organisations. Answers to such questions in the applications can be descriptions of strategic visions, plans of action and concrete calculations in the budget.

For instance, the Arts Councils of the four UK countries provide a *guideline* that expresses their expectation from beneficiaries in relation to fair pay. Creative Scotland developed the '[Fair Pay: Rates of Pay Signposting Guide](#)', in which they specify: 'Across all our funding programmes we expect applicants to be clear about all costs they allocate in their budgets relating to the payment of people.'<sup>7</sup> They further specify that Creative Scotland is not in a position to prescribe the rates and direct applicants to the existing union agreements and resources on sectoral recommended wages and fees, referring to the 'real living wage' as a standard for sectors where minimum requirements are not established. Similarly, Arts Council Northern Ireland conveys in their '[Rates of Pay for Artists Guidance](#)' that all organisations seeking funding from us are expected to be clear about the budgets relating to the payment of people<sup>8</sup>. They also provide a summary of relevant sector bodies that developed rates of pay for various art sub-sectors.

3 European Expert Network on Culture and Audiovisual (EENCA) 2020, p. 52

4 For example, in Belgium, unions and employer associations convene in joint committees to make labour agreements that delineate individual and collective relations between employers and employees within companies and respective sectors. When an employer is bound by such an agreement, the ensuing rights and obligations extend to all employees. Collective agreements may be declared universally applicable across a particular sector. For instance, the agreement concerning music applies to all entities employing musicians in Belgium. [Read more](#).

5 European Commission 2023, p. 58

6 European Expert Network on Culture and Audiovisual (EENCA) 2020, p. 32

7 Creative Scotland 2021, p. 3

8 Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2022, p. 3

Some Arts Councils have formulated specific *policies* on fair pay, outlining their stances and principles on the issue, and detailing their involvement beyond funding programmers. This includes activities like research and support for advocacy efforts. Arts Council Ireland adopted the [Paying the Artist Policy](#), which puts forward best-practice principles providing a standard of fair remuneration and contracting processes. The principles encompass such areas as compliance with the standards recommended by representative and resource organisations; transparency on organisations' artist engagement policies; contracting practices recognising diverse types of artists activities as work, and more. The policy specifies that Arts Council 'will expect organisations to aspire to the best-practice principles set out in this policy'<sup>9</sup>. Creative New Zealand issued the [Remuneration Policy for Artists and Arts Practitioners](#) which sets six 'sustainable careers principles', such as regarding creative practice as 'real work', fair remuneration, well-being, and access to support<sup>10</sup>.

In some countries, promotion of fair pay through funding schemes is integrated into a broader strategy aimed at changing practices in the sector. In Austria, the Federal Ministry integrated fair pay as criteria in its calls for proposals as part of the wider [Fairness process](#), which also encompassed such issues as diversity, equality, sustainability, family-friendly working places, and more. In line with this policy, advisory boards and panels of jurors are requested to consider fair pay in their evaluation of funding applications<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, in the Netherlands, the Ministry of Culture integrated the [Fair Practice Code](#), the [Governance Code for Culture](#), and the [Code for Cultural Diversity](#) in its [Cultural Policy Principles 2019-2024](#) specifying adherence with these codes as a requirement to receive government's subsidies<sup>12</sup>.

In Luxembourg, the Ministry of Culture issued a code of conduct with the recommendations and rules to be applied in the cultural sector. The document - the '[Charter of Ethics for organisations in the cultural sector](#)' - was produced in consultation with the cultural sector and entered into force in 2022. The Charter determines that cultural organisations must apply 'fair and equitable remuneration' that has to be aligned with 'existing scales'<sup>13</sup>. All publicly funded organisations are required to adhere to the Charter, yet its provisions, including those concerning remuneration, are of a recommendatory nature.

However, Valérie Quilez, International Director at Kultur | Ix – Arts Council Luxembourg, stressed that there is an issue of a common definition of 'fair pay' in the arts sector in her country. While the Charter promotes fair and equitable remuneration, there is currently no formal fee structure in place.

Yet she emphasised that the Charter has played a crucial role in catalysing discussions to define fee levels and establish appropriate sector scales.

In areas where fair remuneration cannot be enforced by law, integrating fair pay principles into funding programmes is a positive move. However, it is important to acknowledge and understand certain complexities, especially those that could prevent any real change from taking place. The major issues include the absence or inefficacy of enforcement mechanisms and reliance on budgetary allocations.

## Enforcement gap

First of all, compliance with fair pay requirements often remains merely a recommendation or expectation for many of the funders mentioned above. Due to various reasons, including limited competence and mandate, as well as capacity constraints, it presents a challenge for funders to thoroughly verify their beneficiaries' adherence to fair pay requirements and to develop effective measures to address non-compliance.

In the report 'Initiatives and measures influencing artists remuneration and working conditions', Dr Tara Byrne maps out global examples of funders' interventions to promote fair pay among their beneficiaries and presents some insights into how these measures work in practice. In the conclusions, she states:

*'Despite the introduction of various payment measures to date as detailed in this digest, anecdotal evidence suggests that once organisations are not legally bound to pay artists particular rates (or pay artists at all), they choose not to. Notwithstanding this, many activists believe that a change in the payment culture for artists can only be achieved through a long term lack of tolerance of non-payment by those state funding institutions in a position to influence change over those it funds.'*<sup>14</sup>

9 Arts Council Ireland 2020, p. 5

10 Creative New Zealand 2021, p. 1

11 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, p. 8

12 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2019, the Netherlands, p. 9

13 Ministry of Culture Luxembourg 2022, p. 21

14 Byrne T. 2016, p. 34

In most of the cases reviewed in Byrne's report, the compliance with fair pay standards is explained in mild terms, staying at the level of funders' 'recommendation' or 'expectation'. In some instances, the communication surrounding funders' fair pay intervention goes as far as acknowledging the possible difficulties for the sector to comply with the recommendations at all<sup>15</sup>.

However, even when certain policies employ more straightforward language, it does not automatically translate into broader compliance with the fair pay rules they advocate. For example, the Cultural Policy Principles 2019–2024 of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, states: 'It's a knockout criterion: institutions that do not adhere to the codes will not receive subsidies'<sup>16</sup>. The Assessment Framework of the Council for Culture, a body advising the Government and Parliament on the arts, culture and media, stipulates that funding applicants have to describe how they will put into practice the core values of the Fair Practice Code (solidarity, sustainability, trust, diversity, and transparency) and what are the main steps the institution will take in this regard during the upcoming subsidy period<sup>17</sup>.

'It is not a knockout criteria, at least not for all funds', testifies Pien van Gemert, project manager Fair Practice Code at Kunsten'92, interest organisation for Dutch cultural and creative sectors, with more than 440 members from all disciplines, 'it is impossible to make everyone comply with the codes in a concrete way that can be enforced, as the art ecosystem is very diverse. But it is important that this question is asked as it stimulates organisations to pay attention to their practices and think thoroughly about what they can change in their work to apply the Fair Practice Code.'

In Austria, compliance with fair pay standards is not compulsory either. However, as Ulrike Kuner, Managing Director at IG Freie Theaterarbeit, Austrian network of independent performing arts workers, explained, the Fairness process led to applicants being required to provide a much more detailed budget with their applications to demonstrate how fair remuneration will be ensured throughout the entire project<sup>18</sup>. Such exercise leads to shifts in mindsets and operations, without making fairness a hard criteria.

## Money issue

One of the most critical aspects concerning funders' role in promoting fair pay actions and directly influencing their implementation is the availability of funds. Introducing fair pay recommendations or criteria in funding programmes must be accompanied by additional budgets specifically allocated to increasing workforce fees up to recommended levels. When budgets are not augmented, yet organisations are expected to maintain their usual output while paying artists higher fees, this recommendation is either disregarded or implemented in an unsustainable manner.

As Shona McCullagh, Artistic Director at Auckland Arts Festival reflected, 'the policy [Remuneration Policy for Artists and Arts Practitioners of the Creative New Zealand - E.P.] has definitely informed or given approval for a positive increase in the amount applied for by artists and companies. But the Crown<sup>19</sup> funding level has not fundamentally increased in New Zealand since 2006. So without extra budget to ensure delivery, the policy is just a piece of paper'.

Yet simply raising culture budgets is not necessarily a solution either. As Irma McLoughlin, Interim Director at the Theatre Forum, organisation advocating for the performing arts sector in Ireland, pointed out: 'The budget for the arts has never been as high. But if you look at our pay conditions and if you speak to people in the sector, they may say things have never been so bad'. This might have to do with how the funding models are structured and how funding priorities are set. When additional resources are allocated, it is essential that it is clearly communicated that this money is dedicated to elevating the levels of pay. As other interviewees added, the arts sector is usually underfunded and the mind-sets are still very much oriented towards producing more work whenever there is extra money; that is why there is a risk that an additional allocation can be used not for increasing fees and salaries but for doing more.

In Austria, the Government undertook a calculation of how much extra money is required to provide the possibility to pay the existing workforce fairly - in line with minimum recommended rates. As part of a pilot phase in 2022, the Ministry made separate funding of EUR 6.5 million available for fair remuneration for the first time. In 2023 the funds were increased to EUR 9 million. In 2024, the federal government increased the fair pay budget for the arts and culture sector to EUR 10 million<sup>20, 21</sup>.

15 Wainwright [Chief Executive of Creative New Zealand at that time] said arts organisations needed to implement robust policies and practices, however he acknowledged small organisations could lack the capacity to enforce policies.: 'Priority' for Government to improve poor pay rates in the arts - Sepuloni, 27 July 2022, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/129392105/priority-for-government-to-improve-poor-pay-rates-in-the-arts--sepuloni>, last seen 25 April 2024

16 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2019, the Netherlands, p. 9

17 Raad voor Cultuur 2024, p. 11

18 This is exercised first with applications for the City of Vienna, one of the nine federal countries, and for the Ministry, which is the secondary founding territorial entity.

19 'Crown' describes 'executive government conducted by Ministers and their public service agencies'. [Read more](#).

20 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport - Fairness & Fair Pay, <https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/kunst-und-kultur/schwerpunkte/fairness-fair-pay.html>, last seen 25 April 2024

21 The City of Vienna raised their budget from 2.6 million EUR per year to 4.5 million EUR per year for project funding and one- and two-year programmes.



In the Fair Pay Strategy of the local authorities, it is stipulated that fair pay funds should be earmarked primarily for existing employment relationships and that existing funding takes into account the previous ratio of funding levels from local authorities and other funding providers<sup>22</sup>. According to Ulrike, this long-term, progressive increase helps ensure that the new policy creates mind shifts in the sector and achieves real change.

The Fair Practice Code was introduced in the Netherlands 2017 to achieve fair practice in professional contract practice between institutions and artists. Subscribing to this code has been required for cultural institutions since 2021, if they apply to the government or the National Culture Funds, through the 'apply and explain' principle<sup>23</sup>.

From the introduction of the Visual Artists' Fee Guideline (developed for professional visual contemporary artists in the framework of the Fair Practice Code), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science made a budget available to encourage and support institutions in the payment of artists' fees<sup>24</sup>. In 2021, research was conducted to evaluate the scheme. The results show that it is of great importance that the compliance of the Guideline is coupled with financial compensation, and it will be difficult if specifically-dedicated financial allocation provided by the National Funds is omitted<sup>25</sup>.

As Pien explained, in 2024 The Ministry made an additional 34 million euros available for fair practice. The Mondriaan Fund (focused on contemporary visual artists) is one of the Funds that have been allocated to use this additional money. Part of this is intended for multi-year subsidies and projects, another part is specifically intended for the artists' fees guideline. With this extra funding, artists who need it can receive this targeted support.

Another important aspect concerning funders' role in ensuring fair pay is how much of the arts sector they financially support. In countries where the cultural sector relies heavily on public resources, funders naturally have a greater impact on promoting fair practices. In places where a substantial part of the sector is not supported by the government, the role of public funders can also be significant yet different. It is more about consolidating the sector and raising awareness.

As Pien put it, 'in the fair pay debate, we have several problems: money, leadership, decisiveness, and awareness'. The public funder has a tremendous role to play in fixing all of them. But raising awareness is not solely the responsibility of the public funder.

22 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport - Joint fair pay strategy of the local authorities for the cultural sector, <https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/kunst-und-kultur/schwerpunkte/fairness-fair-pay/fairness-prozess/fair-pay-strategie-gebietskoerperschaften.html>, last seen 25 April 2024.

23 As outlined by Kunsten'92, Not all signatories will be able to apply every element of the code fully and directly; that is why the principle of 'apply and explain' is used. If institutes or organisations explain why they were or were not able to fulfil certain agreements, then this will bring to light both hidden flaws and best practices'. [Read more](#).

24 Mondriaan Fonds - Artists' fee, <https://rapportages.mondriaanfonds.nl/jaarverslag-2021/coronaondersteuning/kunstenaarshonorarium>, last seen 25 April 2024

25 Platform BK, 4 October 2021, <https://www.platformbk.nl/en/evaluation-guideline-for-artist-fees/>, last seen 25 April 2024

# Shifting mindsets: once and for good

In the reality where legal and regulatory frameworks are absent or ineffective, there are several levels of awareness that are essential for advancing and normalising artists' fair pay. Artists, institutions, organisations, government agencies and the general public should all come to a belief that treating art workers fairly should be the norm. Obviously, all these levels need to be tackled simultaneously, but the question is: where should we focus to create the most effective ripple effect for the rest of the environment? Where are the strongest resistance points - both practically and discursively? The ripple effect.

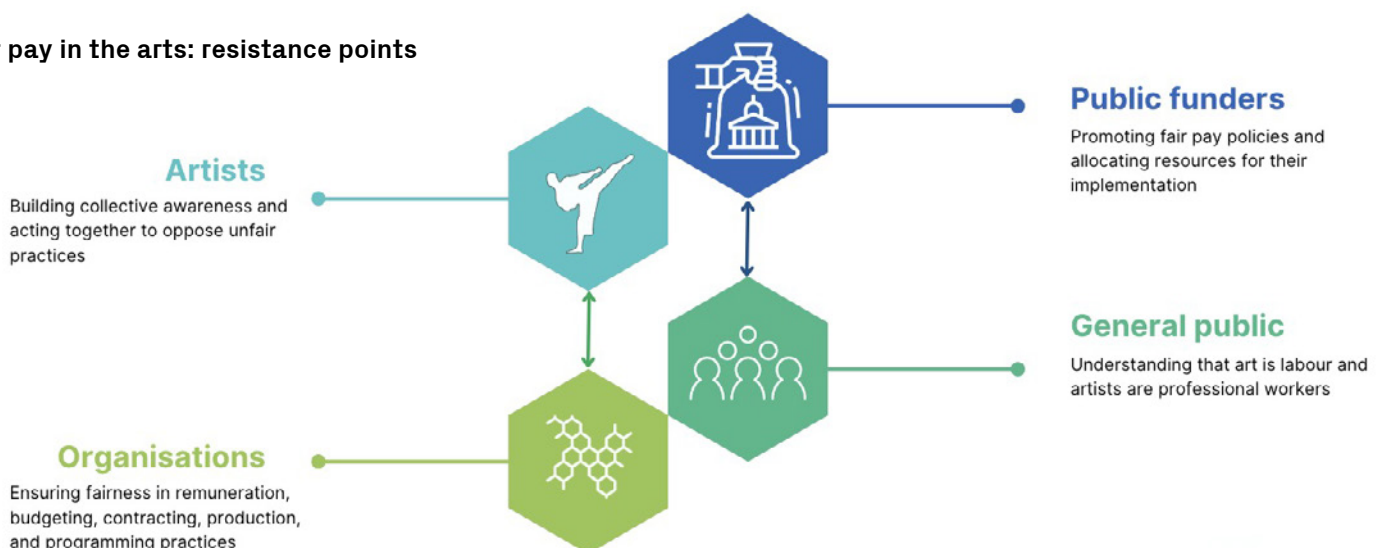
The answers to these questions are highly contextual. However, most experts we interviewed agree that a mindshift among artists themselves plays a significant role in driving change and halting exploitative practices. Even in situations where the government demonstrates the will to establish new rules, which are further supported by additional finances, as seen in the case of Austria, holistic change can only be achieved if artists boldly embrace new practices and cultivate shared awareness. It is also vital that this awareness reaches the entire arts ecosystem, including those sectors unaffected by new policies or beyond the scope of public funding.

As Ulrike reflected:

*'The ripple effect can work at different levels. If fair pay models can be implemented in project-based structures dependent on public funds, then there should be a stimulus to follow the same rule for larger organisations, such as big theatres and operas. Artists will simply stop accepting unfair conditions'.*

Awareness-building is not only about shifting artists' expectations regarding the amount of fees and their readiness to reject poor offers. It is also about instilling new methods of planning and designing the project from the start, as well as weighing and assessing the project idea in terms of its human sustainability value. One of the first questions that is brought to the table then becomes the following: If we are unsure we can fairly remunerate everyone involved in our project, is it worth starting it? If we need to fundraise, should we be asking money for activities or should we prioritise securing a decent level of remuneration for everyone? In Austria, according to Ulrike, commercial organisations that do not benefit from the government support are forced to rethink their business models in order to find additional resources to follow the overall growing mentality of paying artists fairly. If they do not secure sufficient funds, they do not engage in a project easily. Remuneration of workers has to be put in the budget beforehand: it is no longer subject to the success of the project.

## Fair pay in the arts: resistance points





## Transforming the mindset

The example discussed above serves as an illustration of how government interventions, implemented over several years, have catalysed a transformation in the mindset and practices of the sector. However, not all countries witness such policy initiatives that change rules of the game in the arts community. In instances where policy reforms are not in the pipeline yet, it is crucial to begin by consolidating awareness within the sector itself regarding the principles of fair practices. This entails defining what constitutes ‘artistic labour,’ determining the appropriate methodologies for fee calculations, and establishing criteria for remunerating various activities. It is not only about how much one must get, but also what activities should be remunerated, and how responsibilities are divided.

This is what FRANK Fair Artist Pay focuses on. They articulate their mission as ‘pioneering much needed change to fair practice and fair pay for artists in the UK.’<sup>26</sup> FRANK is a membership organisation bringing together artists, art organisations, funding bodies and commissioning agencies, to work to change the mindset and practicality of achieving fair artist pay. They depart from a point that ‘there is still a distinctive lack of awareness about the various contributions of artists, what being freelance entails and of the working practices and processes truly supportive of this status’<sup>27</sup>. Precisely, they focus on three axes: showcasing what fairness and fair pay is, developing a comprehensive understanding of artistic labour, and promoting transparency in the sector.

Celina Loh, FRANK’s Project Manager pointed out: ‘It is very important that everyone in the ecosystem has the same mindset before we can make the change happen.’ According to her and the majority of those we interviewed, collective awareness, shared commitment and commonly agreed parameters of fairness are the key ingredients for advancing the sustainable future for the sector. FRANK is not defining, establishing, or recommending fees - there are other organisations in the UK doing this. As Celina said, ‘we are not recommending the rates, we are changing mindsets’.

Kunsten’92 in the Netherlands also strives to transform the mindset in the sector. ‘I think the biggest resistance is in the cultural sector itself’, Pien said: ‘but six or seven years ago before developing the Fair Practice Code, we were not able to discuss these issues at all. Artists were still afraid to lose opportunities by insisting on fair remuneration. Now a lot of taboos are broken, and we can talk about fairness openly’. At the same time, she pointed out that there is still a long way to go in terms of awareness-raising, understanding how the sector operates - even by the sector itself, moving towards transparency and calling a spade a spade.



For instance, if a project involves volunteers, this should be articulated and explained, and volunteers should also be protected in appropriate ways. Otherwise, confusion and obscurity can lead to exploitation, as well as to finger-pointing and blaming.

It is indeed important to clarify the distinction between work and volunteering to eliminate any ambiguity regarding remuneration and the nature of contractual relationships. To accomplish this, certain funding policies, for instance, Arts Council Ireland’s ‘Paying the Artist Policy’<sup>28</sup>, specify legitimate instances where individuals’ involvement in a project is not compensated and delineate the conditions under which people may be involved without remuneration.

Raising awareness and fostering transparency occur when there is a collaborative framework within the sector aimed at addressing persistent issues constructively, rather than merely shifting responsibility. FRANK aims to foster an understanding that promoting fairness in the arts is a collective responsibility. They do not take sides between artists and institutions; instead, they provide tools for both to jointly plan projects in line with fairness principles. Their ‘Pre Contractual Review’ tool consists of a set of questions that both parties go through before signing a contract.

Throughout the project, they continue to address these questions, helping everyone involved understand their responsibilities, navigate legal complexities (which can otherwise be daunting, especially for freelance artists), and enter the project with transparency and clarity. Overall, dedicating time to discussing issues that are often overlooked - whether intentionally, due to the sensitivity of those issues, or out of habit - can profoundly impact the sector’s mindset. FRANK is clear about the fact that their tools should by no means be seen as finished products, opening the door for continuous feedback and collaborative adjustments.

26 FRANK n.d., <https://frankfairartistpay.com/about>, last seen 25 April 2024

27 Ibid

28 Arts Council Ireland 2020, p. 7

## Supporting representation

Art funders and policy-makers can play a crucial role in championing transparency regarding working practices in the arts, enhancing overall awareness, and assisting the sector in achieving a shared understanding, even in cases where only a segment of the sector benefits from public finances.

In environments where regulatory oversight is lacking or inconsistent, discussions around remuneration are often riddled with unaddressed nuances, taboos, gaps in understanding, and distortions in public perception. Therefore, even declarative statements by government agencies can serve as important catalysts for fostering change. Such statements can be embedded into funders' fairness principles, policies, funding programme guidelines and charters, and encompass a wide range of aspects, such as the outline of what must be considered as work and remuneration, or naming practices that damage artists' livelihoods, and more.

Beyond framing the discourse, public funders and policy-makers can play a role in consolidating the sector. When there are no overarching and strong collective bargaining or sector representation systems in place, governments can support the creation, capacity-building, and empowerment of artists' representative organisations. As spelled out in the European Commission's Open Method of Coordination report on working conditions, 'Member States should also support and / or establish formal processes for dialogue between politicians, authorities, policymakers, arts and culture organisations, and representative bodies'<sup>29</sup>.

Funders can also stimulate organisations and workers to adhere to existing collective agreements, employers' associations and trade unions. For example, in the Netherlands, as Pien explained, the Ministry integrated the Fair Practice Code in its funding streams and required 'every organisation to join a collective labour agreement or another form of social dialogue where agreements can be made about rates'. If an organisation is already a member of a collective labour agreement, they are obliged to pay in accordance with the scale provided by that agreement.



<sup>29</sup> European Commission 2023, p. 58

## Consolidating resources

Public agencies financing the arts are often tasked to support a diverse range of sectors, which operate in unique ways. Some artists work in a range of jobs, and different laws and rules can apply to these different activities, and to work done in different locations within the same country. Some artists, art workers and arts organisations are members of associations, such as unions and employer associations. However, there are also many in the sector who are not members of such organisations and need help to navigate this complexity.

Art funders can play a role helping artists and art workers understand what they should be paid by consolidating the resources that apply to the sector and making them available in a central location. They can foster the exchange of information about minimum standards and best practices across different sectors and help identify gaps.

Creative Workplaces, a part of Creative Australia<sup>30</sup> was established in the framework of the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy: Revive in August 2023. Creative Workplaces' mission is to 'promote fair, safe, and respectful workplaces for Australian artists and arts workers'<sup>31</sup>. Kate Schaffner, Director of Creative Workplaces, explained that they will be assisting artists and art organisations in understanding the minimum pay standards and conditions by centralising information, resources and tools on an online platform for artists, art workers and organisations. Acknowledging the complexity and diversity of the landscape, she noted: 'To help improve pay and conditions, we will need to offer support to both artists and the organisations that they work for'.

Creative Australia also conducts research to gain a comprehensive insight into the composition of artists' income and the types of contracts utilised across various creative sectors. Creative Workplaces will use this to inform how it deals with issues related to artists' pay and conditions.

## Vision and leadership

Celina from FRANK stressed that in the UK, there is also a need for promoting the key resources artists should be using to calculate their fees and negotiate rates. Moreover, there is a need for working on an unified model, bringing everyone to the table. 'We need a dialogue, we need a debate', she stressed, 'right now everyone is working separately'. Art funders can play a role in making fair pay the 'talk of the town' and make sure that the debate does not stifle, even when budgets shrink. This can be done inter alia through regular conferences and consultations that address fair pay issues in a concrete way and bring together resource organisations, unions, associations and other sector representatives.

The need for funders' leadership and strategic approach to fair pay issues has also emerged through our interviews. As Pien from Kunsten'92 noted, 'funders and policy-makers can adopt a common vision on fair pay policy, making things concrete, nailing down nuances and spelling out the many dilemmas around fair pay'. While art communities are proactively designing codes and 'rules of the game', it is essential that policy-makers help them resolve the emerging unresolved issues and move forward.

The 'elephants in the room' that require attention vary from country to country. Some of them are related to questions: when resources are limited, can we accept remunerating everyone fairly but producing less work? What does 'fair' mean, and is sticking to the minimum acceptable? How to make sure fair pay policies are implemented across the entire sector, not leaving under-resourced regions and cities behind, and not widening the talent gaps in the arts ecosystem across the country?

There are many more dilemmas in this domain, and government agencies can make things concrete and provide the sector with strategic vision that would help answer puzzling questions. 'There are many difficult decisions that need to be made, and we need strong leadership and vision from the Arts Council - developed in partnership with the sector', concluded Irma from the Theatre Forum (Ireland).

30 Creative Australia is the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body, <https://creative.gov.au/about-us/>, last seen 25 April 2024

31 Creative Australia - Creative Workplaces n.d., <https://creative.gov.au/creative-workplaces>, last seen 25 April 2024

# Making things concrete

To implement positive change, it is essential to understand the terrain of action and the scale of the problems we are trying to solve, as well as to find specific and convincing arguments to advance advocacy.

## The ‘fairness gap’

One of the crucial starting points of the fair pay processes and debates should be figuring out the current ‘fairness gap’. It is necessary to map out the sources of income in the arts, investigate the type of contracts used - with a particular attention to payment models (per hour, day, week or for the final product); contract types (employed or freelance) and the legitimacy of using freelance contracts; what is considered as remunerated work; how many paid hours or days are typically allocated to various tasks; and of course, the amounts paid compared to the recommended rates if such exist. It is then useful to define the official level of fair rates and calculate whether the current annual spending on fees and salaries matches this level. In case it is lower, financially bridging the difference should be the target.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken globally to determine the most practical, relevant, and equitable methods of calculating fees for artists. However, the analysis of diverse methodologies and types of calculators, along with their strengths and imperfections, falls outside the scope of this paper.

Yet it is crucial - especially in contexts lacking robust regulations - to touch upon the question on what fee level should funders establish as recommended, acceptable or compulsory - minimum sectoral rate, country’s minimum wage, living wage<sup>32</sup> or simply a more abstract ‘fair remuneration’ open to contextual interpretations? Gemma Wilson, senior editor at CityArts magazine, a platform for arts and culture in the Seattle area (USA), reflects in her article ‘Paying theatre artists fair wages is hard. But why do we consider it optional?’:



*‘Making hard and fast rules around who should pay what is impossible. Does it have to do with company longevity? Budget size? Percentage of that budget that goes to artists? How many people you employ? Singling out any one company is wildly unfair; few are blameless. But no nonprofit is swimming in cash. ‘Living wage’ is equally sticky. Living for whom? A single person? Married with kids? Seven roommates? What are artists actually entitled to, as a quality of life? Do they deserve to take a vacation once in a while?’<sup>33</sup>*

Our desk research indicates that many funders’ recommendations, policies and sector guidelines and codes are oriented on the ‘minimum’. This may help to make the rules of the game concrete and feasible.

However, minimum is by definition at the bottom of acceptable, and thus it only vaguely relates to what we may mean with ‘fair’. If complying with the minimum is promoted as sufficient, there is a risk that it will practically become the norm, and organisations will adjust themselves to ticking the minimum ‘fairness’ box, and further improvements will be challenging. ‘Making minimum rates compulsory is tricky’, reflected Leanne, network and policy manager at Kunsten’92, ‘once we all comply with the minimum, the debate will not progress further’.

Moreover, the widespread practice of paying the recommended minimum fee, especially if it is about a minimum wage, may impede the promotion of the perception of an artist as a valuable worker, as a professional. As Celina from FRANK pointed out, ‘when you place artists at the minimum wage rate, you place them at the very low level of the hierarchy that doesn’t recognise them as professionals’.

<sup>32</sup> Minimum wage is the lowest wage that an employer is allowed to pay by law, while a living wage is high enough for somebody to buy the things they need in order to live (Oxford Learners’ Dictionaries).

<sup>33</sup> CityArts - Paying theater artists fair wages is hard. But why do we consider it optional?, 26 October 2018, <https://www.cityartsmagazine.com/paying-theater-artists-fair-wages-is-hard-but-why-do-we-consider-it-optional/>, last seen 25 April 2024

Yet establishing minimum rates is not necessarily a pathway to reproducing unfairness. This can be seen as a clear and transparent starting point, especially in the contexts where the practice of not paying artists or paying very little is wide-spread. However, to avoid growing the ‘minimum mentality’, fair pay policies and guidelines must clearly stress that the recommended fee is the lowest acceptable and paying more is encouraged. For instance, Arts Council Ireland’s Paying the Artist Policy stresses: ‘we aspire to the position that best practice, not minimum standards, should apply to remuneration and contracting of artists across all artforms and disciplines’<sup>34</sup>. Another example is Creative New Zealand’s statement on increasing the minimum fair remuneration guidance rate: ‘Fair pay for more experienced artists and arts practitioners should be well above the minimum rate, reflecting both their experience and the nature of the work’<sup>35</sup>.

It proved to be effective when a recommended increase from the minimum level is made more concrete. For instance, Ulrike mentioned that in Austria, it is recommended to pay 25% above the minimum rate, and this trend is increasingly common.

If fair pay becomes a priority and there is a shared understanding that paying at the minimum level is not the ultimate goal, organisations can be encouraged to allocate their additional revenues towards augmenting employees’ salaries and honorariums rather than generating more work. When this significant shift in mindset occurs, progress beyond the minimum level will gradually become a reality. However, initially, **guidance on how to advance from the minimum should be informative and detailed, addressing both percentages and the circumstances under which the rate could be increased.**

This was also stressed in the evaluation of the Guideline of the Artist Fee, highlighted by BKNL: ‘Guidelines are used too often as standard fees, whereas they represent a minimum. This has to be more clearly communicated to artists and institutions. Also, it should be stated more clearly what reasons could lead to a fee above the suggested amount of the guideline, such as: a big exhibition or work-intensive group exhibition; service record of the artist; application of the fair share-principle’<sup>36</sup>.

## Convincing narrative

Another type of clarity and concreteness is needed around the discourse on why fair pay in the arts is an important issue if not an urgency. Figuring out a robust ‘why’ is part of creating a strong advocacy narrative which would convince funders and the government and speak to the general public.

In some cases the argument lies in the social protection space. For instance, bbk berlin, an independent association representing the interests of visual artists, states: ‘Public money finances independent cultural work. They must contribute to employment that secures a living and security in social security systems. Our goal is fair fees that actually make this contribution.’<sup>37</sup>

The social security discourse has also been prominent in fair pay advocacy in Austria. ‘We have consistently linked fair pay advocacy with social security,’ Ulrike shared. ‘Artists should be recognised as workers entitled to social security payments, just like any other worker in the country.’ A compelling narrative could emphasise that public funders are responsible for ensuring cultural workers receive this right, thereby avoiding disruptions in the national welfare system while distributing taxpayers’ money.

Yet again, art should be promoted as work, and artists as workers entitled for decent compensation for the entirety of time and effort required to produce their work, not solely for the final output. Instead of alienating the art sector, it is important to reflect what other sectors are in a similar position and unite forces with them.

This argument was developed by Katja Praznik in IETM’s publication ‘Which side are you on?’:

*‘The art sector would certainly benefit if its members joined voices with scholars who study non-standard employment, for example in the gig-economy. In fact it would most definitely benefit the workers in this sector to make it a top priority and to start advocating that art work gets fully recognised as labour like any other work rather than categorising and building the case for more art funding by claiming it an exceptional, special or in the neoliberal jargon atypical work’* <sup>38</sup> (p. 8).

34 Arts Council Ireland 2020, p. 3

35 Creative New Zealand - News and blog - Creative New Zealand’s minimum remuneration guidance moves to \$30/hour, 31 August 2023, [Read more](#)

36 Platform BK, 4 October 2021, <https://www.platformbk.nl/en/evaluation-guideline-for-artist-fees/>, last seen 25 April 2024

37 bbk berlin - What we have achieved: exhibition fees, scholarships, infrastructure for artistic work n.d., <https://www.bbk-berlin.de/was-wir-erreicht-haben.honorare-stipendien-infrastruktur?idcat=178>, last seen 25 April 2024

38 IETM 2023, p. 8

Consistent with this perspective and the sentiments expressed by the majority of interviewees, programmes for artists should avoid segregating them as a distinct category deserving special treatment. Such segregation could provoke backlash from the broader public and exacerbate the erosion of artists' professional reputation. When addressing the question of 'why fair pay in the arts', the focus should be on advocating for workers' rights, rather than emphasising the unique characteristics of the arts sector which make them 'less of a worker', such as autonomy or freedom.

The art sector is not inherently special, but its current circumstances are. Specifically, what sets the art sector apart is the frequent neglect of artists' rights as workers. Simply integrating the art sector into the broader labour discourse should not result in overlooking or exacerbating these longstanding issues. As Jennifer Mills writes, 'art is important not because it deserves more attention than other public goods, like schools and hospitals, but because it's an area where these unfair labour practices are increasingly normalised and can be usefully challenged'<sup>39</sup>.

There is also an opinion that beyond promoting arts as labour, it is important to stress the unique value this labour brings. Justin O'Connor, Professor of Cultural Economy at the University of South Australia, in his book 'Culture is not an industry', warns that overemphasis on culture as a work 'like any other' can act as just another "economic justification", a focus on the workers' need and not on the value they create:

*'Nurses and doctors are also 'jobs like any other'. But they are also jobs we value, unlike, say, arms traders or private equity dealers. Rather than position cultural workers as vulnerable and in need of protection, the argument might be to sustain a complex cultural sector as a crucial element of the social foundations' <sup>40</sup>.*

Combining the two arguments, it becomes apparent that both strategies - crafting the narrative of art as work and promoting the value of art labour - are vitally important and complementary. Promoting the role and importance of culture without stressing the needs and rights of those who create it can lead to rising expectations and pressure on the sector without creating a supportive framework. Equally, it might be more challenging and even unsustainable to promote artists as workers without articulating their unique position in terms of the value they create.



39 Meanjin 25 May 2022, It's Time... To Demand Fair Pay in the Arts, <https://meanjin.com.au/latest/its-time-to-demand-fair-pay-in-the-arts/>, last seen 25 April 2024

40 O'Connor J 2024, p. 210

# Creating (im)balances

As discussed above, persistent promotion and exercise of comprehensive fair pay policies in one part of the art ecosystem will inevitably have ripple effects for its other parts. The mindshift and the change of behaviour among artists and organisations, as well as the continuous debate that makes the fair pay centre of attention of cultural policies and sector dialogues, ultimately frame the sector-wide rules of the game.

Yet when there's no robust collective bargaining practice, clear country-wide fair pay policy and no guidelines to ensure everyone gets compensated properly, and especially when there is no extra budget for increasing fees, many organisations may find it hard to stay afloat and retain artists, and the gaps within the ecosystem could become wider. Ultimately, these imbalances can yet again create negative effects for artists' careers and working conditions. Gemma Wilson, City Art Magazine' senior editor reflects:

*'In all creative mediums, "experience" and "exposure" can be beneficial, but unlike many other creative mediums, one cannot practise, and therefore improve at, the craft of theatre on one's own. A working theatre ecosystem requires a mix of small, mid-level and large theatres. The three levels feed one another and folks move up and down between all of those tiers,' says Jeffrey Herrmann, managing director of Seattle Repertory Theatre. 'Not having those mid-level theatres becomes an obstacle to us, to being able to draw more folks locally' <sup>41</sup>.*

In some countries, there is a similar issue of territorial balance. What happens in the long term if advocacy, fair pay interventions, be they pilot or permanent, and the increase of budgets dedicated to raising fees are concentrated in some parts of the country - in some regions and cities, and not in others?

Ulrike spoke about Vienna as the place where fair pay has been implemented in the most effective way (compared to other parts of the country), supported by specially dedicated budgets. It is the country's cultural hub, concentrating 70% of artistic production, and in recent years the number of artists coming to Vienna has continued to grow.



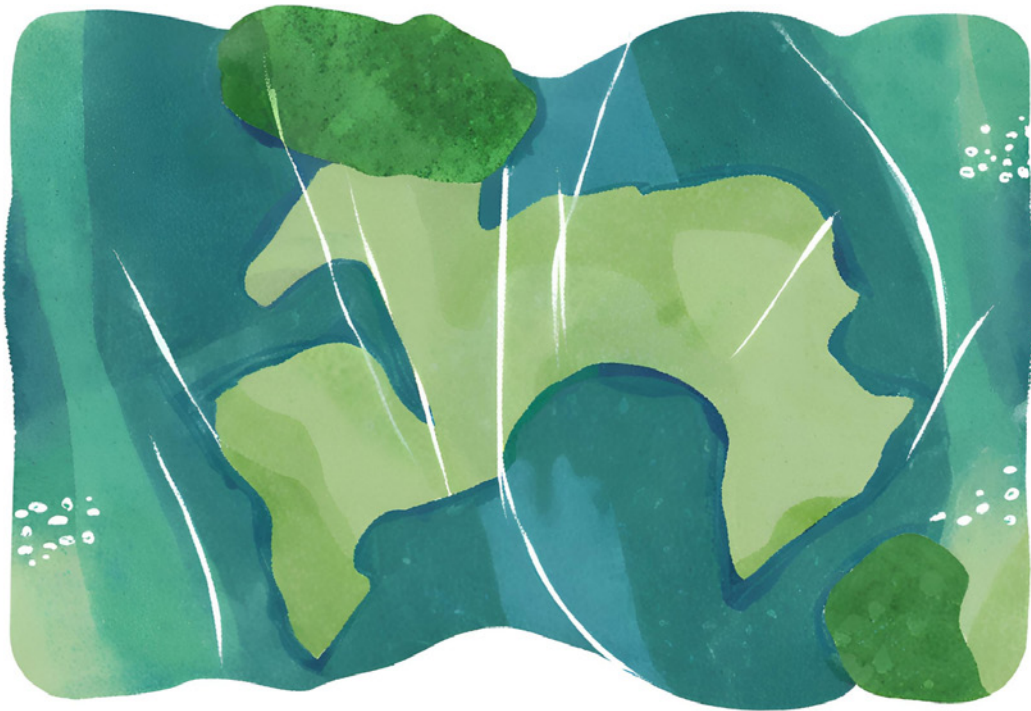
Ulrike observed: 'As part of the fair pay strategy, the city of Vienna has raised the funds, while keeping the number of funded projects the same. But more and more artists are now asking for funding. So, artists can now get funding only every second or third year. They have to wait even longer before they get funding for their work'. While this is caused by a wide range of factors making Vienna an attractive hub for art workers, such as availability of cultural infrastructure and artistic education programmes, Ulrike assumed that a more effective and visible implementation of fair pay policy in Vienna has also played a role.

However, the issue of regional spread of fair pay policies has not been ignored in Austria. In June 2022, the local authorities adopted a joined Fair Pay Strategy, affirming their responsibility for financing art and culture, as well as their willingness to make a larger contribution to fair pay in the future. Andrea Mayer, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, called this document 'historic', highlighting its importance at the press conference:

*'If you had asked me two years ago, I would not have believed that a document like this was possible. Here, on a few pages of paper, signed by representatives of all federal states, the federal government, and the cities and municipalities, there is a clear commitment that where public funds are used, fair pay shall also be provided - and even more: that the funding bodies are willing to contribute to this.' <sup>42</sup>*

<sup>41</sup> CityArts - Paying theater artists fair wages is hard. But why do we consider it optional?, 26 October 2024, <https://www.cityartsmagazine.com/paying-theater-artists-fair-wages-is-hard-but-why-do-we-consider-it-optional/>, last seen 25 April 2024

<sup>42</sup> Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport - Joint fair pay strategy of the local authorities for the cultural sector, <https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/kunst-und-kultur/schwerpunkte/fairness-fair-pay/fairness-prozess/fair-pay-strategie-gebietskoerperschaften.html>, last seen 25 April 2024.



As Ulrike explained, compliance with fair pay policies is not mandatory. Individual funding agencies develop their own models, but coordinate them with each other. With regard to the further procedure, the fair pay strategy requires further close coordination between the local authorities and the interest groups, for example, at an annual round table. It is also announced that fair pay measures taken will be continuously reported, for example in the local authorities' annual art and culture reports<sup>43</sup>.

The Interim Report on the Fairness Process 2020-2021 illustrates the variations in how Austrian regions address the issue of fair pay. Among the seven regions, only three explicitly mention fair pay. Vienna allocated additional funding in the millions to implement its new strategy. Salzburg developed a 'model for the gradual implementation of a fair pay policy'. Styria introduced a guest performance, tour, and revival subsidy as an instrument to promote fair pay for performances.<sup>44</sup>

Exploring the Austrian example and national policies in other countries, we can conclude that cross-region coordination certainly takes some time and is highly contextual, depending on the regional structure and the cultural funding model of the country. However, the overarching policy of aligning different parts of the country is typically essential from the outset. It's crucial to avoid concentrating applications solely in certain funding hubs, such as major cities or specific regions, that adhere to fair pay policies. While attracting more artists to these areas may seem advantageous, it often leads to increased competition and lower success rates for applicants, rather than increased funding to meet everyone's needs.

Furthermore, heightened competition can result in even more complex application and reporting procedures, leading to additional working hours, days, and weeks for art organisations — which may not necessarily be covered by dedicated budget allocations.

Instead, the focus should be on spreading fair pay policies evenly across the entire country. While the feasibility of establishing a nationwide remuneration policy varies by country, initiating discussions across all regions and actively bridging territorial awareness gaps is essential. Hosting country-wide debates on the topic can serve as a productive starting point. Additionally, advocating for agreements, strategies, and visions that apply nationally, even if not legally binding, can play a significant role. Increasing awareness among artists in different regions and encouraging them to adopt successful practices that are the norm in other parts of the country is crucial. Nuanced and region-specific solutions can be found; for instance, providing alternative forms of compensation, such as accommodation, workspaces, and equipment, can help attract artists to regions with limited financial resources.

At the same time, the issue of a balanced development of art sectors in a country extends beyond fair compensation of artists. It is also about availability of residencies, working spaces, schools, and other types of infrastructure, which are all essential for making a vibrant arts scene. Thus, advocating for integrated development of art production in regions and cities requires holistic investment strategies, and implementing fair pay policies, particularly if they're already established at the national level or in other regions, should be a central component of such strategies.

43 Ibid

44 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport 2021, p. 10



# Fair pay: what if there is no (more) money?

One of the dilemmas addressed earlier in this paper revolves around the challenge of implementing new fair pay policies while also dealing with shrinking budgets. If paying artists fairly has become the norm but public funds have not grown or have even dropped, what happens then? Will there be less programming, less people engaged, higher prices, different business models, or other crucial shifts in the ecosystem?

Pien from Kunsten'92 reflected that in case there is radically less money but a widespread commitment to raise fees and salaries, there is a risk that a lot of smaller companies and collectives will disappear, and the field would become more institutional. 'While bigger institutions will be strengthened', she reflected, 'less attention will be paid to community art, and the gap between "high art" and community culture will probably grow'.

Gemma Wilson in CityArts Magazine referred to the 2005 Post-Intelligencer story decrying a state audit that forced some smaller theatre companies to pay their artists minimum wage in compliance with labour laws. 'Theatres will close! Art will die! That may be partially true. But theatre will never die - it just might have to look different, or be honest about what kind of theatre it is'<sup>45</sup>, she concludes. So, what kind of theatres, what kind of art would there be then?

## Rethink funding structures

Before imagining that fair pay should necessarily come with less production and output, it is useful to reflect upon what artists and organisations are currently doing for the money they get. **Some tasks may be excessively laborious and disproportionately focused on meeting funders' requirements rather than benefiting artists, organisations, or audiences.** For example, as budgets tighten and competition intensifies, activities like preparing funding applications and reporting often become more time-consuming, leading individuals to either work longer hours without additional compensation or allocate more resources to procedures that do not directly contribute to increasing compensation for art workers. The solution lies in reassessing these procedures to align with the genuine aspirations and priorities of organisations.



As we wrote in our report from IETM's Luxembourg Focus meeting:

*'Reporting processes should not only cater to the funder's needs but also prove beneficial for applicants and justifiable to the public. The public, likely disinterested in reading reports, would prefer public funds to be allocated to meaningful artworks rather than excessive reporting. Applicants should be encouraged to formulate their own evaluation processes with a central question in mind: how will this assessment method contribute to improving your work?'*<sup>46</sup>

Participants of IETM Luxembourg Focus suggested that instead of requiring art organisations spending days and weeks on producing reports, funders could adopt a more partner-like engagement with their beneficiaries. This can include site visits to funded organisations, conducting interviews, participating in meaningful conversations, attending their performances, and exploring other authentic methods to better understand and support beneficiaries<sup>47</sup>. Revising reporting procedures to be less intricate and burdensome, while aligning them more closely with organisations' needs and objectives, would facilitate efficient use of people's time and prevent 'overstretch' of human resources within already limited remuneration frameworks.

The same applies to application procedures, which are often overly complicated and energy-consuming. Irma from Theatre Forum emphasised the necessity to simplify funding processes and align them more closely with the sector's needs and aspirations rather than with funders' procedures.

<sup>45</sup> CityArts - Paying theater artists fair wages is hard. But why do we consider it optional?, 26 October 2024, <https://www.cityartsmagazine.com/paying-theater-artists-fair-wages-is-hard-but-why-do-we-consider-it-optional/>, last seen 25 April 2024

<sup>46</sup> IETM 2024, p. 19

<sup>47</sup> ibid

She suggested that the first step should involve a **thorough reevaluation of funding structures to address the growing ‘mismatch between expectations and available resources’**. On one hand, she discussed the sector’s expectations from public funds, including how many artists and organisations can access funds and the size of grants available. On the other hand, she addressed the expectations of funders towards the sector, including what artists and organisations can realistically achieve with the money they receive.

Irma reflected that over the past few years, there has been a growing discrepancy between the design of funds and the actual reality of the sector. Some programmes, including those initiated during the pandemic, aim to support a significantly larger number of artists than before, yet they fail to strengthen the underlying ‘scaffolding’ that supports the arts sector. The grants provided are generally too low, and the cultural infrastructure, as well as the support system for art organisations, are not equipped to accommodate the increased number of people with heightened expectations. ‘There are many people funded, but not so many meaningfully funded, or at least consistently funded’, Irma said. These are not favourable conditions for widespread adoption of fair pay practices.

**Instead, there is a need for a strategic vision on who, what and under which conditions should be supported by public funds.** Irma advocates for more multiannual schemes and less project-based grants, and believes that funders’ priority should be to empower key organisations to more strategically support artists instead of investing their time and energy into fundraising and reporting.

### Withdrawing from overproduction

Furthermore, when there are no budget increases but treating people fairly becomes a priority, it can come with producing less art, adopting slow programming and touring models, and withdrawing from overproduction marathons. It is a challenging transition for everyone in the ecosystem: artists may be faced with less visibility and less opportunities; programmers will have less work to show to the public - ‘the fear of emptiness’ as Valérie Quilez, International Director at Kultur | lx – Arts Council Luxembourg, put it; **government agencies financing art would need to justify cultural budgets with other terms than quantitative KPIs; and the public may see less cultural events in their towns.**

According to Pippa Bailey, producer and director based in Sydney, there are ways to undertake this transition while enhancing the relevance of the arts and building a strong narrative around the shift towards fairness and equity in the sector. It is first of all crucial to rethink creation, production and programming models to allow for extending the lifespan of artistic works to make sure they are seen by more people throughout a longer period of time. This reduces the exhaustion and poorly paid labour put into speedy processes producing and showing new art.



This would allow cultural workers to concentrate on attracting wider audiences instead of focusing on constantly offering new stuff for the same narrow slice of society.

Engaging more people in the arts not only anchors their societal value but also helps reinforcing organisations’ economic models. In this regard, beyond the various community-building strategies that exist, the importance of art education was highlighted.

Pippa observed that the more people are actively engaged in making or practising art, the more people will want to see the art of others. ‘Performing artists like to show what they have done’, she observed, ‘but to progress, they need to see what others are doing’.

In Pippa’s opinion, mainstreaming art practices throughout the entire education system - from early age until high education will raise a generation of people who will appreciate the arts much better than if the system leaves art education to the side, or creates ruptures in this cycle, for instance, by making art degrees unaffordable. She also pointed out that developing the ‘imagination muscle’ and the habit to immerse themselves in artistic processes and practices have many holistic effects beyond just growing audiences for the arts. Practising arts would enhance people’s wellbeing as they would activate a wider array of emotions and senses, be less alienated in the digitalised world and learn to appreciate the process, the practice, the moment, rather than consuming and producing end products, and exercising wasteful practices in the quest of being productive. This can shift socio-political dynamics, revive the appreciation of the arts, and educate a more sustainable mindset.

# The ‘bigger picture’

So, what direction would the sector go to establish fair pay amidst financial scarcity? Here we yet again bump into the so-called ‘systemic nature’ of the issue.

The fair pay problem is undeniably concrete and tangible, requiring ‘short-term wins’, as Irma noted, to stop the talent drain and enable individuals to meet their needs today rather than years down the line. However, it’s crucial to approach this matter holistically, considering its interplay with broader social, political, and economic dynamics. Is it just about unfair remuneration? Are there other crises and frictions which make social life unsustainable? ‘It is not about three exhibitions instead of five, it is about trying to transform the bigger picture’, Pippa stressed.

It is often questioned, however, **whether a sector that is fragile and highly reliant** on underpaid or unpaid work can ‘change the world’. While many in the sector would say they do not have the capacity to engage in advocacy and politics, it is yet important to assess how their preferred fair pay reality fits within the current political, social and economic landscape. This assessment encompasses not only understanding other crises unfolding in many parts of the world, like healthcare, childcare, housing, and the cost of living, but also grasping the broader socio-political system, including its values, priorities, and the discourse it conveys and embodies through policies.

**In some places, where arts are appreciated by societies and governments, the issue is indeed about how to turn this appreciation into viable interventions that are going to bring about positive change and last without creating new imbalances and issues.** Valérie emphasised the importance of ‘placing culture at the heart of societies’, a phrase often used by governments. However, in her view, this should not merely remain a vague concept. Reinforcing the social value of the arts should be accompanied by tangible support, ensuring that the discourse on the value of the arts aligns with fair remuneration for artists. ‘There are many intangible aspects to this debate,’ she noted, ‘but one quantifiable measure is the number of hours artists dedicate to their work.’



**In other places where there is less political will to improve things for the arts, advancing ‘cosmetic’ initiatives targeted at the cultural sector without influencing the wider environment can end up being a short-sighted approach.** The state of artists’ working conditions is correlated with societies’ and policy-makers’ perception of culture’s role and value. But this perception is embedded in a wider logic of how societies and economies operate, what is being prioritised, what models are used to reach these priorities and what kind of values nourish these models. For instance, are societies and policy-makers ready to redistribute support in favour of a sector that is not about growth and productivity?

Justin O’Connor, Professor of Cultural Economy at the University of South Australia, discusses in his book ‘Culture is not an Industry’ how the neoliberal perception of the cultural sector as a ‘creative industry’ led to the deterioration of artists’ working conditions. For instance, he notes that the economic lens on culture led to replacing the societal sense of its value with ‘rattle of statistics,’ which requires collecting various types of evidence: ‘This now involves large amounts of unpaid labour from grant applicants while absorbing the resources of larger organisations’<sup>48</sup>. O’Connor further reflects: ‘The dire impact of the pandemic merely confirmed the growing evidence that the cultural sector did not necessarily produce “good jobs”, in terms of financial remuneration, security, or even intrinsic satisfaction’<sup>49</sup>. The book concludes that it is not only necessary to emancipate culture from the industrial and economic value system, but primarily to challenge what ‘economy’ itself entails, moving away from a sole focus on the ‘tradable competitive’ type of economy to encompass its other forms.<sup>50 51</sup>

48 O’Connor 2024, p. 48

49 Ibid, 79

50 Ibid, p. 114

51 Ibid, p. 149



What is essential is that the arts sector engages in wider debates about the future of societies and economies, contributes to transformative visions and alternative strategies to organising public life. For this, it is important to identify which other sectors can be allies to promote socially and ecologically sustainable models of public life. As Pippa noted, the art sector can not only imagine different visions and models but also pilot and ‘rehearse’ them. In countries, where governments realise that things need to change but do not know how, the arts sector should unite with like-minded sectors, provide viable ideas, and showcase what different values can be placed at the centre. In countries where the momentum for ecosystemic change has not come yet, advocacy strategies and pathways are of course different.

As Pippa put it, ‘we should not lose the point of being an artist, which is - to ask difficult questions’. Can our fragility and financial precarity prevent us from challenging the system and taking a stance?

At the same time, is it legitimate to expect a burned-out and exhausted sector to shift paradigms and have a global impact? As Jennifer Mills put it, ‘we can’t expect cultural strength when our cultural sector is so reliant on unpaid and undervalued work’<sup>52</sup>.

This dilemma will not be solved with simplistic answers but what seems essential is that interventions and strategies to improve pay in the arts are applied and developed in a holistic manner. There must be space for short-term and long-term visions, and for both sector-specific and ecosystemic approaches - all of which should be speaking to each other.

One of the ways to address the topic in a more holistic way is to regard it through the prism of transnational collaboration.

52 Meanjin 25 May 2022, It’s Time... To Demand Fair Pay in the Arts, <https://meanjin.com.au/latest/its-time-to-demand-fair-pay-in-the-arts/>, last seen 25 April 2024

# Fair beyond borders

The issue of fair pay in the arts is often localised. Yet working internationally is a crucial aspect of performing artists' professional development of which fair remuneration is an integral concern. It's essential for both artistic innovation and the economic sustainability of organisations. However, as became blatantly apparent throughout the research of [Perform Europe](#), not all artists and organisations have equal opportunities to work internationally<sup>53</sup>. All these factors underscore the importance of examining how fair pay practices manifest when artists and art organisations tour abroad, co-produce international work, or engage in any other form of collaboration with peers from other countries.

The fair pay issue is currently topical in Europe. Working conditions in the cultural sector is a priority of the EU's [Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026](#), and the European Parliament has undertaken several [attempts](#) to push for a consolidated approach to this issue at the EU level. The last Parliament's initiative in this field was the [resolution](#) 'EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors' adopted in November 2023. One of the points of the resolution is a call for establishing 'social conditionality' of European programmes that fund cultural and creative sectors. The Parliament proposed that social conditionality would be 'covering among others, the obligation to remunerate CCS professionals fairly for their work'<sup>54</sup>. The European Commission, in its official [response](#) to the resolution, stated that it 'will consider reinforcing the social conditionality in the next cycle of Union programmes'<sup>55</sup>.

The next phase of EU funds will only commence in 2028, but a lot of time is needed to determine how social conditionality can be effectively implemented at the EU level. Establishing unified standards, such as pay rates, or even reaching a more broadly shared understanding of 'fairness,' might prove challenging given the diverse landscape of the EU's 27 member states, let alone at the level of all 40 countries participating in Creative Europe.

## State of play

Fair pay is not a new issue for the beneficiaries of the Creative Europe programme. Several of its projects, networks and platforms have undertaken attempts to tackle this matter in a translational setting<sup>56</sup>. For instance, RESHAPE, Creative Europe's large-scale project that brought together 19 partners from 17 different countries, worked on developing prototypes - ideas and instruments proposed by artists and art workers to reshape the working models in the field of arts and culture<sup>57</sup>. They aimed to 'imagine an alternative to the European arts' that would be more collaborative and work on principles of fairness, solidarity, geographic balance and sustainability<sup>58</sup>.

Furthermore, some Creative Europe platforms developed and piloted fair pay guidelines and policies. For example, the [European Festivals Fund for Emerging Artists – EFFEFA](#), a platform initiated by the European Festivals Association, features fairness in its selection criteria, asking applicants to answer the questions: 'Is the budget adequate in all aspects for supporting / benefiting the emerging artist? Is it fair and professional? Is the festival's contribution to EFFEFA and the residency assured? Is the budget balanced?'<sup>59</sup>. The guidelines further stipulate that the budget should be 'built based on the principle of fair remuneration towards the artists at all stages (stay, rehearsal time and payment, fees, etc.)'<sup>60</sup>.

Perform Europe<sup>61</sup>, a funding programme supported by Creative Europe, is one of the initiatives that aspires to address fairness in close relation with ecological sustainability, inclusivity and innovation. Both in its pilot phase (2020-2022) and throughout the current period (2023-2026), Perform Europe has integrated fairness as an important aspect of its selection criteria.

53 Perform Europe 2021, p. 14

54 European Parliament 2023, art. 34

55 European Commission 2024, p. 4

56 Creative Europe platforms work in partnership with member organisations, each of which receives a grant to set up a common artistic programme as well as a branding strategy. Creative Europe networks are membership organisations representing thousands of members from individuals to national and regional organisations working in the cultural and creative sectors. [Learn more here](#).

57 RESHAPE - Prototypes n.d., <https://reshape.network/prototypes/list>, last seen 25 April 2024

58 RESHAPE - About n.d., <https://reshape.network/about>, last seen 25 April 2024

59 EFFEFA 2024, p. 8

60 Ibid

61 As stated on its [website](#) 'Perform Europe is funding programme for the European performing arts sector which facilitates international networking and supports inclusive, diverse, and green touring projects across the 40 Creative Europe countries. Perform Europe is led by IETM in a consortium with Circostrada, EDN, EFA, Pearle\*, and IDEA Consult.

Precisely, the most recent call for proposals included the following question: ‘how does your proposal promote and implement the cross cutting priorities of Perform Europe: quality, innovation and fairness?’<sup>62</sup>. The Perform Europe consortium intentionally did not propose a concrete and comprehensive definition of ‘fairness’, leaving it at: ‘creating meaningful partnerships in solidarity, taking care of each other, respecting boundaries and fair pay’<sup>63</sup>. The Open call guidelines further unpick the fairness notion in the following manner:

*‘Perform Europe partnerships should be based on solidarity. We expect partners to acknowledge existing inequalities between them, and to bridge these inequalities by empowering each other and sharing resources. This could be on the level of financial means, time, knowledge, infrastructure, skills, visibility, etc.’<sup>64</sup>*

Karen Verlinden, Perform Europe’s Project Coordinator, shared that by not prescribing a more detailed definition, the consortium intended to open the space for diverse ideas and innovative approaches to fairness that might exist in the sector. She said that a bit less than half of applicants elaborated on fair practices, interpreting this concept in diverse ways: as transparency, solidarity, care, sharing resources, and some also mentioned fair remuneration.

The proposed models to address fair pay were equally diverse and sometimes somewhat contrasting with each other. Some proposals intended to apply the same fee rate to all project partners no matter the country. Some of them picked the recommended fee of the country where the level was the highest; while others opted for the lowest one. A few proposals look into the possibilities to divide the grant in line with local circumstances. Type of local factors taken into account also vary from proposal to proposal and include local recommended fees, minimum wage, cost of living, the level of cultural funding in the country and the possibility to raise additional funds nationally.

Karen concluded that having the question about fairness as part of the application form has certainly been important as it seems to have triggered conversations among partners and stimulated them to articulate shared visions or at least intentions regarding fair collaboration in their partnerships. Yet leaving the question too open has not helped to glean a common vision about fair pay. This is because a general formulation opens doors to imprecise statements and various interpretations, but also because there is currently no such common vision on what ‘fair pay’ means across borders. ‘I sense there is a basis, a general framework missing’, Karen reflected.



She further suggested that if fair pay is to remain a priority in the future, Perform Europe should elaborate on a more complete, detailed, and practical definition that would be applicable across the borders of 40 countries. Karen voiced that in an international setting, the discussion on fair pay can be even more sensitive and tricky, as substantial inequalities exist, and the reasons behind them can sometimes be seen as political. Moreover, when applying for an international grant with people you do not know very well (the intention of Perform Europe being to stimulate new partnerships) and being under time pressure, it is challenging to overcome all sensitivities and contradictions and come up with a viable model. That is why it would be more constructive if people came to the table equipped with some guidelines. It would be even more helpful if such a guideline were developed for the Creative Europe programme as a whole.

But how could we ever be able to develop unified recommendations on fair pay in an unequal world? Many of the possible solutions seem to contain contradictions. For example, automatically applying one fee for all partners regardless of the country does help to mitigate inter-country inequalities in terms of access to resources, but it fails to consider differences in cost of living. Furthermore, differentiating fees in line with nationally recommended rates creates issues for the countries where there are no such sector-specific recommendations, except for the minimum wage (if at all), which is typically rather low. Additionally, it is necessary to figure out how much money artists from different countries would receive after having paid tax and social security contributions. Finally, even if we imagine a transnational fund - for instance, at the EU level, compensating artists’ financial losses they incur when going to countries with a lesser paying capacity, it is easy to predict that the main beneficiaries of this fund would be artists from wealthier places.

62 Perform Europe 2023 (a), p. 4

63 Perform Europe 2023 (b), p. 10

64 Ibid

## Possible ways forward

However complex the issue may be, we can no longer afford to leave it unaddressed, giving green light to obscurity, misunderstanding and exploitative practices. ‘How can you co-produce and work together on a project if you know that you are being treated unequally?’ Valérie reflected.

Given the many disparities within the European sector and the multiple dilemmas discussed above, **the conversation on the promotion of fair pay through funding mechanisms, such as Creative Europe, should not start with defining the level of fees. It should rather start with developing and mainstreaming a common definition and understanding of artistic labour.** This includes reinforcing the perception of an artist as a professional and art as work - among policy-makers, organisations and artists themselves. It is also crucial to reach a shared understanding of what artistic labour entails: what it takes to plan, research, rehearse, create, produce, and disseminate artistic work. It might not be so much about the amount of the fee but about what is considered as work and thus what hours or days need to be remunerated.

Additionally, it’s imperative to cultivate a mindset wherein all aspects of remuneration are thoroughly addressed prior to the project kick-off. Remuneration fees should be calculated and integrated into both the budget and project design right from the outset. Fair treatment should extend beyond financial compensation to encompass in-kind support, accommodation, per diem allowances, workspace provisions, local transportation, as well as broader frameworks of professional relationships, including inclusion, power dynamics, gender equality, and beyond.

A common guideline with which international partners could come to the table could also include a range of standard questions about the various local conditions of each partner: the national minimum wage, sector-specific rates (if such exist), cost of living level, availability of funds for international collaboration, social security and labour frameworks for artists<sup>65</sup>. Having mapped and learned these different circumstances, partners could at the very least be better informed of the gaps that might exist between their situations. Ideally, such exercise could guide them towards defining the most appropriate approach to establishing fee rates within the partnership.

In Karen’s opinion, the elaboration of any sort of cross-border fair pay guidelines, just like at the national level, should only happen from the bottom-up. This approach is not only more relevant to the sector but also acknowledges the value of the collaborative process and the debate that typically precedes the development of common statements, codes of practice, guidelines, and similar resources.

While guidelines and codes, especially on a large scale, often remain somewhat general, allowing for diverse interpretations, the dialogue within the sector needed to formulate them is crucial for raising awareness within the sector.

However, the role of national funders is also crucial as they influence the conditions of artists in their respective countries. As Valérie observed, national funders should be aware of how they create or distort the level playing field across borders by establishing either too low or too high artists’ fees. It is, therefore, important for EU member states - at the level of ministries for culture, arts councils and funding agencies - to engage in a dialogue specifically on fair remuneration policies. This includes defining artists’ labour, mainstreaming fair pay models in funding programmes, monitoring compliance with fair pay requirements, balancing changes in budget sizes with increasing remuneration levels, and more. If some countries lack recommended sector-specific rates, EU-level debate can promote the urgency of having such rates and stimulate cross-border exchange of information and good practices on how to establish them.

Finally, just like in the case of national funding programmes, the implementation of social conditionality requires an increase in programme budgets, clearly allocated to meeting fairer contract conditions rather than merely increasing the number of funded projects. This must align with the ambition of greening the Creative Europe programme, resonating with the aspirations of many cultural organisations to make their practices and operations more ecologically sustainable. Typically, this involves adopting slower working models, less focus on producing more output, and prioritising the well-being of the workforce. These measures require allocating additional financial resources. Finally, as we stated in our policy document issued in April 2024, it is important to test pilot models supported by research on how fair working conditions can be best promoted through Creative Europe and other transnational programmes<sup>66</sup>.

Ensuring fair pay in the arts in contexts where regulatory frameworks are underdeveloped or ineffective presents a significant challenge. Our research confirms that effecting positive change requires concerted efforts from both the sector and governments (with particular emphasis on public funders, whose role is not always adequately acknowledged). This entails shifting mindsets, restructuring systems, advocating for sustainable budgets, and addressing working conditions in the arts comprehensively. **Here are some recommendations for both art advocates and funders on actionable steps to initiate the much-needed transformation in remuneration practices within the arts.**

65 Some of this information from all 27 countries of the EU can be found on the platform developed by Creative FLIP - ‘This is how we work’: <https://creativesunite.eu/work-condition/>, last seen 25 April 2024

66 IETM 2024, pp. 3-4

# Seven Elements for Successful Fair Pay Advocacy

## 1. Unite the ecosystem

It is crucial to develop a robust and interconnected art ecosystem with shared understanding of current issues and envisioned solutions. To put it simply: an agreement must be reached that people in the arts sector deserve better pay. We must strive for all artists being represented through unions and other sector organisations equipped with advocacy tools and access to media and acknowledge that individual responsibility of every worker is also crucial. Comprehensive change can only occur if artists boldly adopt new practices, cultivate shared awareness, and extend it throughout the entire arts ecosystem, including those parts which stand outside of collective bargaining and public funding.

## 2. Change the mindset

In contexts where fair remuneration is not enforced, the arts sector needs to be on the same page to overcome the multiple resistance points. There are several levels at which the sector should change its own mindset: understanding of what art labour is composed of; shifting the indicators of 'success' from overproduction towards care for people; and accepting to scale down production and output in case there is not enough money to remunerate everyone fairly. Awareness-building is not only about shifting artists' expectations regarding the amount of fees and their readiness to reject poor offers. It is also about instilling new methods of planning and designing the project from the start, as well as changing production cycles entirely, sharing resources, adopting new organisational models, and more.

## 3. Make things concrete

To implement positive change, it is essential to understand the terrain of action and the scale of the problems we are trying to solve. One of the crucial starting points of the fair pay processes and debates should be figuring out the current 'fairness gap'. It is necessary to map out the sources of income in the arts, investigate the type of contracts used - with a particular attention to payment models; contract types; and the amounts paid compared to the recommended rates if such exist. It is then useful to define the official level of fair pay and calculate whether the current annual spending on fees and salaries matches this level. Should there be a shortfall, the advocacy objective must be to bridge this financial gap. Importantly, the minimum rate should not be promoted as final, and progressing from the minimum level should be encouraged.

## 4. Mind the budget

It's widely understood that fair pay and available budgets are intrinsically interconnected. However, it's not a widespread truth that one shouldn't request more money without the intention to ensure fair pay, and one shouldn't advocate for fair pay without requesting more money. It is crucial to promote budget increase as an essential foundation and condition for changing pay practices in the sector. Those are also related to mentalities and habits within the art community, and change should be happening regardless of fluctuations in public funds for the arts. Yet it is essential to be vocal and clear about the fact that rising fees require sustainable budgets. The sector must be particularly vigilant regarding the government's promotion of fair pay that is not accompanied by increased budgets or changes in output expectations.



## 5. Craft a strong narrative

Advocacy for artists should not alienate them as a special category which deserves special attention. This can generate backlash among the wider public and further undermine the professional image of artists. On the question of 'why fair pay' the answer should rather be directed to workers' rights, rather than the features of the art sector that make it different or special. The focus should be placed on bridging the gap between artists and other workers - in terms of their access to social security, level of remuneration, and acceptance of their activities as labour. It is precisely those protection, remuneration and perception gaps that differs the arts from other sectors.

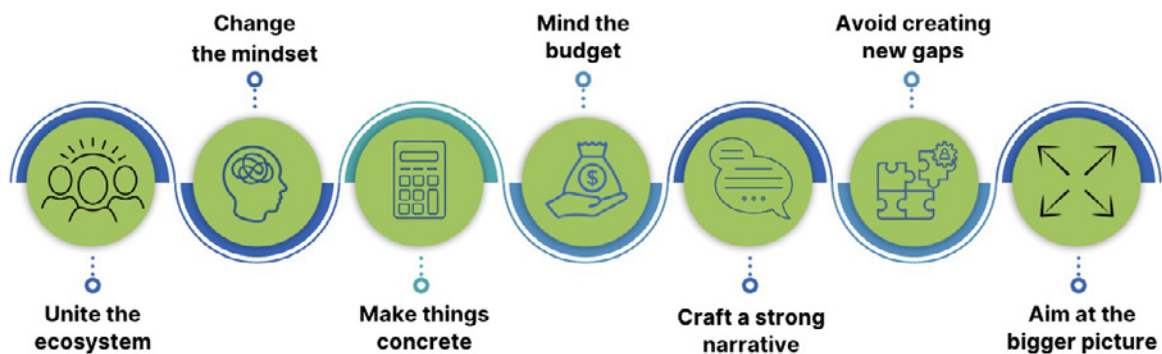
## 6. Avoid creating new gaps

The focus should be on spreading fair pay policies evenly across the entire country. While the feasibility of establishing a nationwide remuneration policy varies by country, initiating discussions across all regions and actively bridging territorial awareness gaps is essential. Hosting country-wide debates on the topic can serve as a productive starting point. Additionally, advocating for agreements, strategies, and visions that apply nationally, even if not legally binding, can play a significant role. Increasing awareness among artists in different regions and encouraging them to adopt successful practices from elsewhere is crucial.

## 7. Aim at the bigger picture

While many in the sector would say they do not have the capacity to engage in advocacy and politics, it is yet important to assess how their preferred fair pay reality fits within the current political, social and economic landscape. This is equally about various other conditions which prevail; such as the lack of healthcare and childcare, housing and cost-of-living crisis, as well as the overall socio-political system - including the values, priorities, and discourse it broadcasts and embodies in policies. It can be beneficial to work with other sectors to try to influence political and economic paradigms, while proposing and 'rehearsing' solutions for a better future.

### Seven Elements for Successful Fair Pay Advocacy



# Six tasks for the public funder

## 1. Make fairness a criteria

It is crucial for public funders to play a role in promoting fairness in the arts by broadcasting fair pay principles through their funding programmes. This can involve establishing fair pay as a criterion for funding applications or embedding a recommendation to pay employees and freelance contractors in line with certain standards. By asking applicants to provide a much more detailed budget which demonstrates how fair remuneration will be ensured throughout the entire project, funders stimulate essential conversations and change in approaches to project planning. Such exercise leads to shifts in mindsets and operations.

## 2. Allocate a sustainable budget

One of the vital nuances related to funders' role in promoting fair pay actions and directly impacting their implementation is availability of finances. Introducing fair pay recommendations or criteria in funding programmes must be accompanied by additional budgets specifically dedicated to increasing workforce fees up to recommended levels. When budgets are not increased but organisations are asked to produce as much as usual while paying artists higher fees, this recommendation is either ignored or implemented in an unsustainable way. It is also important that there is an understanding that raising of funding for fees should not be an ad hoc action, but part of a long-term strategy.

## 3. Raise awareness

The structured effect of funders' fairness initiatives on the arts ecosystem as a whole depends on how large the portion of the sector they financially support is. In countries where the cultural sector relies heavily on public resources, funders naturally have a greater impact on promoting fair practices. In places where a substantial part of the sector is not supported by the government, the role of public funders can also be significant - championing transparency around working practices, boosting overall awareness, and helping the sector to reach a shared understanding.



Fair pay: tasks for the public funder

## 4. Bring the sector and resources together

Art funders can play a part in bringing the sector's resources together, centralising and disseminating the information artists need to access to get equipped with knowledge and tools. They can stimulate exchange of best practices among various sectors, and identify the gaps in the ecosystem. The intention should be to bring all standards, rules, and models together, compile the information and practical tools that exist and build a channel for the sector to access this knowledge and make use of it.

## 5. Rethink rules of the game

Funders should look into their current funding practices and reflect on what must be changed to eliminate practices that aggravate working conditions in the arts sector. These could be over complicated application process and reporting methodologies, schemes that generate high competitions and are not rewarding enough compared to the amount of work required to apply for them; short-term project grants, and more. Funders' priority should be to empower key organisations to more strategically support artists instead of investing their time and energy into fundraising and reporting. Furthermore, treating people fairly should be prioritised over producing more art. Funders should prompt and support adopting slow programming and touring models, and withdrawing from overproduction marathons.

## 6. Offer vision and leadership

While art communities should be the drivers of 'designing practised codes and fair pay policies', it is essential that policy-makers help them resolve the many dilemmas that exist in this space and move forward. Some challenging decisions need to be taken, as government agencies can make things concrete and provide the sector with strategic vision that would help answer puzzling questions. This needs to be the leadership underpinned by the sector, and not a top-down relationship.

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